African Performance Review
Vol. 10, No. 2, 2018
pp 11-27

Popular Performance Research and Practice in the Academy: The Case of the Ghanaian Concert Party[1]

E. John Collins
University of Ghana, Legon

Introduction

This paper examines the importance of a local form of Ghanaian popular musical drama known as the 'concert party'[2] during the mid 20th century, that was a period of social change, rapid urbanisation and emergent national identity. It also examines the reasons for the initial negative attitude to it and other forms of popular art by the Ghanaian Academy that stem from a combination of imported and home grown elitist prejudices. The article finally turns to the reasons for the later endorsement of the Concert Party and its associated highlife music as a legitimate area of scholarly study for artistic, historical and sociological purposes, as well as being an art-form that draws on traditional resources and expresses a unique Ghanaian sense of humour.

In recent years there has been a growing interest by the Ghanaian Academy in a form of local Ghanaian popular musical theatre called the 'concert party' that combines vernacular plays with highlife music. But first, the concert party itself needs to be described. This comic drama started in the early 1900s as a coastal copy of imported variety entertainment staged in English to the accompaniment of American ragtime music, tap-dancing and blackface make-up. The Concert

1 Based on a Keynote Speech for the 8th International African Theatre Association Conference (AFTA), held at the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, Legon. 9-12 July 2014.

2 The tradition of Concert Party can be found in other countries in West Africa, Togo and notably Nigeria, where it is also called the Yoruba Opera or Travelling Theatre.

Party was subsequently adapted by artists such as Bob Johnson (1925-1993) and E.K. Nyame (1927-1977) who indigenised the art-form by the early 1950s by incorporating local highlife rather than imported music and staging the shows in local languages (mainly Akan, but also Ga and Ewe). They also drew in elements of traditional African performance, such as a seamless fusion of music, dance and drama and a high degree of audience participation. This 'highlife opera' format was so successful that between the 1950s and 1980s there were over two-hundred-and-fifty such theatrical groups that toured and criss-crossed the country putting on semi-improvised comic plays for farmers and the urban poor. The genre became so popular that during the 1960s and 1970s ten concert parties were also set up in neighbouring Togo, including the Happy Stars of Lome, that performed their plays in the Ewe and Akan languages.

The Importance of the Concert Party

The Concert Party became the biggest professional theatrical movement this country has ever produced and as such made a number of contributions to Ghanaian society. Firstly, concert performers and groups like the Bob Johnson's Axim Trio, Bob Cole's Ghana Trio and E.K. Nyame's Akan Trio supported Nkrumah's CPP and the independence struggle. Secondly, although using slap-stick humour, concert party musical plays had a moral angle, as they included topics such as the need to farm rather than running away to the city, the importance of humility, advising the youth to obey their parents and for men to stick with one wife. Often the moral message was presented at the end of the play by the 'gentleman' actor. Thirdly, as concert parties presented various ethnic and social-class stereotypes on stage, they helped to defuse tension by poking fun at figures such as Hausa policemen speaking 'broken' English, Liberian rice eaters, traditional Akan priests battling Christian priests, big businessmen and unruly comic servants, pompous lawyers and teachers talking 'big English', illiterate farmers confronting urbane 'playboy' taxi-drivers, and market women advising wayward 'goodtime' girls.

A fourth way concert parties contributed to the development of Ghana was that their plays and highlife songs reflected and articulated the tensions of modern life for its audience of cash-crop farmers and poor urbanites. For instance, in the mid 20th century the Ghanaian extended family system was breaking up due to the expansion of male migrant work and the introduction of Eurocentric ideals of the patrilineal nuclear family. Concert party plays and songs of those times therefore often dwelt on the theme of broken homes, the orphan child, and inheritance disputes and witchcraft accusations within the extended family or 'Abusua'. Another modernising stress found in the plots and highlife songs of concert

parties was the growth of new social classes, the nouveau riche and sudden disparities in wealth. An example is the 1967 highlife record song 'Ebi Tie Ye' released in 1967 by Nana Ampadu's African Brothers concert party-cum guitar band.[3] Its theme was class stratification as it metaphorically talked of big animals pushing the smaller ones away from the warmth of a forest camp-fire: a sort of musical equivalent to George Orwell's book *Animal Farm* (see Yankah, 1984 and Collins, 2004B).

From a content analysis I did some years ago of around three hundred 1930s-1970s highlife records in my own BAPMAF music archives[4], I discovered that 10% were on the subject of the 'Agyanka' or orphan and the 'Abusua Bone' or wicked family, whilst 9% were on wealth, poverty and 'money palava'. Two other topics related to modernisation in this collection are male urban migration (2.5%) and inter-generational conflict (2.5%).[5] In short, concert parties and highlife music were providing the subaltern classes with a humorous running commentary and vernacular critique on the stresses and strains of modern times.

Reasons for the Academy's Initial Negative Attitude to Popular Performance

Despite the cathartic role of concert party plays and music in helping defuse ethnic and social tension, its importance was not at first recognised by the Ghanaian Academy, partly for imported reasons and partly for local ones. Western negative attitudes to popular performance that were very prevalent up until the 1960s was that popular art was too ephemeral, too trivial and too low status: as compared to the 'immortal' and 'highbrow' works of art music, ballet and literary theatre. Ironically, some

---

3 This was also the title of one of their concert party plays.

4 I set up the Bokoor African Popular Music Archives Foundation in 1990 with the assistance of some leading popular artists - and currently (2018) it operates a Highlife Institute and music archives at my house in South Ofankor, Accra.

5 Other topics found in the 280 songs analysed in the BAPMAF highlife record collection are as follows. Philosophical and moral advice (22%); romantic love (14.5%); sickness and death (10%); enemies (8.6%); patriotism and current events (4.3%).Topics less than 4%: are praise-songs, bad marriage, fertility, drunkenness, good women and bad women.

Marxists even took this anti-popular culture attitude, such as the 1930s German Frankfurt School of Theodore Adorno and Herbert Marcuse who viewed popular culture and mass entertainment as an 'opiate' used by governments to divert the struggling masses from a full realization of their economic exploitation.

In the Ghanaian universities, these imported negative notions on popular art were compounded by a negative attitude found in traditional West African feudal kingdoms to full-time professional musicians. These include the griots, like the Mande *jalis* and Yoruba court drummers, who were custodians of oral tradition that they passed down the generations through their exclusive clans and guilds. Despite their important role as historians, these professional performers were near the bottom of the feudal social ladder. This ambiguous status stemmed from the nervousness of traditional rulers to these full-time artists who, not only had their own distinct organisations, but were often itinerant performers who could spread news and even subversive opinions around.[6] Moreover, as custodians of official court history the griots were the very ones who could also rewrite and reinterpret history.[7]

This home-grown and imported elite nervousness and even disdain of itinerant fulltime professional performers seems to have been carried over into the Ghanaian Academy's attitude to the Concert Party. For instance, these groups were touring ones and so their members were considered by the western educated Ghanaian elites to be 'footloose', whilst the highlife guitar players associated with this genre were seen as drunkards, as they also played in palm-wine bars where this local alcoholic beverage was served. Adding to the Academy's low esteem of the Concert Party was that its performers played for money, and so were treated as mere commercial artists. Indeed, the concert parties' concern with commercial matters rather than elitist 'art-for-arts sake' ideals is evidenced by the fact that in 1960, when they formed their own Ghana National Entertainment Association, it was organised as a trade union and

---

6 This was similar to the status of the roving minstrels and jongleurs of Medieval Europe who had their own guilds but were so despised by the Catholic Church that when they died their bodies were not allowed by be buried in church graveyards.

7 In African kingdoms there was the same ambiguous attitude to blacksmiths, who belonged to endogamous clans. They likewise made a vital contribution to feudal society, but were also considered dangerous to rulers as they could make weapons.

not a 'pure arts' association.

Despite this negative stereotyping of professional popular artists by Ghanaian educated elites, Ghana's first leader Kwame Nkrumah recognised popular performance as a crucial component of his three-pronged national cultural policy of using traditional, classical-art and popular performance to help develop a national identity. Traditional music and dance were developed through agencies such as the Arts Council and the School of Performing Arts that involved the likes of Professor A.M Opoku, whilst Ghanaian art-music and the National Theatre Movement were developed by university people such as Ephraim Amu, Professor J.H.K. Nketia and Efua Sutherland. However, Nkrumah also endorsed popular performance and as a result in the 1950s and 1960s, his CPP government established many state highlife bands and concert parties, and encouraged the formation of performance unions. Moreover and although mainly Akan, there were also Ga and Ewe concert parties and highlife bands, and so their multi-ethnicism fitted in well with Nkrumah's criteria of a national art (Collins 2009/2010).

With his overthrow in 1966 Nkrumah's tripartite artistic vision was not fully transmitted into the Ghanaian university system, where the performing arts were dominated by studies and performances of traditional drum-dances, and contemporary Ghanaian art music and literary theatre. As a result, music students, for instance, were trained to be 'bi-musical' in traditional and art-music only. Not surprisingly, only a handful of Ghanaian scholars, or scholars based in Ghana at the time, studied local popular performance: these being, Professor K.N. Bame, Professor Atta Annan Mensah, Robert Sprigge of the History Department and Efua Sutherland, who actually set up a concert party in the late 1960s called 'Kusum Agoromma'. The present author also began publishing works on the Concert Party and highlife music from the mid-1970s.[8]

[8] It was through the concert parties that I obtained my first contact with highlife music, as from 1969 and whilst still a student of sociology and archaeology at Legon, I played guitar for groups like the Jaguar Jokers, Happy Stars of Nsawam and F. Kenya's Riches Big Sound. It was my father, Edmund Collins of the Philosophy Department, who played guitar and mandolin and toured with Yamoah's concert party in the 1950s who introduced me to 'Opia' (Y.B. Bampoe), the leader of the Jaguar Jokers.

The Introduction of Popular Music Studies to the University in the Late 1990s

By the mid-1990s the situation had changed and the Music Department at Legon became 'tri-musical' when it began offering courses on popular as well as traditional African music and art music. One external reason for this inclusion of popular music was that popular culture studies had by then been academically accepted in the West through the pioneering efforts of scholars and cultural theorists such as Antonio Gramsci (1971), Raymond Williams (1974) and Stuart Hall (1981) of the Centre for Contemporary Studies at Birmingham University. Moreover, many foreign and African scholars had begun to do academic work on African popular music from the 1970s: such as David Coplan in South Africa, Chris Waterman, Alaja-Browne, Karen Barber and later Austin Emielu in Nigeria, Christian Dowu Horton in Sierra Leone, Gerhard Kubik in East Africa and Pierre Kazadi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Also important for the opening up of popular music courses in the Music Department was the expansion of the Ghanaian local commercial music industry after its decline during 1970-80 military era. This was related to the business infrastructure of emerging local gospel and techno-pop genres, the multiplication of private radio and TV stations, the setting up of hundreds of digital recording studios and an interest of cultural tourists and 'World Music' fans in African popular music. Consequently, many job opportunities opened up for students in the popular music field.

The very first sign of this acceptance of popular music studies by the Academy was that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the palm-wine highlife guitarist Kwaa Mensah was employed by Cape Coast University and then University of Ghana, Legon to teach guitar.[9] In 1995 I began teaching at the Music Department and continued Kwaa Mensah's work in teaching palm-wine guitar.[10] This was in stark contrast to when I was a student at Legon between 1969-72, when I had to hide my guitar on campus as it was associated with drunks and 'dropouts'.

Then in 1997, when Professor Willie Anku became Head of Department, I was able to start the very first courses on African popular music,

---

9 Palm-wine highlife guitar was created on the Fanti coast from around 1900 by local fishermen who called it 'osibisaaba' and who were partly influenced by the guitar and accordion music of Liberian Kru sailors (see Collins 2006).

10 He taught me palm-wine guitar in the 1970s and 80s.

whilst Anku set up the Department's first recording studio. We also established the still running Process of Arts course that allows students to interact with leading artists and obtain job-experience in music studios, radio and TV stations, art promotion companies and as music journalists. From 1997 a Music Department pop and highlife band was established and highlife veterans like T.O. Jazz and Ebo Taylor were brought in as resident artists.[11] Furthermore, students were encouraged to do projects on veteran popular performers and composers, with some of these being Jerry Hansen, Ebo Taylor, Stan Plange, Mac Tonto, T.O. Jazz and Kojo Donkoh. This introduction of popular music in the Music Department corresponded with a renewed interest in the Concert Party by the Theatre Arts Department of the University of Ghana that, as noted, went back to Efua Sutherland's pioneering work in the 1960s.

The Interest of Theatre Arts Department in the Concert Party since the 1990s

As the Concert Party provides a running commentary on some of the social traumas resulting from modern development, it naturally became of interest to the Theatre Arts Department courses on community theatre, such as 'Popular Theatre and Developmental Theatre' and 'Drama in African Society'.[12] Some Theatre Arts scholars also applied the techniques of this home-grown theatrical movement in their student projects: such as the use of local languages, a combining of music, dance and drama, slapstick humour, stylized movements, audience participation and a closing moral message. Moreover, there is the long established practice in the department of lecturers like Sandy Arkhurst and others taking developmental theatre students to the Fanti village of Atwia near Mankesim in which there is a rich tradition of Anansesem folk stories. This was where Efua Sutherland made her base for her Ananse story-telling practice and research. Indeed, the Efua Sutherland Drama Studio at the School of Performing Arts is modelled on a design by her that is suitable for informal concert party and Anansesem productions.

Besides the pioneering work of Efua Sutherland, Professor K.N. Bame

---

[11] The highlife musician Bob Pinodo was also asked to set up a popular music band by Winneba University.

[12] In 2014 these courses were being taught by Dr Reverend Elias Asiama and Grace Adinku.

and myself on the Concert Party, others later wrote on the subject. Akunu Dake wrote an M.A. thesis on this topic for the University of Ghana Institute of African Studies in 1991. Then there is Esi Sutherland-Addy of African Studies, who since 1997 has managed the Mmofra Foundation built around the legacy of her mother, Efua Sutherland. Some foreigners who have done important concert party research are the Americans Michelle Gilbert (2000) who worked on concert party advertising paintings or ' cartoons' and Catherine Cole, who published the book *Ghana's Concert Party Theatre* in 2001. Moreover, that year she and her husband, Kwame Braun, made a film on the topic called 'Stage Shakers of Ghana'.[13] Another American is Jesse Shipley (2004) who was attached to the Theatre Arts Department and did research into the concert party programme of the National Theatre. Two Ghanaian students who did diplomas in Theatre Arts also went on to do research on concert parties: these being David Dontor who is currently the President of the Concert Party Union – and David Donkor who wrote his PhD on the Concert Party for the American University of Northwestern. I should add that of forty graduate MPhil and MFA theses of the Theatre Arts Department written between 2000-2009, seven were on popular theatre and developmental theatre. Furthermore, in 2007 the Theatre Arts student Fiifie Coleman did a student production at the Efua Sutherland Studio in Fanti that was based on the 1970 Ghana Film Corporation feature film movie 'I Told You So' that starred the concert party comedian Bob Cole.

Decline of the Concert Party during the 1970-90s – and New Outlets for Them

Despite the social importance of the Concert Party and an interest in it by some academics as far back as the 1970s, the genre declined during the era of military regimes from the late 1970s and into the early 1990s with the coups, curfews and import restrictions on band and stage equipment. During this time most of the concert parties collapsed and many of its performers left the country; like Francis Kenya who moved to Cote d'Ivoire and Kofi Sammy and Amakye Dede who relocated to Nigeria. Other concert party musicians such as T.O. Jazz and Nana Ampadu went into local gospel music: and indeed churches like the Christo Asafo

[13] A 100 minute film that includes interviews with pioneer concert performers made with help of Indiana University Press Bloomington http://iupress.indiana.edu.

Mission set up concert parties whose comedies had a religious slant.

Due to the problems of the military era that limited the income of touring concert parties, new forms of generating an income were developed by them. From the late 1970s scenes from their comic plays were photographed and converted into comic literature as 'photo-play' books[14], and also their plays were recorded onto commercial audio 'dialogue cassette'. For instance, in my own Bokoor Studio in Accra during the 1980s I recorded dialogue cassettes for the comedians, Waterproof and Ruby Darling.

Long running TV concert party series that had begun in the 1970s and 1980s with Osafo Dadzie and Obra, were continued: for instance, the Cantata program. These TV concert parties had helped the careers of a whole generation of concert party actors such as S.K. Oppong, Grace Omaboe, Esi Kom, Adelaide Buabeng, Doctor Rokoto, Kwadwo Kwakye, Super O.D, Joe 'Stationmaster' Eyison and Cecilia Adjei who also later taught costume design at the Theatre Arts Department at Legon. As can be seen from this list, television concert parties helped open up an avenue for women concert party performers, for an itinerant profession that due to the hardships on the road had always employed lady impersonators for female singing and acting parts (see Collins, 2007). In recent years and with the rise of the local Ghanaian video film industry during the 1980s and 1990s, concert party comics like Agya Koo and the Lilwin have also starred in the new 'Kumawood' film industry that emerged in Kumasi and which draws heavily on the concert party format.

Yet another way the concert party found a new outlet was through the National Theatre's concert party shows sponsored by Unilever and Key soap from 1994. Although this provided a new venue for concert parties it also involved some attempts to change the long established format of the genre, one which was the stopping of members of the audience going to the stage to interact with the actors. However, a more serious interference took place in December 31st 2000 that is documented by Jesse Shipley (2004) who attended the National Theatre's 'Who is Who' competition for the best Concert Party for that year. For some reason on that occasion the organisers decided to separate the comic sketches, that

[14] These came complete with comic type speech balloons and an example was 'Osofo Dadzie in Abyssinia' published in the 1980s by Gapo Publications. Another was the 'The Case of the Hunchback Craze' published by the Spear photo-comic magazine that featured the concert party actors Osofo Dadzie, Bob Cole and Ajax Bukana.

normally open a concert party show, from the main plays. For this introduction a concert party first puts its leading comic or comics to dance and crack jokes, and is a tradition that goes back to the 'opening chorus' and 'comedies' of the 1930 Axim Trio. However, on the first night of the National Theatre's 'Who is Who', the audience was told that on that evening only the plays would be presented, without the comic sketches, that would all be performed the following night. Consequently, there was riot and the police had to be brought in. For more than sixty years the central character of the concert party plays had been the comic clown-like character known as a 'Bob'[15] which in turn drew on the even older mischievous and trickster character of Ananse-the-Spider of traditional Akan Ananseseem folk-tales. As a result, the audience who were expecting the 'whole show' were infuriated when their indigenous form of humour was tampered with.

Due to the decline of the itinerant concert parties during the military era, I myself put forward a way of assisting unemployed concert performers at a speech I gave in Kumasi in 1992 for the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFAC). This suggestion was based on what happened in Europe when their equivalent to the Concert Party, a low class type of itinerant theatre known as Comedia dell'Arte, declined in the 18th Century. Europe's Comedia dell'Arte' also had had equivalent stereotypical stage characters to those of the concert party; such as lady impersonators, the high-class Dottore and lowly servant Zanni and clowns such as Harlequin, Pierrot and Pulcinella or Punch. However, as the Comedia dell'Arte gradually died out, some of its components were taken up by other art-forms related to children: such as circus clowning, *Punch and Judy* puppet-shows and Christmas pantomime with its 'dame' or lady impersonator. As elements of Comedia dell' Arte had found a home amongst European children, I therefore proposed at NAFAC that the same could apply to Ghana's disappearing Concert Party tradition. My recommendation was therefore that unemployed veteran concert party performers should be brought into the school system to teach Ghanaian children how to perform plays that combine humour, music, dance, improvisation and moral messages (Collins, 1994).

---

[15] Some Pioneers of the 'Bob' character were Bob Johnson, Bob Cole and also Opia who invariably played the role of comic servant. Later 'Bobs' who regularly performed at the National Theatre were Bob Okala, Nkomode, Santo, Iced Kenkey, Bob Cedi, Cocoa Tea, Kwame Alhaji and Agya Koo/Kofi Adu.

Concert Party and Highlife Artists as National Heroes

Before moving on to some concrete proposals for the Academy concerning the Concert Party, let me say more about its importance for national identity. A theory I heard from some local cultural experts when I was a student at Legon around 1970 was that highlife and the concert party had gradually evolved into their modern form by the accretion of western musical and theatrical elements onto traditional performance, whether that of traditional drum-dance ensembles or Ananse-story sessions. Research by myself and Efua Sutherland in the early 1970s, however, showed quite the reverse; that both the concert party and highlife music had initially begun in the coastal areas of Ghana as a copy of western brass bands, ballroom dance orchestras and vaudeville shows; and that these were subsequently Africanised by Bob Johnson, E.K. Nyame, Kwame Asare, Kwaa Mensah, E.T. Mensah and others. These different theories on the trajectory of highlife and the concert party are, however, not simply a matter of academic hair-splitting. The first 'accretion' theory suggests popular artists are simply diluters, hybridiers and even corrupters of traditional culture and therefore cannot be considered as national heroes. However, the other trajectory that myself and Efua Sutherland put forward recognised the important role of key popular artists who, despite colonialism, Africanised western forms of music and drama and made them relevant to local people. In short, Ghanaian popular artists helped de-colonise popular performance and so should be treated as national heroes (see Collins, 2005). Although this honour has been given to the composers of African art-music and the writers of African novels and plays, it has not really been extended to the pioneers of the Concert Party and highlife music.

Specific Proposals for the Academy Concerning the Concert Party

I will conclude by presenting some proposals regarding the Concert Party and the Academy, and the first one concerns preservation and documentation. Today there are only a handful of concert parties left still actively operating, and many of its pioneers have passed away.[16] Before this art-

[16] Around the time that I was presenting this paper in 2014 both Opia of the Jaguar Jokers and Paa Bobo of the Three Axes concert parties died. Since then Patrick Yamoah, T.D.B. Adjekum. T.O Jazz, Nkomode and Bob Okala have also passed on.

form is finally lost, the university Theatre Arts Departments should make a concerted effort to identify the remaining concert party artists, with some of them being brought into these departments as resident artists, as has been the case with the veteran highlife musicians brought into the Music Departments. These elderly artists are what the musician Koo Nimo calls 'Libraries on Fire' and so drama students should be encouraged to work on and document individual concert party artists. I should point out that Professor Kofi Anyidoho of the English Department at Legon and one-time Director of the School of Performing Arts, has invited concert party artists like Nana Ampadu to his oral literature classes.

The second proposal is that more research needs to be done into the text of concert party plays and their accompanying highlife songs, as these are relevant to social scientists who wish to examine the beliefs and aspirations of ordinary men and women who do not usually write down their own histories. This approach known as 'History of the Inarticulate' or 'History from Below' was originally a method developed by western historians such as Leslie Morton and E.P. Thompson during the mid 20th century to glean information from the brochures, pamphlets, broadsheets and other informal documents of the common people.[17] As the historian Terence Ranger mentions in the introduction to his book on East African dance (1975:2/3), this historical approach also draws on the text of the folk music, street music and festive songs of European peasants and industrial workers in order to understand what they were thinking. All this is in stark contrast to the official histories written by the elites who were not interested in the beliefs, aspirations and points-of-view of the poor and downtrodden. In fact, Ranger applied this 'history from below' method by drawing on the text of the popular 'mbeni' music that emerged in the late 19th century East Africa in order to examine the social history of that part of Africa between 1890 and 1970. This history of the inarticulate approach is therefore useful for historians, social scientists, Africanist and performing art scholars of the Ghana Academy. They too can draw on the text of Ghanaian concert party plays and highlife music to give them a glimpse into what the men and women in the street were thinking in the early and mid 20th century, when the country was undergoing rapid urbanization, social change and economic stratification.[18]

---

17 Leslie Morton 'A Peoples History of England' published in 1938 by the Left Book Club,. UK and E.P. Thompson's 'History from Below' in the Times Literary Supplement, 7 April 1966, pp. 279–80.

18 Ghanaian highlife records began being made in the 1920s whilst the Institute

–Footnote continues on next page

Finally, I would suggest that the Theatre Arts Departments of Ghanaian universities should set up concert parties, just as the three university Music Departments have set up pop and highlife bands[19]. Retired professional concert party performers could be brought in as artists-in-residents to help establish these groups. As the concert party involves drama, music and dance I would recommend that in the case of Legon, the whole School of Performing Arts should cooperate in this venture. Besides showcasing Ghana's most important theatrical form, the introduction of this art-form to the Academy would have four other positive benefits in terms of stage-craft which are discussed below.

Firstly, scholars and playwrights could examine the various stage tricks used to make concert plays attractive to audiences, including linguistic code-switching, slap-stick comedy, and the use of audience participation. Secondly, scholars could utilise the expertise of concert party performers in integrating music, dance and drama. Thirdly, whereas literary theatre is written, concert parties are partly improvised, and so this local art form can be used to teach students the important art of improvisation, just as jazz is often used to teach improvisation to music students. Finally, the Academy could look at some of the stock concert party characters and in particular the trickster ' Bob' who, as noted, is a modernised form of the legendary trickster Kweku Ananse who, despite his failings, always supports the underdog. It is this flawed, mischievous and therefore very human 'Bob' character that adds a touch of tragi-comedy to an otherwise rather melodramatic art-form with a caste divided into 'heroes' and 'villains.' This updated form of Ananse has been and still is central to the Concert Party and its unique and treasured brand of Ghanaian humour, evidenced by the riot at the National Theatre in 2000. So the Academy needs to get serious about home-grown humour.

---

of African studies has a collection or audio recordings of concert party plays that go back to the 1960s. Moreover, many concert party plays have been documented and in my own 1994 PhD I document plays going back to the 1950s by E.K. Nyame, Kwaa Mensah and the Jaguar Jokers: with the very earliest being a 1923 play by Williams and Marbel performed at the Palladium Cinema in Accra called 'I Fear No Ghosts'.

[19] In the last few years the Music Department of the University of Cape Coast has also established a popular music band.

References

Bame, K.N. 'Comic Play in Ghana. *African Arts*, U.C.L.A., Los Angeles, Vol. 4, Summer, 1968.

___ *Come to Laugh: A Study of African Traditional Theatre in Ghana*. Baafour Educational Enterprises Ltd, Accra, Ghana, 1981//.Lilian Barber Press Inc, New York. 1985.

Barber, Karin, John Collins, Alain Ricard . *West African Popular Theatre*. Indiana University Press/James Currey, 1997.

Asiedu, Awo Mana, Sarah Dorbgadzi and Ekua Ekumah. ' Language and Body in Performance: Working Across Languages in the Ghanaian Production 'I Told You So'. *Contemporary Theatre Review*, Vol. 21(1), Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2011.

Cole, Catherine, *Ghana's Concert Party Theater* , Indiana, Indiana University Press, 2001.

Collins, E. John . 'Comic Opera in Ghana'. *African Arts*, U.C.L.A., California, Vol.9, No. 2, January, pp. 50-57, 1976.

___ *Music Makers of West Africa*, Three Continents Press, Wash. DC/Passeggiata Press, Colorado,1985.

___ 'Comic Opera in Ghana'. *Ghanaian Literatures: Critical Perspectives*, (ed) Richard Priebe, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, pp. 61-72. 1988.

___ 'The Concert Party: Popular Entertainment and the Ghanaian School Syllabus' (NAFAC '92 paper). *The Empowerment of Culture* (eds.) Ad Boeren and Kees A. Epskamp, published by the Centre for the Study of Education in Developing countries (CESO), The Hague, CESO Paperback No. 17, pp. 171-177,1992.

___ The Ghanaian Concert Party: African Popular Entertainment at the Cross Roads. Ph.D Thesis in Ethnomusicology. State University of New York at Buffalo. Published by University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan (pub. No. 95-09102), 1995. Also available at www academia.edu.

___ *West African Pop Roots*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2, 1992.

___ *E.T. Mensah the King of Highlife*, Off The Record Press, London, 1986, Reprinted by Anansesem Press, Accra, 1996.

___ *Highlife Time*, Anansesem Press, Accra, 1994. New expanded version published, 1996.

___ 'Urban Anxiety & its Sonic Response'. *Glendora Review*, Lagos, Nigeria, (ed.) Olakunle Tejuoso,Vol.3, No. 2/4, pp. 23-8, 2004.

___ 'Ghanaian Popular Performance and the Urbanisation Process: 1900-1980'. *Transactions: Journal of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, No, 8, pp. 203-226, 2004B.

___ 'The Decolonisation of Ghanaian Popular Entertainment.' *Urbanization and African Cultures*, (eds.). Toyin Falola and Steven Salm. Carolina Academic Press, North Carolina, USA, pp.119-137, 2005.

___ 'African Guitarism: 100 Years of West African Highlife'. *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. XVII, pp. 173-196, (eds. Gordon Adika and Kofi Ackah). Published by the Faculty of Arts, University of Ghana, Legon, 2006.

___ 'The Entrance of Women into Ghanaian Popular Entertainment'. *The Legacy of Efua Sutherland: Pan African Cultural Activism*, edited by Anne V. Adams and Efua Sutherland-Addy, Ayebia Clark Publishing Ltd, UK, pp. 47-54, 2007.

___ 'Highlife and Nkrumah's Independence Ethos'. *Journal of Performing Arts*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 93-104 (ed. John Collins/John Djisenu) Published by the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, Legon, 2009/2010.

___ 'A Historical Review of Popular Entertainment in Sub-Saharan Africa'. *Africa in Contemporary Perspective: A Textbook for Undergraduate Students*, (ed.) Takyiwaa Manuh & Esi Sutherland-Addy. Sub Saharan Publishers, pp.445-466, 2013.

___ *Highlife Time 3,* DAkapabi and Associates, Accra, 2018.

Coplan, David. 'The African Musician and the Development of the Johannesburg Entertainment Industry, 1900-1960'. *The Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 5, No.2, April, pp. 135-165, 1979.

Gilbert, Michell. *Hollywood Icons: Local Demons: Ghanaian Popular Paintings by Mark Anthony*. Hartford Connecticut, Trinity College Publication, 2000.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from Prison Notebooks*. Lawrence and Wisehart, 1971.

Kazadi, Pierre. 'Congo Music: Africa's Favourite Beat'. *Africa Report*, April, pp. 25-27. 1971.

Kerr, David. *African Popular Theatre.* James Currey, Heinemann, East African Publishers-Nairobi, Boabab Books–Harare, 1995.

Kubik, Gerhard. 'Neo-Traditional Popular Music in East Africa since 1945'. *Popular Music*, Richard Middleton and David Horn (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Hall, Stuart. 'Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'. *People's History and Socialist Theory*, Raphael Samuel (ed), Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, pp. 227-240, 1981.

Horton, Christian Dowu. 'Popular Bands in Sierra Leone, 1920 to the Present'. *Black Perspectives in Music*, Cambria Heights New York, Vol. 12, No. 2, Fall, pp. 183-192, 1984.

Nketia, J.H.K. 'The Gramophone and Contemporary Africa'. *Music in the Gold Coast*. Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 1956.

___ 'Modern Trends in Ghana Music'. *African Music Society Journal*, No. 4, pp 13-17, 1957.

Mensah, Atta Annan. 'The Popular Song and the Ghanaian Composer'. *Okyeame, Ghana's Library Magazine*, Vol. 4, No.1, December, pp. 110-119, 1968.

___ 'Jazz the Round Trip'. *Jazz Forschung/Research*, Universal Edition Graz, Internationalen Gesellschaft Fur Jazzforschung, No.3/4, 1971/2.

Ranger, Terance O. *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa: 1890-1970,* Heinemann, London, 1975.

Shipley, Jesse. 'Producing African Futures: Ritual & Reproduction in a Neo-liberal Age' *Brill Lleiden* , Boston, pp.107-140, 2004.

Sprigge, Robert. 'The Ghanaian Highlife: Notation and Sources'. *Music in Ghana,* Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 2nd May, pp. 7-94. 1961.

Sutherland, Efua. *The Original Bob: The Story of Bob Johnson, Ghana's Ace Comedian*. Anowuo Educational Publications, Accra, Ghana, 1970.

Williams, Raymond. 'On High and Popular Culture'. *The New Republic*, November 23rd, pp.15, 1974.

Yankah, Kwesi. 'The Akan Highlife Song: A Medium for Cultural Reflection or Deflection?' *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 15. No. 4, Winter, University of Texas Press, pp. 568-582, 1984.