

# POR POR

HONK HORN MUSIC OF GHANA



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

THE LA DRIVERS UNION POR POR GROUP



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|--|-------|
| 1. POR POR AKWAABA /WELCOME  | 1:18  |
| 2. OTSOKOBILA  | 5:24  |
| 3. TROTRO TOUR OF GHANA  | 8:07  |
| 4. "TROTRO DRIVERS, WE LOVE YOU SO"                                    | 7:35  |
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All music, adaptations, and musical arrangements © La Drivers Union Por Por Group



**POR POR** (pronounced *paaw paaw*) is the name of the honking, squeeze-bulb horn music unique to the La Drivers Union of Accra, Ghana, and which is principally performed at union drivers' funerals. Although Por Por's musical genesis precedes Ghana's March 6, 1957, independence, it is just now, fifty years later, that this musical history of transport workers is having its grand debut. And what better way to celebrate Ghana's golden anniversary than by honoring the musical inventiveness of drivers who shaped national history by moving goods and people throughout the country?

To tell the story we begin with road life in Accra, Ghana's capital and largest city, with a population of over 3 million people. Sounds of car, bus, and truck horn honking are ubiquitous here. On main roads vehicles speed along, honking frequently and demonstratively as they go. Pedestrians and bicycles have no right of way and are always rhythmically honked over to the sides of roads. Repeated horn honks can signal annoyance with slowed movement or blocked lanes, a desire to pass or merge, a wish to attract the attention of drivers and passersby, or drivers' sheer exuberance with street life in motion. Passing taxis continuously honk in rhythmic bursts to signal availability and attract clients. And *trotros*, affordable point-to-point minibuses, also honk in stylized rhythmic phrases as they pass, gathering attention along the roadside while their handlers lean out windows and doors shouting out destinations in distinctive intonations.

In central Accra, all this traffic honking blends together seamlessly with sounds that overflow roadside venues into public highway space. Prayers broadcast day and night by neighborhood mosques over large, mounted amplifier horns overlap with the booming sounds of prayer meetings taking place at countless Pentecostal churches. Sound systems at roadside businesses blare into the streets to attract customers. Sometimes they feature the more local hip-life, gospel, or reggae, but just as often, as in taxis and *trotros*, it's a mix of Western sonic nostalgias, romantic oldies, and covers such as "You Are the Sunshine of My Life," "Sexual Healing," "Lean on Me," "Nothing's Gonna Change My Love for You," "I Just Called to Say I Love You," and (quite regularly) "That's What Friends Are For."

One notices quickly that public road space is also often work space. Shops, stalls, and kiosks line the roads, where numerous hard-working sellers of food, clothing, household necessities, furniture, and small goods keep very long hours amidst the heat, dust, noise, and diesel smoke to make a small living. "Communication Centres," where public phones are available and mobile phone recharge cards are sold, dot each and every public thoroughfare. Vendors often crowd traffic light and turn areas, and even the spaces between traffic lanes. In this vibrant setting one is enveloped by sounds of work and workers, and the colorful rhythms of public art, the hand-painted business and advertisement "sign-writing" plaques for which Accra is well known.

Yet residential neighborhoods often reveal softer sounds of everyday work. Rhythmic scissor-blade clicks advertise a passing tailor or seamstress. Repeated snapping clacks, wood tool

to leather, say it's a shoe repairer. A double bicycle horn honk signals a cart vendor with yogurt, milk, and freshly baked biscuits and savory pies. And around the corner you might hear panel beaters, working in yards and along back roads to rebuild rusted, worn, and bent car and bus shells. They have their work rhythms too, as do the stylish roadside carpenters and furniture makers with their patterned saw rips and hammer taps. Such regular public displays of occupational sound exist alongside other historically significant examples: the rhythmic stamping of letters by post-office sorters as recorded by the late James Koetting or, as recounted recently by Ghana popular music historian John Collins, the metric tapping of professional typists using traditional rhythms like *adowa* while producing formal letters on large manual machines outside courts and police stations.

All of these themes—the everyday sounds of street and road life, of motion through public space, of workers, place, and labor—are combined in the story of Por Por music. Here in this album a group of *trotro* drivers in Accra transform their sound world of roads, honking vehicles, and blasting radios by inventing a unique music. They do it by rhythmically beating wrenches on tire rims and pumping up tires to the sounds of interlocked car horns with bells and drums, as well as singing topical songs that map the places, routes, and road experiences of their distinct profession. The songs even move into the territory of worker protest—for example, a rap against corruption, explaining how highway accidents increase when transport licenses are purchased by bribe rather than earned by tested skill.





Por Por tells a multi-layered story of musics involving local and regional history, colonialism, the diaspora, and globalization. In the context of Ghanaian indigenous music history, Por Por obviously derives from *mmenson*, the multi-part animal horn ensemble music of Akan origin. Later there is also a clear articulation with brass band music, indigenized from colonial origins to become central to the sound of large-group highlife and small-group jazz.

The 1940s and 1950s brought well-remembered big-band jazz recordings, such as those of Count Basie, to Ghana. The sound and choreography of big-band saxophone sections seen in popular film shorts, and later the raucous humor of the rhythm and blues saxophone “honkers and shouters” also had a role in shaping the Por Por performance style. And as the music became ritually specialized, played by drivers exclusively at funerals for other transport industry workers, another Black Atlantic connection was revealed, to the “rejoice when you die” musical traditions of the New Orleans jazz funeral, the driver’s road to heaven paved by road songs and the sounds of car horns. Driver’s funerals are still the main context of performance, even though the music has recently begun to be performed in public as well.

Specific local markers of global musical contacts also entered the mix. A Ghanaian television show of the 1960s, *Show Biz*, used as its theme music a lively arrangement of Broadway “belter” Ethel Merman’s hit song “There’s No Business Like Show Business.” One of the catchy saxophone section phrases in the arrangement, itself reminiscent of the background vamp to Dizzy Gillespie’s “A Night in Tunisia,” was picked up as a *por por* horn riff. The result was a distinctive sound signature relating the honking of Por Por music to the

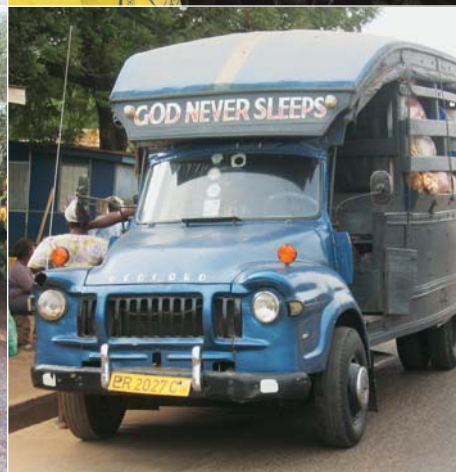
modernity of both African-American bebop jazz and Ghana's television service in the years immediately after independence.

Of course, none of this should come as a surprise. Por Por was forged in a crucible of colonial labor and trade, trans-colonial connections, and the emergent cosmopolitanism that coincided with Ghana's independence. The circular squeeze-bulb brass horns arrived by the 1930s and were instantly called *por por*, the instrument's name thus sonically mimicking its quirky, animal-like sound. The early horns came with traders from India, and were sold at still-important central Accra trading and musical instrument establishments such as Bombay Bazaar and E. Chebib Bros. Later they were also sold at well-remembered general merchants such as John Holt Bartholemew and vehicle dealers such as the United Africa Company.

Adopted by drivers of timber trucks working forest roads, the squeeze-bulb horns were first brought together with small percussion as a kind of ensemble noisemaking to insure protection to disabled vehicles after dark. As punctured tires—a frequent occurrence on forest roads—were pumped back to strength, driving mates surrounded the vehicles and banged out encouragement on *ododompō* finger bells and small square *tamalin* (from “tambourine”) frame drums while honking the *por por* horns to scare off dangerous animals. In time, the noise of warning transformed into a music, as the drivers layered short *por por* horn phrases onto the standard *dawuro* banana-leaf bell pulse patterns of distinct ethnic and national rhythms such as *kpanlogo*, *adowa*, *asafo*, *ogeh*, and *agbadza*. Likewise, the up and down motion of pumping the punctured tires was turned into an enthusiastic dance of accompaniment.







While much of the Por Por history is about men's work, it is also very much a women's story. Women were central players in agricultural transport and marketing throughout Ghana and shared widely in the creation of the stories, songs, and performances of Por Por. Both women and men often had to brave days and nights in remote places when vehicles broke down or tires were punctured badly. Women raised song as men pumped damaged tires. Drivers took up with girlfriends and sometimes multiple wives on their routes. There are also tales of rare but legendary pioneer women transport owners and drivers, such as Matilda Afieye Lomo, deceased in 2004, who drove the Accra-Northern Ghana tomato and onion route, and was chairperson of the La Drivers Union for four years in the 1970s.

The local name given to the original British-made open-sided wooden trucks, used for both inner-city and long-distance transport, was "mammy wagon," because the vehicles were often filled with women doing the business of buying, selling, and transporting agricultural goods. In the 1960s, the government declared these vehicles (also known as *tsolorley*, "wooden lorry," or just "boneshakers") too dangerous for inner-city transport in case of traffic accidents. So in time the mammy wagon became more restricted to long-distance transport, and today they are a relatively rare sight in Accra, replaced by the inner-city minibuses still generically called *trotro* (the word *tro* coming from "three-pence," the original colonial-era cost of an inner-city ride).

La Drivers Union Por Por Group performances open with a procession led by a standard-bearer whose ritual staff features a model mammy wagon. The vehicles also enter into pop-



ular material culture as coffins modeled on trucks and buses, for example those made by well-known Accra carpentry artist Paa Joe. Memorable stories circulate about transport owners buried in wood or metal coffin replicas of their vehicles, such as Ofoli Kuma, whose *trotro* was named Modin Sane, "The Black Man's Story." Recently, replicas of the mammy wagons have also been sold as tourist items.

La, one of Accra's seven regions, holds an important place in Por Por's history, and it is no accident that it is the birthplace of Por Por. Because the Burma Camp Barracks, a sizeable colonial station, was located on land owned by the people of La, a great number of transport vehicles were in the vicinity during the long colonial period. Men from La sought employment at the Barracks, taking up driving as a profession or becoming specialized machinists or car mechanics. Ataa Awuley, the first local holder of an Accra driver's license, was from La, and legendary 1920s Gold Coast governor and commander-in-chief Sir Frederick Gordon Guggisberg, well remembered for his dedication to schools, hospitals, and transport development, had a personal driver from La, Dzatei Abbey, affectionately called Dzatei Guggie. In the years since, many chief drivers from La have provided professional transport services for diverse companies, embassies, government offices, and international organizations.

The La region figures in another important way too, being a critical location in the history of the Ga people's resistance to colonialism. The area was tough to control and in 1855 was bombed by the British as a result of residents' refusal to pay colonial taxes. Preferring their own Lakpa god to the one introduced by colonial Christians, the reluctance or outright



hostility toward colonial rule at La led to some British administrative references to “La-Bad.” Many La residents today consider this the origin of the common alternate place name, Labadi, even if the point is historically contentious.

La drivers tell of the time just before independence when the colonial government wanted to ban the *por por* horns from inner-city mammy wagons, claiming they made too much noise and had become a public nuisance. It was the drivers from La who led a response protest, stopping service, and forcing the ban’s repeal. Such signs of community pride and resilience are also well embodied in the oft-repeated local phrase *La dade kotopon, wuo gbee, La gbee*: “Before the cock crows, the people of La are awake.” The cock, always a sign of authority, was adopted for the La Drivers Union emblem, appearing atop a steering wheel, with a *por por* horn to one side and a *gankokui* double bell on the other. The cock also famously entered nationalist politics as the insignia for the CPP (Convention People’s Party) in the momentum that brought in Kwame Nkrumah and Ghana’s independence.

The trucks that moved out from La and became a ubiquitous part of transport, and thus national development, also brought real personality and high style to public culture in the inner city. Drivers’ mates, *aplanke*, are much remembered for the athletic ways they ran, jumped, somersaulted, or flipped out from and into the mammy wagons as they slowed to a stop or sped off when discharging and picking up passengers. The bandanas, as well as the stylized leaps and fancy footwork of these handlers, owed much to the horseback and stagecoach acrobatics made famous in 1950s movie Westerns.



On their front and rear mantles and tailgates, vehicles also carried distinctive phrases or proverbs associated with the road stories of their drivers and owners. Pioneer transport operator Ataa Anangbi Anangio, for example, named his vehicles "M.V. Labadi," linking the La region to the M.V. (motor vessel) Aureol, a popular British passenger ship in the 1940s. Other names came from phrases that encapsulated driver experiences: "They Talk What They Don't Know," "It Pays Your Way," "Sweet Mother," "Slow but Sure," "Fear Not," "Safety First," "No Sympathy," "All Shall Pass," "Never Say Die," "God's Time Is the Best." Movie titles also entered the mix: "No Time to Die," "Rebel Without a Cause," "Quo Vadis."

Echoes of the mantle and tailgate legacy can occasionally be seen on contemporary *trotros* in Accra today: "No Condition Is Permanent," "Champion," "Don't Try," "No Fear," "Goods Only," "Your Time Go Come." But most contemporary *trotros* and taxis bear some kind of Christian or Muslim religious slogan on their rear windows, either in English, Ga, Ewe, or Twi: "By His Grace," "The Lord Is My Shepherd," "Jesus Saves," "Hallelujah," "Blood of the Lamb," "Merciful God," "Pentecost Fire," "The Prophet," "AlHaji," "In the Name of Allah," "Young Hajj."

The use of religious slogans past and present also relates to how drivers have long acknowledged a spiritual dimension in their work. Many drivers believe that spirits of the road will repeatedly test them in encounters that are unpredictable and potentially profound. Some drivers carry talismans or religious paraphernalia and consult spiritualists before particular travels. Since vehicles bring wealth, they must be properly venerated. Drivers may perform rituals related to the maintenance of their vehicles, as well as rituals meant to guard against road

accidents. Spiritual attention is also required in the course of driving: when a driver comes to a bridge, he must blow his horn well in advance to ask the residing spirits for permission to pass. Attention, or lack thereof, to road spirits thus figures prominently in the stories that accompany Por Por music.

The tale that now brings this musical tradition into the international public arena is quite recent. From the time of its formalization in 1968, the La Drivers Union Por Por Group restricted their performances to funerals for union drivers. Despite this sacred context of use, the music was considered rowdy and profane, the rude and humorous noisemaking of "*trotro* boys" who were just workers, not artisans, cultural elites, or professional musicians. Few people showed interest. But Accra photographer Nii Yemo Nunu held out hopes that the larger public might someday know about this music. Born in La, the son of a transport operator, Nunu was both familiar with the Por Por group's history and actively involved in its visual documentation. He told his friend, musician Nii Noi Nortey, about the group, and in late 2002 Nortey began to play with them from time to time, honking along on one of his own instrumental inventions, the *afirifones* (African wind instruments with saxophone mouthpieces), or on alto saxophone. After a few performances at local *trotro* stations, the Por Por group and Nortey began to get occasional performance gigs at local venues that reached a diverse Accra public, including the International Trade Fair Centre, the W. E. B. DuBois Centre for Pan-African Culture, the Goethe Institute, the British Council, Alliance Française, and even the La Royal Palm Hotel, opening a late 2004 show for British saxophone star Courtney Pine.



*Nicholas Wayo's painting of a classic independence-era Bedford troto bears the unique emblem of the La branch of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union of the Trades Union Congress. Atop the driver's wheel is the cock, connected to the local motto La dade kotopon, wuo gbee, La gbee, meaning "before the cock crows the people of La are at work." On either side of the wheel is a por por horn and bell.*





In 2005 Nortey introduced me to both Nii Yemo Nunu and the Por Por group, and we recorded the three tracks—the very first published sound documents in the group's history—that appeared on *The Time of Bells, 3: Musical Bells of Accra* (VoxLox 2005). The CD's international release, and its Accra launch at the residence of Ghana's country director for The World Bank, brought an enthusiastic response and a call for more honking, leading to what you have here—highlights of the Por Por musical heritage for the world to hear on the occasion of Ghana's fiftieth anniversary of independence.

### TRACK NOTES

Over a period of three months the Por Por group gathered for weekly recording sessions to create this CD. The recordings were made outdoors in La in the backyard of friends of the union chairman, or at the union office. The collective personnel is: P. Ashai Ollennu, group leader, *por por* horns, bells, *shekere* rattle, vocals; John Boye "Hello Joe" Mensah, lead vocals, *por por* horns; Nii Otoo Annan, percussion leader and soloist, *por por* horns, bells, *tamalin*, *gome* and *kpanlogo* drums, vocals; Tawiah Jonku, female lead vocalist and chorus leader, bells; Adjetei Sowah, *por por* horns, *otsokobila* tire rims, bells, *pati* drum, *tamalin* drum, vocals; Ashirifie Mensah, *por por* horns, bells, vocals; Ibrahim Ako Perkoh, bells, vocals; E.A. Tetteh, *por por* horns, vocals; Nii Quayee, *por por* horns, *shekere* rattle, vocals; Adoley Mensah, bells, *shekere* rattle, *por por* horns, vocals; Tsotso Mensah, *por por* horns, bells, *shekere* rattle, vocals; Agnes Jama Maale, bells, *shekere* rattle, vocals; Joe Lartey,

*otsokobila* tire rims, bells, vocals; Adokwei Din, *otsokobila* tire rims, vocals; Ayikwei Quaye, *otsokobila* tire rims, bells, vocals; Kotey Nikoi, bells, vocals; Seth Adjei, *por por* horns, bells, vocals; Tetteh Klorrey, *por por* horns, bells, vocals; Tetteh Boye La, *pati* drum, *por por* horns, vocals; Bawa Akrofi, bell, *por por* horns, vocals; Nii Yemo Nunu, guest vocals.

In their great enthusiasm for this project the group always came very well rehearsed, and each track was recorded in a single take. The very lively and spirited excitement of the process is palpable, the grooves immediately inviting listeners to start dancing and pumping up tires. Playback sessions after each recording were held at the La branch Drivers Union office, where on-the-spot responses and conversations determined the selections and sequence for the CD.

### 1. POR POR AKWAABA/WELCOME

As traffic in downtown La passed by in front of the office of the La Drivers Union, the Group Leader and Union Vice Chairman P. Ashai Ollennu leads off the call of welcome with a solo double *por por* horn salute in *kolo* rhythm.

### 2. OTSOKOBILA

The literal meaning of the word *otsokobila* in Ga is “body rash disease.” By metaphoric extension, the word can also refer to a person who behaves so badly that they become like this disease. But the term also refers to a unique Por Por musical genre, namely the musical striking of tire rims accompanied by honking horns, all mixing rhythmic patterns of *adowa*, *agbadza*,

and other popular dances from Ghanaian ethnic groups. While this beating of tire rims and honking has been uniquely formalized as a musical genre by the Por Por group, related practices are well known in West Africa. A scene where lion hunters play a rhythm of encouragement on a Land Rover tire rim as the tire is pumped up to strength in the bush can be seen in Jean Rouch’s 1968 film, *Un lion nommé l’Américain* (“A Lion Named ‘the American’”), shot among the Gow bow hunters in the borderlands of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso.

The opening a cappella section is sung in Ewe with *agbadza* rhythm. Then the percussion and horns join in, and two song texts are alternated and woven together. The first is a song of fright and then of joy upon discovering that a battle cry comes from allies, not foes. It is a story about conflict and the fortification that creates strength in the face of adversity. The second text is about a man who doesn’t work but wants to eat, its moral being “no food for a lazy man,” locally articulated as NCNC—“no contribution, no chop.” NCNC is also a reference to a Nigerian political party of 1950s independence struggles, a time of mass movement also resonant with the history of *trotros*, their drivers, and their unions.

### 3. TROTRO TOUR OF GHANA

Beginning with an a cappella fragment of the Ghanaian National Anthem, the song’s main text, sung in the slow highlife style, travels like a *trotro* ride throughout Ghana, naming different ethnic groups, places traveled, and people met. “On our way home we pass so many places, on our way home we pass so many towns.” The route traversed reaches from the greater



Accra region to the Central, Eastern, Western, Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, Volta, Northern, Upper West, and Upper East regions, and their capital and key cities and towns of Takoradi, Sunyani, Tamale, Bolgatanga, Kumasi, Ho, Koforidua, Sekondi, Cape Coast, and, of course, back in Accra, Labadi, the home of Por Por music and the La Drivers Union.

#### 4. “TROTRO DRIVERS, WE LOVE YOU SO”

Using the *ageh* rhythm associated with the *gome* seated frame drum and social dance music that migrated along the West African coast from Liberia and Sierra Leone, this song mixes a classic 1950s style of slow highlife with a contemporary form of “driver’s rap” created by Por Por group lead vocalist John Boye “Hello Joe” Mensah. The refrain text tells: “*Trotro* drivers, they are the ones we go with since the old days; We love them all, we love them so; Come gather round and see; Since olden times they are the ones we go with.” The chorus theme is that women always fight for the love of drivers.

Layered in between these refrains is a series of raps by “Hello Joe” about *trotros* and drivers. One rap section takes on the theme of worker recognition and position, stating that drivers do everything, bring all the cocoa, all the fish, bring everything to the market, but sometimes are not treated well; people just call them “drivers.” The next rap tells a bit of history, of how the British came and sold the Austin vehicle, but it had no strong sound so *por por* horns had to be added. Then, when vehicles reached Tamale, or Kumasi, the *por por* horn honking alerted people and brought recognition, a good reason why drivers should buy



the *por por* horns, put them on their trucks, and really sound off. Another rap protests that formerly one had to demonstrate driving skills to get a transport license, but now the regulatory system has collapsed, and the license can be bought for a “dash,” an outright payoff to a corrupt official. The rap urges that something must be done about this problem because avoidable accidents and deaths occur as a result of drivers not having the proper licenses based on tests of knowledge and skill.

A final rap tells that *trotro* drivers might have children wherever they go, and that sometimes they don't even know they have children here or there because they have taken up with so many women. And this is simply because drivers have the things that women want: food, transport, cash, and news.

## 5. SHIDAA, A SONG OF PRAISE AND TRIBUTE TO ELDERS AND UNION LEADERS

The song opens with words of praise by Por Por *griot* John Boye “Hello Joe” Mensah. He gives tribute to union leaders, the national, regional and branch chairmen, as well as the drivers from Labadi and the professor and his crew. A series of historical details about driving and drivers is then interwoven with words of praise and tribute. “Hello Joe” relates that in the olden days virtually all the drivers were from La, but that nowadays just about anyone can get a license. He praises those who had the skill and fortitude to become drivers in earlier times, under much more restrictive conditions.

The next segment is about the history of Por Por music, about the time when trucks had

no electric horns, how *por por* horns were added to the trucks, how they were used at road crossings to insure that people did not get injured. “Hello Joe” tells the story of the original importance of the horns for truck drivers to scare wild animals on dark roads in the hinterland, or to protect drivers as they pumped punctured tires. He praises those who gave birth to the Por Por music in earlier times through this work. The choral refrain goes: “We are going, the drivers are going, going on their way, all the way.” “Hello Joe” then weaves together more praise and history with typical driver and driving songs. One set of typical song themes is women's desire for the love and return of their husbands and boyfriends. Women lament that the men have traveled long distances to market, saying their goodbyes, wishing them luck, asking when they will return. “The Por Por beast is coming!! This is the only one like it in the world!!” After this mighty roar, “Hello Joe” returns to history, praising the British for bringing the Bedford, Austin, and Morris vehicles, and calling for libation. What Britain gave to Ghana, the wooden truck, is still kept with pride in La, he says, noting that mammy wagons can still be seen there. The song ends with praise for all the elders, union leaders, and workers who created and maintain the Por Por tradition.

## 6. “DRIVER, TAKE ME, THE TRAIN HAS LEFT ME BEHIND”

Sung in Ga, to *adowa* (Akan origin) rhythm, this song, led by Tawiah Jonku, is about a trader woman who has missed her train and appeals to a *trotro* driver for transport. Woman: “Driver, the train has left me behind; can you take me along?”



Driver: "Mammy, where are you going?"

Woman: "I'm going to Nsawam."

Driver: "Oh, you are going to Nsawam? We are going to Odomiabrah. We have to pass through Achimota and Ofanko, then to Odomiabrah, and then we can take you to Nsawam. Mammy, so where does this train go?"

Woman: "It goes to Nsawam."

Driver: "OK, Mammy, join us, let's go, jump in."

## 7. KPANLOGO POR POR MEDLEY

This track features John Boye "Hello Joe" Mensah leading a medley of five songs about love, poverty, and the sadness of life's circumstances. The song texts and themes come from various sources and are set to *kpanlogo*, the popular style that emerged around the time of Ghana's independence. Over the course of their history the Por Por group have adapted this national song tradition to their unique sound and instrumentation. These kinds of songs are part of the everyday world and history of drivers and driving through the country.

The first song, sung in Ga, laments, "Mother, you are dead and I am left with nothing, just the one cloth on me, how can I even bury you now, it's getting dark." The second song, also sung in Ga, features an old text previously popularized by 1950s highlife star E.T. Mensah under the title "Sea Never Dry," a title that also became popular on *trotro* mantles. Never an ocean without fish, the literal meaning, is perhaps overshadowed by a more com-



mon interpretation, at least among drivers, that the road is always filled with available women. Also a lament, the text takes the voice of a fisherman's wife, asking, after four day's absence, when her husband could be coming back. The third song, sung in Fanti, is about two lovers hoping to get married. The fourth song, sung in Ga, is an adaptation of another old text about a man who is married but takes a second wife, "Kooley," only to discover that he is even less happy with her. His words of disdain tell her to back off and leave him alone, that he has had quite enough of her. The fifth song is about a greedy man who wants everything he sees and how he is ultimately done in and consumed by his own selfishness.

#### 8. AAYOO SAMIAH, "TODAY, I GOT YOU!"

Tawiah Jonku leads a song about a wise woman and a foolish man, who, fed up with his wife, takes a girlfriend, who turns out to be more demanding and requires more money than the original wife. While not directly about vehicles, drivers, or routes, the text typifies a kind of song often sung by marketing women on their work travels.

#### 9. LAKPA FESTIVAL SONG OF THE PEOPLE OF LA

Homowo is the key Ga festival to commemorate the migrations of Ga people to their present locations, a festival to praise the gods for the food that meant survival to people during their long journeys. Central to the uniqueness of the Homowo festival as celebrated in La is the performance of *kpashimo* songs of praise sung with a stamping dance. Like Por Por music,

the *kpashimo* songs and dance are of unique La origin; of all the Ga people it is only those at La who perform *kpashimo* songs during the Homowo festival. For the festival, libations are poured and the songs sung to honor heroes, heroines, and visitors, to praise gods and to ask for no hunger, for long life, for a good harvest, for success in pregnancy and marriage. In equal measure the songs may insult those who have been rude, done bad deeds, or behaved poorly in recent times. From chiefs to common people, everyone is equally open to praise or insult at this time.

John Boye "Hello Joe" Mensah begins with a gathering invocation of good tidings, and a reminder that in festival times some receive songs of praise and others songs of insult. He says that for fifteen years now people have been quarrelling in La, and there has been great tension, people even moving away to get married. Elders saw this situation and wanted to do something about it; even La native Peter Ala Adjetey, a lawyer and former Speaker of Parliament, saw that La was on fire. There were several unsuccessful attempts at reconciliation in the past, but now the crew of Ablade Glover—a La resident, well-known painter, and director of Artist Alliance Gallery—has succeeded. Their praises be sung, for on April 8, 2006, they brought a great day of reconciliation in La. The refrain goes on: "La people, let us love ourselves, we can live well, even without money, let us live well, elders and children, this is our day, a loving day, and now we will stomp for you to see." The stomping dance, backed by *por por* horns sounding off in *kpa* rhythm, takes place as the song text continues that, as the people of La now live in greater peace, so should other Ga regions too.



## 10. M.V. LABADI

John Boye “Hello Joe” Mensah opens in Ga with the motto of La people, *La dade kotopon, wuo gbee, La gbee*, meaning that before the cock crows the people of La are working. He says that this song will praise the old drivers who brought things to where they are today. Specifically, the song is named for the M.V. Labadi vehicles of pioneer lorry owner and driver Ataa Anangbi Anangio. “Hello Joe” begins with Anangio’s praises, about how everyone liked to ride with him, how his trucks were unique, how women loved him and wanted to travel with him. The choral refrain responds in the voice of his wife in Teshie town, crying out, “M. V. Labadi, don’t leave me behind, I’ll go with you and come home safely with you.”

The first verse tells of Anangio’s travels transporting foodstuffs, like yam and cassava, a reason why women loved him so, and why he had five wives. “Hello Joe” then calls on Nii Yemo Nunu, official Por Por photographer and Anangio’s son, to call out other famous *trotro* names in English, Ga, Twi, Akan, Ewe, Hausa, and Pidgin. Nunu begins with “No Time to Die,” not only an important vehicle but also the title of a now rare booklet of *trotro* poems by Kojo Gynaye Kyei with historic vehicle photographs by Hannah Schreckenbach (Accra: Catholic Press, 1975). Alternating with further verses and choruses, Nunu recites the names, including: “It Pains You Why,” “Sweet Mother,” “Who Be You,” “Look People Like These,” “They Talk What They Don’t Know,” “Fine Fine Super Fine,” “Accra Is the Place.”



## 11. POR POR HORN-TO-HORN FIREWORKS

The recording closes with a spirited salute to March 6, 2007, the fiftieth anniversary of Ghana’s independence. In anticipation of this momentous day, the Por Por group headed down the road in May 2006 to the taxi and *trotro* ranks near their union office. There they told assembled drivers about a unique opportunity to sound off to the nation and quickly enlisted dozens of vehicles to honk up a fireworks storm of response to their call of eight *por por* horns.



Researched, recorded, annotated, and photographed by Steven Feld  
 Research consultation and musical coordination by Nii Yemo Nunu and Nii Noi Nortey  
 Location recording coordination by Nana Agazi  
 La Drivers Union Vice-Chairman and Por Por Group Leader: P. Ashai Ollennu  
 Por Por historian and lead vocalist: John Boye "Hello Joe" Mensah  
 Special guest percussion leader and soloist: Nii Otoo Annan  
 Lead female vocalist: Tawiah Jonku  
 Black-and-white and archival photographs by Nii Yemo Nunu, Kotopon Afrikan Images  
*Por Por Trotro* sign-painting by Nicholas Wayo, Accra, 2006  
 Production supervised by Daniel Sheehy and D.A. Sonneborn  
 Production managed by Mary Monseur  
 Sound supervision, mixing and mastering by Pete Reiniger  
 Design by Michael Motley, Santa Fe, New Mexico  
 Editorial assistance by Carla Borden

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- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 1. POR POR AKWAABA / WELCOME  | 1:18  |
| 2. OTSOKOBILA   | 5:24  |
| 3. TROTRO TOUR OF GHANA   | 8:07  |
| 4. "TROTRO DRIVERS, WE LOVE YOU SO"                                 | 7:35  |
| 5. SHIDAA, A SONG OF PRAISE AND TRIBUTE TO ELDERS AND UNION LEADERS | 13:03 |
| 6. "DRIVER, TAKE ME, THE TRAIN HAS LEFT ME BEHIND"                  | 6:20  |
| 7. KPANLOGO POR POR MEDLEY  | 9:37  |
| 8. AAYOO SAMIAH, "TODAY, I GOT YOU!"                                | 5:27  |
| 9. LAKPA FESTIVAL SONG OF THE PEOPLE OF LA                          | 5:43  |
| 10. M.V. LABADI   | 6:51  |
| 11. POR POR HORN-TO-HORN FIREWORKS                                  | 2:48  |

