

AFRICA IN THE WORLD OF POPULAR MUSIC

IASPM 4th International Conference on Popular Music Studies

Accra (Ghana), 12 - 19 August 1987

BACKGROUND

The decision to hold IASPM's 4th international conference in Ghana was taken in 1985 at the 3rd general meeting of the association in Montreal. The rationale behind the choice of the venue was partly liberalist "tokenism", i.e. that it was about time us citizens of the "1st" world (whose top 10 of worlds?) should hold our conference somewhere outside western Europe and North America, partly to mark the association's commitment to real, rather than nominal internationalism. But that was not all. It was also felt that since music of West African origin has made such an extensive contribution to the popular music of our own part of the world, it was about time an organisation devoted to the study of popular music paid some attention to this fact. Since 99.5% of those attending the Montreal conference were not from Africa, holding the conference in Accra would, it was thought, offer an excellent opportunity to discover more about popular music in a part of the world whose good news, including its music, rarely makes the headlines here. As one of the main propagators for the idea of holding the conference in Accra, I will admit that other reasons were to establish better contacts with colleagues on the African continent and to see who would turn up from this part of the world.

ATTENDANCE

A few hundred Africans (mostly Ghanaians, others from Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo) attended the conference in Accra. About fifty of these Africans attended sessions regularly. About twenty North Americans and Europeans actually made it to Accra. This low turnout

of folk from Caucasian continents is surprising, given the fact that travel to West Africa Europe or North America is only marginally more expensive than a cheap rate transatlantic flight and that living costs in Ghana are far lower than in any previous venue for a IASPM international conference. Moreover, as you will see later from the programme and report, we attended an extremely interesting event. What could have prevented so many Europeans and North Americans from attending?

A few Europeans and North Americans who had originally intended to go to Accra cancelled a few weeks beforehand because they were not sure whether the conference would materialise at all. Some Northern Europeans were worried because they had received no advance programme, no confirmation of how they would be met at the airport or notice of where they would be housed, etc. Their reaction was quite understandable in view of the fact that even those of us who actually made it to Ghana were still in some doubt until about late July as to whether the conference would really take place. Perhaps those of us who did attend were just more foolhardy than those who chickened out at the last moment? Perhaps it was a question of basic attitudes? I have the impression that the Europeans and North Americans present in Accra had taken the position that there was no real reason to question the likelihood of their being a conference since its success depended to a considerable extent on our own participation there as visitors from far afield. Part of my own rationale was that since I had done little or no organisational work without telephones, photocopiers, duplicators, computers and a reliable mail service, I was not in a position to question the viability of conference preparations, especially in view of the fact that the operation was being run in a country where a sense of time and organisation has developed along different lines those of my own culture (see "African organisation").

It felt arrogant to assume that the conference would not take place, just because preparations did not resemble European or North American conference preliminaries. In any case, we knew that if

the worst came to the worst we could always read our papers to each other, and learn plenty about Ghana and Ghanaian music by meeting people and listening to music there. Of course, as you will see from the programme and report, there was no call for all these worries and we were fortunate enough to witness what in my opinion proved to be the most rewarding IASPM event in the history of the association. Those who cancelled their trip to Ghana at the last minute were amongst the "braver". What I find strange is that the vast majority of Europeans who had applied for funds or saved up to visit our Big Brother continent in the Wonderful West (the Montreal conference of 1985), seemed two years later either to have lost credibility with funding bodies or to have totally ruined their personal economies or to have suddenly become insanely busy or to have radically altered their lifestyle or ideology. Did the Europeans who attended the Montreal conference think that going to Africa for a conference was less important or less interesting or less fun than going to one in North America? Or were they so disappointed by the Montreal conference that they didn't want to go to another IASPM event? Or had they become totally disillusioned with IASPM in the meantime? Surely they hadn't been conned by the racist "AIDS comes from Africa" hoax? (You can have HIV faster in Paris or London than Accra). Or were they too lazy to get their tetanus, yellow fever, cholera and typhoid jabs? Perhaps they were afraid they might forget to take their malaria tablets? Or do they only consider Africa an interesting place from the historical viewpoint? Surely they don't exploit their interest in or knowledge about Africa, African music or Afro-American music as a pungent backcloth upon which they paint their career image in Europe or North America?

I found the total absence of Brits especially disturbing. Why did so many of them show up at Montreal and none of them come to Accra? It cannot possibly be for the same reason that I never yet visited Ireland (understandable shame over Britain's ignominious colonialism) because Canada and Ghana are both Her Majesty's former colonies. So what is the difference? Is it because the Canadians still have the "decency" of putting the queen on their ban-

knoses while the Ghanaians put Ghanaians on theirs? I refuse to think that it might be because Canadians are mostly white and Ghanaians mostly black or because Canada is "first" and Ghana "third" world. So perhaps my fellow countrymen find it unfair that IASPM has held a mere two of its four international conferences in Europe (the fifth and sixth will also probably be in this continent) when half of IASPM's members are European? That can't be true either because $2 \times 2 = 4$. Then the root of the evil must be Thatcherite social and educational impoverishment policies. But if that is the case, couldn't IASPM (UK) have passed round the proverbial hat and sent even just one representative? Or have they become so privatised and competition minded after a decade of monetarist brainwashing that they could not agree on who to send?

Not believing in magic or divine (im)providence, I find it hard to believe that the poor turnout of white folks at the Ghana conference might be due to a coincidental convergence of so many simultaneous unfortunate circumstances. My one final speculation is that the low attendance of Europeans and North Americans can be ascribed to cultural inertia and conventionalism. We can lie down and accept that it is easy to find Apex flights for an individual passenger with an established Western European or North American airline to New York, London or Milan. At the same time we are unaware, or we forget or we could not be bothered to find out (or do we not wish to know?) that a group booking on British Caledonian (as the Dutch suggested) or a return flight with Aeroflot, Balkanair, Air Afrique or Egyptair (as my local travel agent informed me) to Accra costs no more than an Apex between London and Chicago. Through our conformism and mindlessness we accept and reinforce dominant patterns of international contact. Through cultural sloth we say, like our national airline companies, "yes" to the fact that a lot of people move about inside and between Europe and North America and "no" to mass movement on other international axes. It should be clear which masters we serve through such unimaginative conservatism.

AFRICAN ORGANISATION

In order to grasp the interest and importance of the Accra conference, it is necessary to give certain concepts like "organisation", "time", "programme", "content", "session" and "conference" wider and more correct meanings than we tend to give them in Europe and North America. What I am referring to is the sort of thing best illustrated by an example.

Copenhagen airport

While waiting for the Aeroflot departure for Moscow (where I was to change to the Accra flight), I ran into about twenty Tanzanians who had been studying at various cities in Denmark for a year and who were now returning home. They were all in the process of putting on several layers of clothing on top of what they were already wearing. Why? Because they had no suitcases in which to put the winter clothes they had had to buy and they had never been in the situation of having more to take with them than they could carry. But clothes were not the only problem. Instead of the obligatory native drum which Europeans invariably bring home from Africa, every Tanzanian at Copenhagen airport was armed with a ghetto blaster, ranging in size from large through jumbo to hyperblast - the most powerful portable sound fetish indigenous to exotic Europe. Of course, all this paraphernalia was far too voluminous to be accepted as hand luggage by any airline company and arranging its shipment on the Ilyushin with only one hour's delay was no mean feat of organisation for the Soviet crew and Danish ground staff. Had I been in a bad mood, I would have cursed at having to wait, but another sort of sophisticated organisation had attracted my attention.

The Tanzanians, most of whom I later learned to have different local languages, spoke in Swahili and English to each other, constantly checking out each other's actions and reactions, so that within half an hour and without alcohol they had managed to create the sort of festive sense of community which might take a local football team in Europe several years and hundreds of pints of

beer to establish. The sense of timing in the gestures, looks, actions and statements of those Tanzanians made the precision of the digitalè clock dominating the waiting lounge entrance seem pretty crude and turgid. So I resumed swotting up Chernoff's African Rhythm and African Sensibility with increased insight and motivation.

Local arrangements committee

The IASPM conference had been given high priority in Ghana. The local arrangements committee included representatives from the Ministry of Culture, the Arts Council of Ghana and the Musicians' Union. The highly esteemed Professor Nketia had also been instrumental in bringing the final arrangements to fruition. The sort of problems the local arrangements committee must have faced seem almost incredible as I sit here by my PC, knowing I can download this text to Canada or Japan in a couple of minutes. Hardly any phones work in Ghana and the arrangements committee had no van, no car, no photocopier, no telex link or reliable postal service to and from the outside world. Conference organisation had moreover to take place with a serious amount of political unrest, not least at the university of Ghana where foreign participants were to be housed. Add to this the impecunious state of many a "third" world economy leading to difficulties in acquiring electronic equipment we regard as obvious and the materialisation of the Accra conference appears more realistically as a major feat of organisational skill.

Not only for the sake of protocol but also as a matter of interest, it should be mentioned that some of the main contributions to the organisational success of the conference were made by Mr Koo Nimo (outstanding guitarist and ballad singer, president of the Ghana Union of Musicians), Mrs Dinah Reindorf (60 year old ex-director of the Ghana Symphony Orchestra, synthesizer freak and head of Rent-A-Dee Services), Ms Chapman-Niahu (Bach interpreter par excellence, mother of three, textile designer and head of the Music Department), Mr John Collins (musician, head of Bokoor recording studio), Mr Ralph Quist (as Scandinavian as Max

von Sydow is African, ex-technical adviser to Ghana Broadcasting, head of Quist Electronic Enterprises), Prof J H K Nketia (professor of music, University of Pittsburgh) and, of course, IASPM's own "man in Accra", Klevor Abo (Department of African Studies).

This does not mean to say everything went "smoothly" all the time. Some people cancelled their trip out of a sense of insecurity about the conditions of the conference, while some of us were a bit non-plussed by having to fork out for "gifts" - the Dutch brought stereo equipment, the North Americans audio and video tapes while I had to buy film to the tune of 500 kr on behalf of you Scandinavians.

However, here again it is a question of understanding different cultural patterns, because such gifts are, it seems, standard practice and gestures of good will in Ghana. The goods they were interested in are moreover extremely expensive and hard to come by in Ghana. A much appreciated gift was the complete *Big Sounds from Small People* TV series on videocassettes, which I had the honour of presenting to the director of Ghana Television in the presence of journalists and which would be aired at prime viewing time on Saturday evenings. Many thanks to Roger Wallis and Krister Malm (of IASPM and MISC) for making these videocassettes available.

Programme, "postgramme" and the fetishisation of bumf

We were presented with a conference programme on arrival, but this paper with words on it did not have the same immutable fetish value as stencilled bumf in our part of the world. A new version of the programme came out each day which in its turn was subject to further alteration during the course of the same day. This oral improvisation on written verbiage actually improved the conference in my opinion, because if you "planned" to skip a session, you might very well find yourself missing the "wrong" thing. Similarly beneficial was the fact that you could never foresee when you would have to give your paper or be asked to chair a session. This prevented participants from engrossing themselves

in their "own thing" too far in advance. Although seemingly "freer" than a "normal" (European or North American) conference programme, this liberating relativity of bumf led to the same sort of on the spot immediacy and precision present in West African polyrhythm where everybody must play their own interacting part in order to make the whole thing work. Participants were in other words kept much more on their toes at this event than at any other conference I have attended. In the context of this report, all this means that the "programme" cited here is really a post-programme", based on Peter Winkler's notes, my (unreliable) memory and selected extracts from the official "programme" for each day.

Pro- or postgramme of conference

Wednesday August 12

- Opening ceremony - Music by Wolomei. Speeches, pouring of libation
- Klevor Abo (Ghana): Indigenous African Popular Music
- Daniel Avorgbedor (Ghana): Indigenous African Popular Music in an Urban Setting
- Fleming Harrev (Denmark): Origins of Urban Popular Music in West and Central Africa
- Andrew Kaye (USA): The Internal Spike Lute- A Review of its Historical Role To the Present
- Beatie Casely-Hayford (Ghana): On the Origins of Highlife
- Dr Afolabi Alaja-Browne (Nigeria): From "Ere e faaji ti o pariwo" to "Ere e faaji alariwo". A Diachronic Study of Change in Juju Music
- Dr Christian Horton (Sierra Leone): On Milo Jazz

Thursday August 13

- K N Bame (Ghana): The Ghanaian Concert Party
- Michel Demeuldre (Belgium): Dynamics of Urban Music Development Systems
- Scott de Veaux (USA): African Elements in the Music of Herbie Hancock
- Yao Asamoah (Ghana): Impressions of Cuban Popular Music Culture

- Philip Tagg (Sweden): Celtic and West African Influences in North American Popular Music
- Nana "G-Man" Agyeman (Ghana): Michael Jackson and My Career
- Jan van Belle (Netherlands): Punk in the 80's
- Petter Stranger-Johannessen (Bergen): Popular Music in Norway
- Marcus Breen (Melbourne): Popular Music in Oceania
- Shuhei Hosokawa (Tokyo): The Japanese Blues
- Rameshi Jain Gulabra (Ghana): Popular Music in India

Friday August 14

- Yaa Mponsah - A Classic Ghanaian Popular Song
Beatie Casely-Hayford (Ghana): Historical Background
George Dor (Ghana): Musical Analysis
Live performances by Koo Nimo with John Collins and by Mr Godofu
- Tour of Ghana Film Industry Corporation Recording Studios
Franco Fabbri: The Accessibility of "Obsolete" and "Low-Tech" recording equipment
Screening of "Doing Their Thing" and "The Visitor"
- Funeral of Samuel Kwabena "Paa" Gyimah

Saturday August 15

Popular Music as a means of Education

- Kwabena Bame (Ghana): The Concert Party in a Birth Control Campaign
- Reebee Garofalo (USA): Music as an Educational Tool Around the World
- Philip Tagg (Sweden): The Need for Education about Popular Music in Europe
- John Shepherd (Canada): Aesthetics, Values and African Influence in Popular Music

"Satan in Trouble": Popular Music in Christian Evangelism

- Contributions from Rev Prof K A Dickson, Asare Opoku, A A Mensah, Rev Ansah (Ghana)

Popular Music in the Educational Curriculum

- Contributions from Ms Omibiyi-Obidike (Nigeria) and Dr Ahofi (Ghana)

*Highlife concert at The State House starring Pozo Hayes, Jewel Aka, and Gyeddu-Blay Ambolley**Sunday August 16*

- Visit to the Department of African Cultural Studies
- Excursion to the Pan-African Cultural Community Workshop

Monday August 17

- - M A Omibiyi-Obidike (Nigeria): Women in Nigerian Popular Music

Graphics and Packaging

- - Kojo Mettle-Nunoo (Ghana): Ghanaian Record Covers
- - Gyeddu Blay-Ambolley (Ghana): A Musician's View
- - Niko O Lai (Ghana): Making an Album Cover

[misc.]

- ? (USA): African Music and American Jazz
- Charles Brown (USA): African Retentions in Country and Western Music
- John "Owosu (Ghana): "Warm Kiss II". Two Ghanaian Videos: "Obarima nkwan ye de" and "Osofo bo mpae ma hen"

*IASPM General Meeting**Tuesday August 18**Popular Music, Apartheid, Cultural Boycott*

- Stan Rijven (Netherlands): Rock Against Apartheid
- David Coplan (USA): By the Graceland of Paul Simon

Media

- Enimil Ashon (Ghana): GBC-FM: Popular Music in an African Broadcasting Organisation
- Joe Kofi (Ghana): To Play or Not To Play African Music: The Ghanaian DJ's Dilemma
- Roland Schmitt (BRD): "Hot, Hotter, Africa": Stereotypes in the Representation of African Pop Music in German and European Media

- Marcus Breen (Australia): The Nostalgia Industry
- Stan Rijven (Netherlands): The Reception of African Music in Western Europe and Holland
- Peter Wicke (GDR): Rock, State Policy and Media in the GDR

Wednesday August 19

- Peter Winkler (USA): Ragtime - Echoes of Africa?
- IASPM and Activism: cContributions by Klevor Abo, John Shepherd, Philip Tagg
- Closing the conference

Conference venue

Conference sessions took place in the main auditorium of the Arts Centre in downtown Accra. The auditorium has no side walls, so on one side were steps leading southwards down towards the Atlantic and on the other a courtyard. Sounds of goats, cocks, hens and children wafted in from nearby backyards and markets but mainly as background atmos, GBC (Ghana Broadcasting Corporation) being there with their PA system and elderly Telefunken recorder for every session. (I do not recall IASPM getting such media coverage previously). In a sort of dressing room by the stage stood a dilapidated musical artefact from the days of dilapidated colonialism - a once proud concert grand, its keys stripped of their ivory, its strings broken or rusted from humid heat and its woodwork well withered from what must have been a fair dose of termite terror. Meanwhile, outside the Arts Centre tourists - mostly British, West German and Japanese - were buying African drums to take home to a decontextualised death by hanging on "first" world living room walls. Fortunately, inside the Arts Centre auditorium most participants seemed more interested in finding ways of helping the music of the people live and flourish.

CONFERENCE SESSIONS

As you will gather from the programme, there were very few dull moments. However, since IASPM will shortly be publishing most of the papers there is no point in summarising that part of the proceedings here. Nor will I give more than an extremely brief sum-

mary of IASPM matters discussed at the conference, since a full account of that business will shortly appear in RPM. I shall therefore restrict the rest of this account to describing important events and aspects of the conference which are unlikely to be reported elsewhere.

Musicians at the conference

Attendance at sessions varied between about thirty and two hundred. At average session there would be some fifty or sixty people in the audience. I was particularly impressed by the number of Ghanaian popular musicians present and by the eloquence, clarity and dignity with which they spoke of their art. This was a far cry from the Wonderful West where rock and jazz musicians frequently take pride in being as non-communicative as possible about why they produce the sounds they make. King Bruce - an elderly and highly respected Highlife's musician - took an active part in the proceedings, both criticising presentations in a constructive manner and arguing convincingly for measures to improve the state of music in Ghana. Eloquent panel presentations were given by Beatie Casely-Hayford (engineer and producer for many classic Highlife recordings) on the early days of Highlife, by Gyeddu-Blay Ambolley (popular artist and singer) and by Nana "G-Man" Agyeman.

G-Man, probably in his early twenties, described clearly and honestly how winning the U.S. Michael Jackson Look-Alike Contest and touring the States doing dub shows had inspired him to start off with his own band, writing his own material and doing his own shows on returning to Ghana. Throughout the week we were able to witness his popularity at home by hearing his Highlife in G played frequently on the radio and on cassettes at bars and restaurants. This tune was a positive example of U.S. - African acculturation, the "bright solid state silver lame' neon" qualities of Jacksonian disco never gaining the upper hand on the bouncy Highlife beat. Highlife in G was refreshingly lacking in on-beat 4/4 bass drum thumps and provided the listener with danceable infectious elation rather than mechanical plastic pastel shade aerobics.

African music on GBC

Enimil Ashon and Joe Kofi from the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation's music department were two other Ghanaians who had plenty to say about the state of the art. They described the difficulties under which state broadcasting institutions work in the "third" world. Particularly disturbing was to hear that whereas no problems are involved in getting the latest disco, reggae or soul hit from the U.S.A., it is practically impossible to get hold of recordings from other parts of the world. Although Ghana have a recording exchange agreement with Cuba (the Afro-Caribbean genres being well-liked in Ghana), there are no such arrangements with other socialist countries, nor with the rest of Latin America. This means that Yoruba influenced music from Bahia or Venezuelan "salsa" are almost never heard in Ghana. Even more absurd and serious is that it is difficult and expensive to get hold of music from other African countries to play on the radio, the sad result being that the average Ghanaian listener has heard far more U.S. disco than Juju from Nigeria or Tanzanian "Jazz" from Kenya (sic - yes, it is!). If you share my feeling of uneasiness about this prospect of the transnational music business and if you have records of African music, please proceed as follows:

1. make a decent cassette or reel-to-reel copy of your African music and photocopies of the sleeve, recording details, etc. Keep this for your own enjoyment and edification, because public radio cannot play home tapes without infringing (expensive) copyright legislation;
2. pack your LP(s) well and send them by registered mail to The Director General, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, P.O. Box 1633, Accra, Ghana;
3. enclose a short note asking the GBC to confirm receipt of your records.

Recording in Ghana

A similarly sad impression was gathered when we visited the Ghana Film Industry Corporation recording studios on Friday 14 August. We were informed that the one record pressing plant in

Ghana was (a) manually run, (b) in poor shape, (c) that importing vinyl was very expensive, (d) that mechanical copyright was most easily applicable to records. These factors contribute to high production costs which cannot be defrayed by the home market where potential buyers earn far too little to pay for such goods. Without a strong home market there is no capital to invest in mass production for foreign sales and the possible revenue that might create, given the increased interest in African popular styles after Graceland (see below) in Europe and North America. Moreover, as Franco Fabbri sadly but correctly informed, there is little likelihood of "third" world record production companies being able to pick up cheap "obsolete" analogue recording equipment from Europe and North America.

Films

Included in our visit to the Ghana Film Industry Corporation was the screening of two films. The first of these, "Doing Their Thing", was a locally produced cautionary tale in fading technicolor from the late sixties about a wealthy young couple from Accra caught in the process of betraying their African heritage through the sort of commodified "generation gap rebellion" they thought they had found in U.S. American soul and disco music. Although it seemed highly odd to have chosen protagonists representing what must be the top 2% income bracket in Ghana, the moral of the film was clear: the enemy of your own identity and development is not your overbearing and authoritarian father with his "old style" African clothes, however trying he may be, but the fact that you know nothing of your own culture and background. So get out into the towns and villages of your own country and listen to and take part in the music there. Then you'll know what really swings and where you're really "at".

The other film - "The Visitor", a full-length documentary coproduction between the Ghana Film Industry Corporation and Mick Fleetwood, taught a different kind of lesson. I got the impression that the Ghanaian film makers were not very happy with the result, neither artistically nor economically. The gist of the film

was that world star rock drummer Mick Fleetwood and two of his fellow musicians come to Ghana because - as we all know, don't we? - West Africa is the place for drumming. The film documents the making of a record and a final open air concert. Viewing this film was a tragic experience because the potentially dynamic encounter between rock and Ghanaian popular music ended up as one-way quasi-imperialist bulldozing, not because Mick Fleetwood and his cronies are nasty - they're not -, but because they would have to sell the film to someone who could market it back home. Obviously, too much real Africa in the music would have been bad sales strategy and so the film uses and sees "Africa" mostly from the tourist viewpoint, i.e. as little more than an "exotic", "genuine" setting in which to put the "real thing" (cf. "Coca Cola is it"). This is why Mick Fleetwood can enjoy dancing outside recording sessions and concerts but why all other music cuts - Ghanaian doo-wah girls and maraca shakers notwithstanding - are battered like metal into heavy rock 4/4 boxes. It is why the background singers are lambasted into counting beats and bars for their entries instead of being allowed to use African response techniques which might have helped lift the music out of the mud.

Most symbolic of this clash was the way the in which Fleetwood and his musicians moved their bodies when sitting listening to Ghanaian music. I was particularly embarrassed recognising my own stereotypic movements as I watched poor old Mick listen to Ghanaian music. He rocked the upper part of his body to and fro and moved his head from side to side like most of us Europeans do, thereby applying our own cultural experience and behavioural schema of duple time to rhythmic structures slightly more refined than that, rhythms associated with completely different forms of bodily expression and social behaviour by those who make and use them.

MUSIC SESSIONS

There was no lack of live music at Accra. We were boogied off to a flying start by the infectious rhythms and dances of Wolomei at

the opening ceremony. The Yaa Mponsah session was admirably illustrated by the subtle musicianship of Koo Nimo, John Collins and Mr Godofu, while Peter Winkler received thunderous applause for his great ragtime performances.

Saturday night at the State House

We were also treated to a Saturday night concert at Accra's impressive State House. Stars of the show were Pozo Hayes, Jewel Aka and Gyeddu-Blay Ambolley, all backed by a combo that made James Brown's horn blowers sound like they just breezed in from Haight-Ashbury. Hayes, Aka and Ambolley are probably Ghana's most popular male singers. They are also all highly accomplished artists with widely different techniques and stage personalities. The fact that Hayes uses crutches on which he occasionally hobbles across the stage is one of those idiosyncrasies that becomes irrelevant as soon as you hear him sing, because his ability to combine warmth of vocal timbre with a keen sense of timing and humour is both rare and impressive.

Gyeddu-Blay Ambolley seemed younger and had a more biting sense of humour, using a mixture of Highlife, Reggae, Soul and Rock to give what struck me as a highly original and convincing sort of Afro-Brechtian stage performance. But what caught my mood most that evening was Jewel Aka's powerfully playful style. This stocky little man stands on stage and throws his head back as he propels musical phrases so cleverly timed and intoned that it would cure the most anguished Swede of the worst Bergmanesque depression. I tried in vain to find a recording of one Jewel Aka tune (I think was called Water) to take with me back to Scandinavia. It would have come in handy this winter ...

Paa Gyimah's funeral

Perhaps the most memorable musical event during the conference was the funeral of Highlife guitarist Paa Gyimah (aged 40). The funeral was only a "musical" event to the extent that (a) music is an inextricable part of most types of social activity in Ghana and (b) Paa Gyimah had been a musician. Had he been a football

player, there would also have been music at his funeral but probably more football than music. Teams would have come to play matches in his honour, thereby enacting his life work and meaning to the community of which he had been part and in so doing also perpetuating his memory. So it was obvious that Koo Nimo, the most respected guitarist in the country, should - with other musicians - attend Paa Gyimah's funeral and play there for free.

We drove to a part of Accra not far from the Ring Road. Koo Nimo escorted us out of the conference bus, across the ditch (open sewer) that runs along many streets in the city, through a dense crowd of people and into an open space about the size of a tennis court. Underfoot was the orange-brown earth and at the opposite end of the square the local people had constructed a tarpaulin roofed stage which was now laden with instruments, amplifiers, mixer and PA-system. Around the three other sides of this small square there were three corresponding lines of benches where the Paa Gyimah's family was seated, his nuclear family being placed up nearest the band. Behind each row of benches stood several hundred people, while hundreds more sat on nearby walls or leant through neighbouring windows. Being a mere dozen white faces amongst a thousand black ones, we were anything but inconspicuous as we went round shaking hands with the complete (not just nuclear) family with its hundred or so members. Who on earth were we and what the hell were we doing there?

First in English and then in Twi (or Ga?) Koo Nimo explained that we were friends of popular music and of African music who, through coming from so far away, brought additional honour to the occasion. This elicited a round of applause and I started wondering if I had ever before felt so secure among so many people. Then we bought red handmade cardboard visors sporting Paa Gyimah's name, his photo, the motto "Rest in Peace", all bordered by a rim of tiny white "In Memoriam" crosses. We talked cheerfully to others present at the occasion, watched some boys cause mirth amongst onlookers as they wiggled their hips and shook their bottoms in the manner often used by Ghanaian women when

they dance, after which we put our contribution towards the costs of the funeral in the large barrel provided for the purpose just in front of the stage and left.

This visit to Paa Gyimah's funeral was probably the most important lesson I learnt at the conference. It told me:

- that music is not a commodity like soap or plastic bags
- that music is essential to the construction of a community and to the furtherance of its well-being
- that musicians are important people and need not be considered as marginalised latter-day court jesters or cultural whores
- that many Northern Europeans (with the possible exception of the Irish) have a strange notion of how an individual's death should be solemnised by the community he belonged to (or do we only permit belonging to the nuclear family as "community"?)
- that when it is time for me to go, I want my funeral to be more like Paa Gyimah's and less like my poor old Grandma's.

Sunday excursion

We had visited Paa Gyimah's funeral on Friday evening. When we drove along the Accra Ring Road at midday on the Sunday, the music was still going and the red earth square and walls and houses around were still packed with people. We were on our day out with the pleasant prospect of a swim in the Atlantic and no papers.

After a lengthy but highly interesting drive along roads frequently resembling an inundated potato field we arrived at the newly built Academy of African Music Art at Kokrobite. (We took the main road back!). Financial matters there are administered by Heidi Mueller - who seems to have advanced no mean amount of her own D-Marks as initial capital for the project - while the Academy's artistic director is master drummer Mustafa Tetty Addy. Thirty miles west of Accra and overlooking the ocean, with a friendly atmosphere, an excellent cuisine and with budding Ghanaian master musicians and dancers amongst its students, this academy seemed almost too good to be true for anybody wanting

to study African music or dance in Africa. I did not have time to find out to what extent the Academy by its very existence will sever the dance and music it seeks to teach from the communities that originally nurtured those arts and skills but it is difficult to imagine a more pleasant environment for pursuing one's interests in the field.

On our way to this idyllic academy we had paid a visit to the Department of African Studies at the University of Ghana. We were told of the department's various activities and shown its archive, a small room crammed full with files, papers, and instruments. Our attention was also drawn to a bookshelf containing hundreds of invaluable original field recordings of Ghanaian music, many collected by Nketia and his collaborators in the fifties and early sixties. After further questioning we were told that these old acetate reel-to-reel tapes had no backups. This means that all that traditional music, much of which has changed or disappeared in the last thirty years, is stored on tape which has probably become brittle and in all likelihood suffers from dropout and print-through.

Although the department was able to find money to buy an air-conditioner for the archive a few years ago, there is the likelihood of losing that material through neglect and lack of funding. This is why IASPM delegated the job of soliciting Sony to present a DAT (digital audio tape) recorder and one hundred DAT cassettes to the Department of African Studies so that as much as possible of this treasure may be saved for posterity. If that doesn't work, it is obvious that IASPM must find money to buy the necessary equipment.

IASPM AND ACTIVISM

As a result of incidents like the visit to the Department of African Studies just described and thanks to the presence at the conference of so many Ghanaians involved in the production and dissemination of popular music, the issue of IASPM's commitment to activism, explicitly raised by Klevor Abo, became an central topic at the

General Meeting, as well as warranting its own session. As a result of these sessions, IASPM undertook to involve itself in several ways:

- We should try and find a DAT recorder and 100 DAT cassettes in order to save the tape archive of traditional music at the Department of African Studies at the University of Ghana.
- We should send as many records as possible of African popular music to the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation so that they can play more African music to their listeners.
- IASPM should try and find ways (e.g. by vetting and by drawing up contracts in accordance with international law) of impeding undue exploitation of the musical riches of the country by European and North American collectors of traditional or popular music who publish phonograms of Ghanaian music abroad without proper reimbursement. This also includes impeding the exploitation of Ghanaian artists solicited for concert tours or recording work abroad by providing help with vetting contracts drawn up by foreign music business agents.
- IASPM should act as consulting body for the Ghanaian recording industry, providing information and advice about prices, quality and functions of studio equipment and recording technology.

The theme of the conference was Africa in the World of Popular Music. Many speakers underlined the essential part which music of African origin has played (from field hollers, minstrelsy and spirituals to Graceland) and still plays in our own popular music. It seems to me that if we mean that seriously we should commit ourselves to practical action of the type suggested above. It is not a matter of do-goodery but in our own interest to see to it that one of the major sources of enrichment of our own life - the African elements in our own popular music - should be allowed to live, develop and flourish. It's like making the effort and sharing the expense of going to Africa. I am sure that every European and North American who attended would agree that the money and Euro-North-American "time" we lost by going to Africa was rewarded sevenfold seventy-seven by what we gained in learning, insight, friendship and sense of belonging.

In fact, the connection between African polymericity and the relationship of individual to collective may be the most important music lesson we Europeans and North Americans can learn from Africa. I think the fact that I only saw one single mirror during my entire stay there is another aspect of the same thing. "What thing?", you might well ask. If you had been there you would probably know. If not, why not go there and find out? Otherwise I shall have to try and answer your question another time ...

