THE IMPORTANCE OF AFRICAN POPULAR MUSIC STUDIES FOR GHANAIAN/AFRICAN STUDENTS
by John Collins

INTRODUCTION

A) The role of popular music and mass entertainment in the independence struggle and the consequent importance of local popular performance in the vision of pioneer African leaders: i.e. a mass music for a mass party (e.g. highlife as the product of the ‘veranda boy’ class). Thus the state support of popular as well as traditional and western type art/religious music sectors by the pioneering leaders Nkrumah, Nyere, Sekou Toure, President Keita. Their approach can therefore be considered as tri-musical.

B) The failure of this tri-musical approach being transmitted into the Ghanaian tertiary education system. This became rather bi-musical; i.e. the training of students only in traditional African and imported western art idioms.

C) Some reasons for this intellectual university hostility to popular music/culture:

1) imported elitist, Marxist and Frankfurt School ideas concerning the ephemeral, frivolous, low status and inconsequential nature (cf. high art) of popular music and performance.

2) Residual African traditional attitudes towards professional musicians. Low regard and apprehension of such indigenous professional traditional groups as West African jalis/griots, praise drummers and goje players.

D) The negative consequences of the narrow bi-musical approach has effected both the university students and the evolution of local musical forms such as highlife music and the concert party. It fosters elitist attitudes by students who do not consider the creative role of the masses and intermediate classes important in musical development. It has in a lack of intellectual input into local popular music: few books and biographies on the topic, no intellectual input into it.

E) The inclusion of popular music and dance since the 1980’s by the local Ghanaian churches has helped bridge the gap between art/choral music and popular music/culture. Some examples are the sanctification guitar, formally considered in Ghana to be the ‘devil’s instrument’; the use of highlife dance-music (i.e. highlife) in churches; the breaking of the western Christian taboo on using body movement for worship; the influx via the church of a new generation of professional female singers.

F) The importance of popular music studies for university students (focusing on Ghana in particular) is summarised in these following nine reasons:

1) Extending the Work Begun in the 1960’s by the University of Ghana. Work by luminaries of the Department of African Studies/School of Performing Arts (such
as Professor Nketia, Professor A.M Opoku, Ephraim Amu and others) who introduced traditional African music into the university syllabus. Their pioneering work in documenting, developing and teaching traditional African music needs to be extended to the area of African popular performance.

2) **Re-appraisal of Traditional Music/Performance in the Light of New Artistic Developments**

Looking at the continuation of traditional performance modes. Traditional retentions, formation of neo-traditional genres and the ‘progressive indigenisation’ of westernised art-forms. The inadequacy of models of social/artistic change based on the unilinear traditional(rural) to modern(urban) model. Rather there is a complex circular relationship between the traditional and modern: the creative implications of this.

3) **History of the Inarticulate**

Popular music/drama as a source of social commentary for the illiterate and inarticulate. Content analysis of older popular text provides a glimpse of the thinking of groups in society (colonised masses, intermediates, peasants contemporary ‘sufferheads’, etc) who have never been given a documented voice. History of colonialism and decolonisation through the popular music/performance texts.

4) **Helps Explain the Sociological Features Related to Rapid Urbanisation**

These include the emergence of urban trans-ethnic popular performance genres during the 20th century that provide an artistic ‘lingua franca’ and catharsis for polyglot communities. The dissemination of new ideas (a factor in ‘urban pull’) into rural areas via popular performance genres. The relevance of popular music to the emergent urban identities such as those of, class, generational and gender.

5) **Relevant to National Identity**

The importance of popular entertainment in the early nationalist struggle and the creation of a national/Pan African identity. In the universities it is already a long accepted idea is that African art-music (African symphonies, chorals, anthems, African pianism, Pan African orchestras, etc) helps forge national and pan-African consciousness. Popular music can therefore play a similar role in fostering these identities. Furthermore, popular music can also provide commentary and protest within the socio-political sphere.

6) **Popular Music Can Provide a Corpus of Transcriptions**

Popular music texts can augment transcribed traditional and art-music texts that are already used for teaching and analytical purposes. At the moment in Ghana there is no textbook of highlife transcriptions.

7) **Links Between the Music of Africa and that of the Black Diaspora**

Popular performance is one of the results of the trans-Atlantic cycle of music from African to the Americas and then back to Africa (others include black nationalism, diet, skills, architecture). The popular music, drama and dance of the black Americas and Africa music can therefore be used to explore this fruitful cultural dialogue.
8) **African Popular Music as a ‘Trans-cultural’ Phenomenon.** There is a dual hegemonic/anti-hegemonic nature of popular and mass culture. Thus the transcultural process between African and the West there is of a double-edged nature: that the imported popular music and its associated technology imported into Africa plays both a part in ‘cultural imperialism’ and in the fostering of local innovation.

9) **The Importance of the Low Status Intermediate Classes in the Formation of a New African Culture** The intellectual attitude that artistic creativity is the prerogative of the educated elites is questioned by popular performance studies. These demonstrate the role of popular performers drawn from the semi-literate intermediate masses are innovative artists in the creation of new African art-forms, as the operate as cultural brokers at the nexus of old and new, local and foreign, creative and commercial. The popular artist can therefore act as a role-model for university students.

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**THE IMPORTANCE OF AFRICAN POPULAR MUSIC STUDIES FOR GHANAIAN/AFRICAN STUDENTS: SOME SPECIFIC AREA OF IMPORTANCE**

**ONE: INFORMATION IN POPULAR TEXT: SOCIAL COMMENTARY, CURRENT EVENTS, CURRENT WORLD VIEW AND HISTORIES OF THE INARTICULATE**

One of the criticisms of popular music is that unlike the ‘immortal’ works of ‘classical’ art music, popular songs are generally short-lived and ephemeral. However this fleeting nature of popular music, often considered disparagingly by elite artists, has a positive virtue: which is that popular music lyrics has an immediacy that easily reflects and articulates the current events and sentiments of the people. Immortal art-music on the other hand concerns the current world-view and aesthetics of an earlier epoch: and in that sense is stuck in a ‘time-warp’ of that epoch.

The difference between art and popular music on this question of longevity can be compared to the difference between newspaper and books. Newspapers comment on immediate events whilst books have a longer shelf-life and usually dwell on topics of a longer lasting or more abstract nature. Although different both are important in disseminating information. This same division of labour applies to art-music and popular

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1 For instance Haydn was concerned with providing music for the Austrian aristocracy, whilst Beethoven’s ‘Eroica’ symphony was originally dedicated to Napoleon and Wagner idealised German folk culture.
music. Both present different but equally important types of musical information and aesthetics. The argument therefore that popular music studies are trivial and of less consequence than art-music studies is invalid.

Taking into account the information contained in popular music texts we will now turn to Highlife and examine its lyrics, through a content analysis or percentage breakdown of two-hundred-and-eighty songs from the 1930’s to 1980’s that have been translated into English from the Bokoor African Popular Music Archives Foundation (BAPMAF) music collection. This is as moral advice 18.55%; romantic and unrequited love 14.5%; sickness and death 10.%; poverty and money problems 9%; envious enemies 8.6%; enemies and witches within the family 4.6%; orphans 4%, positive view of family 4%, praise songs 4%, philosophical comments 3.6%; bad women and prostitutes 3.2%; patriotic Ghana 2.9%; drunkenness 2.9%; generational matters 2.5%; travel and migration 2.1%; good women 1.8%; bad marriage 1.8%; urban dangers 1.4%; fertility and barrenness 0.71%.

An important consequence of the social commentary in popular music text is that it can provide information about the thinking of otherwise inarticulate masses. This ‘history of the inarticulate’ approach as it is called has been used to obtain a glimpse of peasant thinking in old Europe gleaned from the text that still survive from folk song, folk carnival and festivals, proverbs and games. This provides quite a different information from the ‘histories of kings’ written by the educated elites of medieval Europe.

Content analysis of popular music/performance text can also provide a glimpse of the thinking of the African masses and peasants who were never been given a documented voice and thus provide new information on their world-views and on their attitudes to colonialism, decolonisation, and urbanisation.

Some specific areas these texts can throw light on are as follows. They can provide social historians with otherwise undocumented material to ‘decode’ African resentment and opposition to colonialism and to the growth of nationalist movements. They can depict the attitude of new rural migrants to the cities and urban centres to the pleasures and attractions of urban life: as well as the dangers such as drunkenness, prostitution, broken families and poverty.

Popular songs text can also be used as a mnemonic device when interviewing elderly informants. For instance the American researcher Stefan Meischer who was looking at colonial court proceedings in Kwahu played old Akan highlifes of the 1930’s to help trigger oral memories of the old men he was interviewing.

**TWO: URBANISATION**

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2 BAPMAF was set up by a group of concerned popular musicians in 1991 and, together with its associated Highlife Centre/Museum, is situated at Ofankor, Accra.

3 In the mid 1980’s with the upsurge of ‘Burgher Highlife’ (disco-highlife) and later vernacular rap or ‘hip-life’ (i.e. hip-hop highlife) the topic of romantic love and erotic love became the dominant theme.

4 This is the expression used by T.O.Ranger (1975:165) who extracted information from indigenised East Africa Beni music that evolved from the late 19th century.
The study of popular performance can help in understanding the social processes involved in rapid urbanisation. Peacock (1968) for instance saw Indonesian urban popular theatre as playing an important role in urbanising ‘rites of modernisation’. And in the early urban studies in southern Africa by the so-called ‘Manchester School’ work on popular music such as the kalela of the 1930’s and 40’s Copperbelt miners helped develop the notions of urban ‘categorical relationship’s and’ group boundaries.’ Likewise Ranger (1975:3) has shown that the East African beni dance, an indigenised form of brass band music, ‘mirrored’ power division amongst modernising Africans. In turning to Ghana I will examine just two specific areas where popular music impacts on urbanisation: namely the lure the city or ‘urban pull’ and secondly urban socialisation.

A) URBAN PULL: THE LURE OF THE CITY, URBAN WORK AND MIGRATION

The growth of an urban work-force has been one of the pre-requisites for the development of African and /Ghanaian popular performance – and indeed has actually led to the creation of in new genres specifically linked to certain types of modern profession. One is the previously mentioned kaleala dance of Copperbelt miners. Other early examples of include the following: the spread of goombay/gumbeh/gome (Pan African frame-drum music) around West Africa in the 19th and early 20th centuries by migrant carpenters and blacksmiths: the dissemination of West African cross-fingering guitar styles one hundred years ago century ago by Liberian Kru (or Kroo) seamen: the growth of Central African maringa music in early 20th century Congo that partly initiated by triggered by five thousand ‘coastmen’ (clerks and artisans from Anglophone West Africa) brought to Mutadi by King Leopold in the 1880’s.

Another connection between urban pull and popular performance is that the text of songs and plays have helped introduce urban ideas and norms long before the establishment of mobile cinema and television. An example of this are the Ghanaian concert parties, a popular theatrical form that evolved in the coastal towns and was subsequently taken into the rural areas. The Akan Trio for instance staged play during the 1930’s on the coronation of the British King George which they took to the villages whilst ‘on trek’. In the 1950s and 60’s there were dozens of concert parties introducing the latest fashions from Europe and America and thus providing an element of ‘urban pull’ to their rustic audiences. In the 1950’s the quintessence of modern life was the sleek, expensive and stylish ‘Jaguar’ car: which became a popular expression in popular music, drama and literature of the time to express the modern imported urban dream.

It became the name of one of the most important Ghanaian concert parties the, Jaguar Jokers formed in 1954, the leader of which (Mr. Bampoe) told me ‘meant to be fine or modern..... of high class’ The journalist Ian Lang (1956) mentions a Ga and English highlife that includes the refrain ‘jagwah, been-to’ (i.e. a Ghanaian who has travelled abroad), houseful, careful, fridgeful’ by the Hotshots highlife dance-band. An example from popular literature that comes from Nigeria is ‘Jaguar Nana’, the title of Cyprian Ekwensie's fifties book about an adventurous 'goodtime' girl in a big city.

5 See Clyde Mitchell (1956) work on this dance of the African migrant miners of towns and workcamps of the 1930’s and 40’s.
6 (HMV record JZ 5527 in the BAPMAF archives. A similar sentiment is found in short highlife ballet 'Jaguar' made in 1958 by the Ghana Film Industry (GFIC) that includes the commentary 'unless you own a fridge, are a been-too and own a flash car like a Jaguar, the girls won't love you.' (GFIC brochure 1974 p 16.)
7 Hutchinsons 1961 London
B) URBAN SOCIALIZATION

Popular text also plays a role in commenting on the do’s and don’ts of urban life, and I will take the case of the plots and lyrics of Ghanaian highlife music and concert party plays. Often highlife lyrics provide a guide to behaviour and some of these have been categorised in the content analysis of 280 songs provided earlier: neighbourly help, the pitfalls of migration, criticising gossipers, respect for ones elder and family.

Professor Bame (1968) comments on the cathartic nature of the concert party plays in deflecting ethnic hostility and integrating anti-social behaviour; for instance by humorous depictions of ethnic stereotypes. Indeed, as concert plays and highlifes are performed by Akan, Ga and in some cases Ewe, their texts are therefore able to provide emergent urban polyglot populations with a trans-ethnic lingua franca.

Popular texts also present what the Brempong (1984:1/160) and Barber(1997:50) call the ‘horrors’ and ‘chaos’ of city life; such as marital conflict, prostitution, drunkenness and economic uncertainty. For instance the downfall of urban ‘goodtime girls’ and ‘playboys’ is a common feature of concert party plays, as is the pitiful state of a drunkard in highlife songs.

Another theme often depicted in concert plays concerns the breakup of the traditional extended family as it moves towards the modern urban nuclear one. This is often expressed in concert party plays and songs as a hostility to polygamy and the common theme of inheritance disputes and witchcraft accusations within the family (see for instance Brempong 1984). Another very common theme is the plight of the orphan and neglected child a common reproduct of migration and what Ester Goody called the resulting ‘crisis fostering’ (1966).

THREE: THE INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE AND NATIONAL/PAN-AFRICAN IDENTITY

Popular performance and entertainment has also played an important part in the early nationalist struggle and is still contributing to the creation of a national and indeed a Pan-African identity.

In Ghana during the immediate pre-independence era the previously mentioned Axim Trio concert party staged a number of pro-independence plays such as ‘Nkrumah Will Never Die’, and ‘Nkrumah Is A Mighty Man’. Bob Ansah's concert group staged plays like 'We Shall Overcome' and 'The Creation of Ghana' and he told me that he was twice arrested by the British and questioned about his plays. This harassment is reminiscent to what happened around the same time to the father of Yoruba travelling theatre, Hubert Ogunde, in colonial Nigeria.

8 Such humorous depictions include a rice eating Kru mentioned in a 1930’s concert party (Sutherland 1970:10) and a Akan speaking Nigerian in the 1954 Jaguar Jokers Play s play ‘Kashee’(Collins 1994)

9 See Bame 1968 and for the Jaguar Jokers and Kwaa Mensah’s concert parties see Collins 1994.

10 For instance Yamoah’s 1950’s song ‘Osigyami’, the 1972 highlife ‘Robert Mensah’ (a famous Ghanaian footballer stabbed to death in a drinking bar) by Okukuseku’s band and A.B. Crentsils 1980’s ‘Akpeteshie (local gin) Seller’.

11 Hubert Ogunde staged plays critical of the British. In 1946 he was fined and his theatre banned in Jos for his ‘Strike And Hunger’ production about the 1945 Nigerian General Strike. That year (i.e.1946) he was also cautioned by the colonial police for his play ‘The
Some concert parties also released guitar-band highlife records in support of Nkrumah. One was E.K. Nyame's 'Onim Deefo Kukudurufo (Honourable Man and Hero) Kwame Nkrumah' that in 1951 welcomed this him after his release from imprisonment by the British. In 1953, E.K. Nyame went on to accompany the by then Prime Minister Nkrumah on a state visit to Liberia. Another pro-Nkrumah song by E.K.'s band was 'Ghanaman Momma Yensua Biako' (Ghanaians Learn To Be One) and E.K. Nyame told me in 1975 that he had written altogether forty songs in praise of Nkrumah.

Other forms of acculturated popular Ghanaian music and dance were involved in the anti-colonial struggle in the period leading up to independence. The pianist Squire Addo and his London Rhythmic Band released a number of Ga and Twi dance-songs in support of the CPP. The famous black nationalist George Padmore who in the 1950's was the London correspondent for the Ghanaian newspaper the Sekondi Morning Telegraph, mentions in the issue of the 5th of February 1952, a calypso called 'Freedom For Ghana'. This was recorded in London that year by the Trinidadian George Brown and a mixed group of Ghanaian and West Indian musicians - and twenty thousand copies were ordered from HMV by the C.P.P.

Highlife dance bands of the 1950’s, such as E.T Mensah’s Tempos also supported Nkrumah and played the CPP signature tune 'Lead Kindly Light' at pre-independence rallies. Neo-traditional genres of music (influenced by highlife music) were also involved in the independence struggle. Konkoma music became identified with 'Osagyefo' Nkrumah's C.P.P. in the 1950's as did the konkoma influenced 'borborbor' music of the Ewe people, with the pioneering group from Kpandu actually being called 'Osagyefo's own Borborbor'.

Ghana obtained its full independence in 1957, when the Tempos dance-band released the celebratory song 'Ghana Freedom Highlife'; followed the next year by 'Ghana Guinea Mali' that commemorated the political union between these three newly independent socialist states. The Tempos jazzy style of highlife, played on instruments that in the 1950's were the height of sophistication and modernity, partly explains the band's success; for the Tempos brilliant postwar fusion of local Ghanaian dance-melodies and western instrumentation became a symbol of early independence optimism. In short the Tempos became a musical metaphor for the hoped for successful Africanisation of the European Gold Coast socio-political system. The sophisticated Tempos band playing African melodies therefore became the zeitgeist of the independence period which also explains the band's popularity throughout West Africa.

After the country became independent in 1957, Nkrumah's C.P.P. government established numerous highlife bands within the police force, army and various state enterprises. These included the Farmers and Workers Brigades whose dance-band celebrated their establishment in 1959 with the highlife 'Hedzole (Freedom) Aha Brigades'. The Workers Brigade also formed a concert party that year (with Bob Johnson as stage instructor) whilst Bob Cole began and ended his concert shows with pro CPP government messages. Besides fostering popular music and drama Nkrumah also encouraged the formation of two popular performance unions catering for the concert parties and guitar-band musicians and the more urban dance band ones.

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12 These were the Ghana National Entertainments Association (G.N.E. A.) and the dance-band Musicians Union of Ghana set up in 1960 and 1961 respectively.
Nkrumah was overthrown in 1966 and the massive government promotions of the popular arts declined. Nevertheless 1968 the National Liberation Council government organised a board to supervise music, dancing crafts and drama. One of the board members was the playwright and musicians Saka Acquaye who played an important part in the formation of the pioneering Wulomei 'cultural group' that, was the first of a large number of similar Ga popular groups of the 1970's that became nationally admired for performing in 'ancient historical garb'. In 1973 the Arts Council held the first national festival of concert parties to 'pay tribute' to popular drama, and the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) government's 'Cultural Revolution' in April 1982 included supporting concert parties and guitar bands. A PNDC minister declared the concert party as 'the most developed form of drama' in the country, and in 1988 there was official acknowledgement of Ajax Bukana as state comedian; re-establishing a tradition begun by President Nkrumah, for whom Bukana was 'court jester'.

Popular performance is also used to directly express Pan African ideals. An early Ghanaian example was the highlife 'Destiny of Africa' by Onyina's guitar band that celebrated the first Organisation of African Unity Conference which took place in Accra in 1958. Another is the change of name in 1964 of the Broadway dance-band to Uhuru, the Swahili word for 'freedom'. Stan Plange, who was a member of both groups, told me that the Uhuru band often accompanied President Nkrumah on international trips and was 'regarded as a national band.' More recent is the formation of the Pan African Orchestra in the late 1980's by Nana Danso Abiam. This combines together the traditional instruments of various African countries but interestingly its repertoire includes popular music, such as highlife and Afro-beat. Popular as well as traditional performances have also played a part in Pan African festivals and an example if Nigeria's FESTAC '77 which included Ghanaian acts by the Osibisa Afro-rock group, and the Ga 'cultural group' Wulomei that in 1983 also represented Ghana at the Second Pan African Youth Festival held in Tripoli, Libya.

FOUR : THE PROTEST AND ANTI-HEGEMONIC NATURE OF POPULAR MUSIC

Popular music (and culture) mediated via the mass media (score sheets, recordings, TV and radio, etc) has been recognised by sociologists as having a double hegemonic/anti-hegemonic function vis-avis the central politico-economic power of the ruling classes of the state and multi-nationals companies. On the one hand Theodor Adorno and others of the Marxist ‘Frankfurt School’ claimed in the 1930’s that popular music is used by the ruling classes as a soporific or ‘opiate of the masses’ that lulls the oppressed masses into a sense of false-consciousness that diverts their attention from the supposedly more important matter of organising a class-struggle. On the other hand Raymond Williams and Gramsci, after the Second World War, began to see popular music as an arena for

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13 A similar support of the popular as well as traditional African arts was also the policy of other early independence leaders: such as Nyere of Tanzania (who endorsed ‘Swahili jazz’) and President Keita of Mali and Sekou Toure of Guinea

14 Even though these groups were ‘traditional’ they includes some western instruments (such as guitars) and played some highlife songs. See Collins 1996

15 Afro-beat is largely the product of Nigeria’s Fela Anikulapo Kuti who was, up until his death in 1997, Africa’s most outspoken Pan-Africanist singer
battling ideologies: the hegemonic consolidation of power by the ruling class but also the anti-hegemonic protest by the oppressed masses against the status quo via popular music and performance. As soon as the ruling class co-opts a popular music style the masses produce a new style from the streets. In the context of the development of African-American music Charles Keil (1966) calls this the appropriation/revitalisation process’ in which white Anglo-American society has continually absorbed and ‘tamed’ the music of the African-Americans – who then produce a new music in its place: from the spirituals to jazz, from swing to bebop, from the blues to soul, from disco to the ghetto music of hip-hop and rap.

This double nature of popular music is also discussed by Wallis and Malm in their book ‘Big Sounds from Small People’ (1984) on the popular music of small/developing nations, including African ones, that have become saturated with western popular music disseminated by multi-national companies. On the one hand this saturation can lead to the homogenisation and ‘cultural grey-out’ of small local music cultures, but simultaneously and through new de-centralised technologies (such as mobile recording studios and cassette production) there can also be an efflorescence of local styles that incorporate imported elements within an indigenous performance context.

This tug of war between the ‘centre’ and the ‘periphery’, the young and the old, the rulers and oppressed seems to be a feature of popular performance dynamics and helps explain the rise of many types of ‘protest’ genres. For example the American ‘folk songs’ of Woodie Guthry and Pete Seeger that reflected the early 20th century struggles of American poor whites and their trade-unions, and Bob Dylan with his ‘The Times They Are a Changing’ that was an anthem of the anti-Vietnam war movement of the 1960’s.

African-American music has also often involved a protest element and an early example is the ‘Negro spiritual’ many of which had a hidden anti-slavery message. Another example is the militant soul music of the 1960’s (c.f. the earlier melancholy ‘blues’) with its civil right optimism and ‘afro’ and Afro-centric fashions: epitomised by the James Brown song ‘Say it Loud I’m Black and Proud’. More recent is ‘gangsta rap’ the echoes the chronic urban warfare in American black city ghettos with their riots, constant policing and high percentages of young black in jails. And from Jamaica is Bob Marley, whose reggae songs criticise ‘Babylon’(i.e white imperialism) and echo the back-to-Africa sentiments of Marcus Garvey and Rastafariism.

Protest music also occurs with African popular music, both direct criticisms of authority, but more usually in disguised and indirect form through the use of parables, proverbs and metaphor. Ghana’s E.K. Nyame, for instance, recorded several songs of allusion that criticised Nkrumah in the latter period of his rule. One was ‘Nsu Bota Mframa Dzi Kan’ that includes the lines ‘if the rain falls the wind will blow first... so I’m warning you like the wind’. This became the slogan of the anti-CPP National Liberation Movement that opposed Nkrumah’s socialist policies. E. K. Nyame followed this up with ‘Ponko Abo Dam A, Ne Wura No Dze Ommbwo Dam Bi’ that is based on the Akan proverb that translates as ‘if the horse is mad it does not mean the owner is mad’

16 Such as ‘Follow the Drinking Gourd’ (i.e. the northern star and northern ‘underground railway’ to freedom) and ‘Steal Away to Jesus’ (i.e escape from slavery)

17 Two examples are Thomas Mapfumo’s open condemnation of President Mugabe of Zimbabwe which resulted in his exile, and Fela Anukulapo Kuti’s criticisms of the Nigerian government which resulted in two hundred court cases and several imprisonments.
As van der Geest and Asante-Darko (1982:33) noted, the public may also retrospectively give a song a 'secret political meaning.' The African Brothers 1966 highlife hit song "Ebe Te Yie, Ebe Nte Te" (Some Sit Well, Whilst Some Do Not) about big animals pushing smaller ones into the cold, falls into the latter category. Whilst the composer, Nana Ampadu, claims his highlife was based on a fable his father had told him, the song was interpreted by the Ghanaian public as a critique on the emergence of a new post-colonial political and economic elite. A slightly earlier example is the record 'Agyimah Mansah' released in 1964 by K. Gyasi and his Noble Kings concert band about a ghost mother lamenting the plight of her children. President Nkrumah questioned Gyasi about the lyrics, and although the composer claimed these were based on a dream he had had and were not a political reflection by 'Mother Ghana' on the state of the nation, the song was banned from the radio.

The regimes that followed Nkrumah's also had their share of highlife songs that were critical of them. Following a brief period of civilian rule from 1969 led by Dr. Kofi Busia, another military coup took place on January 13th 1971 led by Colonel Acheampong. The record of Kofi Sammy's Okukuseku concert band 'To Wo Bo Ase, Efidie Wura Beba' ('be careful the owner will come') was continuously played on the day of the coup but was later banned from radio and television as its message, which contains the lines 'enemy, the one who will beat you has not yet come', also began to be applied to the increasingly unpopular Acheampong regime that became notorious for its 'kalabule' or corruption. A song by the prolific African Brothers released in the early 1970's called 'Afe Bi Ye Nhyira, Afe Be Ye Asan' was also interpreted as an attack on this military regime, as the title means 'some years are a blessing whilst some years are full of trouble'.

**FIVE : GENERATIONAL CHANGE**

Far from traditional Ghanaian music being static it was continuously undergoing innovation change via inter-ethnic contact (proximity, trade, migration and warfare) and important in this context, was generational change - and indeed conflict. For example youthful age-sets, secret initiation societies and warrior associations could, through innovative performance, ridicule members of the older generation, question priests and even overthrow chiefs. Likewise the youth continually modified recreational drum-dance styles, which was often initially frowned upon by elders: thus acting as an identifier for each new generation. The young in turn become elders and new recreational styles emerged in the next generation in much the same way as popular dance-music styles in the West mark out the waxing and waning of youthful sub-cultures.

Because recreational music and dance styles are continually open to generational modifications, it is from these, rather than the more conservative and slow-changing ritual and court performance, that so much of Ghana’s acculturated or trans-cultured popular dance-music arose. As mentioned above, during the pre-colonial era novelty in recreational music was purely an internal African affair, being the combined result of cross-ethnic contact or the continuous youthful re-interpretation and re-cycling of older music styles. However, during the 19th and 20th centuries era novelty was injected into recreational performance from external rather than internal African sources; i.e. from

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18 Nketia (1973) provides a sequence of neo-traditional recreational styles of the Akan of Ghana.
Europe and the Americas. It could be rightly claimed, therefore, that much of contemporary Ghanaian, and indeed African popular music, is a direct continuation of traditional but ever-dynamic recreational music, albeit with elements from the West incorporated into it.

Turning now to contemporary Africa where traditional generational tension and conflict has not only been carried over into the modern context, but has actually increased for a variety of reasons. Urban migration and the formal western education of young people are particularly important, as these have resulted in a questioning of traditional and parental authority, and a turning away from the extended family towards the nuclear one. Another factor is the introduction of imported social norms such as romantic love, smoking, the drinking of alcohol, and those associated with the teen-age fashions and the rebellious pop idols of western youth culture. Indeed, and as in the West, local African popular performers, particularly urban ones, have become ‘role models’ for African youth. Various writers on African music have noted that popular music and performance creates a a ‘distinct youth identity’ and ‘mirrors’ the tensions and ‘clashes’ between the young and old.

Some early examples of the generational factor in Ghanaian popular music include konkoma (or konkomba), a poor man’s version of brass band ‘adaha’ highlife music that was produced in the Akan area during the 1930’s by ‘school drop-out’ and ‘ruffian’ or ‘no good boys’. Another early example from northern Ghana is ‘simpa’, neo-traditional recreational music of Dagbon that evolved during the 1930s from contact with the imported western and southern Ghanaian gome and highlife performance styles. When I stayed in the Dagomba capital of Yendi in 1974 I was told that simpa music sessions had always been associated with the young and were frowned upon by the older people as improper places for young boys and girls to meet.

After independence, with the dramatic expansion in the educational system and an increase in the number of western educated youths unable to find employment in the modern sector, the school drop-out and delinquent factor in the development of Ghanaian, (and some other African popular music genres) popular music became even more important. Twumasi mentions that the sudden increase in youth unemployment in Ghana during the 1950s was one of the factors that led Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah to establish the Workers’ and Farmers’ Brigades. These socialist type para-statal organisations also trained and hired the young and unemployed as musicians and actors for the Brigade highlife bands and theatrical concert parties.

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19 See Emmanuel Akyeampong 1996.
22 A clue to this southern influence is apparent from the word ‘simpa’ itself – which is the indigenous name for the coastal town of Winneba (i.e. Windy Bay); See Collins 1985 and 1996. Chernoff mentions (1979, p. 212-213) the newer acculturated ‘atikatika’ recreational drumming of 1970’s Dagbon youth that includes songs critical of local school teachers and businessmen.
23 Chris Waterman (1986, pp. 220, 223) and Kazadi (1973) both observe that in the 1950s and 1960s urban migration, school drop-outs and unemployment were factors in the dramatic rise of popular music groups of Nigeria and the D.R. Congo respectively.
24 Twumasi 1975, p. 49.
Sometimes Ghanaian highlifes text dwell specifically on the topic of generational strife and a very early example is ‘Nkyrinna’ (Newcomers) recorded by B.E. Sackey’s guitar band in 1939 which tells the elders to respect the youth, whilst Kwabena Nyama’s ‘Moa Mose Drabin Onye’ on the other hand bemoans the poor driving of the young \(^{25}\).

Not only Ghanaian highlife lyrics but sometimes whole popular music genres have been related to generation disputes: and two already mentioned are the Akan konkoma and Dagbani simpa, both neo-traditional forms influenced by popular music. Another example is the growth of the youthful ‘pop’ music genre in the 1960’s and 70’s when Ghana adopted foreign rock ‘n’ roll and soul music and their associated fashions and heroes. Consequently the young Ghanaian fans of these styles treated the older generation and its music as ‘colo’ (outo-date) and went onto develop their own Africanised offshoots of these ‘pop’ styles: such as Afro-rock and Afro-beat\(^{26}\). Indeed imported ‘pop’ music even influenced the emergence of a ‘traditional’ Ga recreational drum-dance in the 1960’s known as ‘kpanlogo’. Because of the exaggerated pelvic movements of the kpanlogo dance, borrowed from rock ‘n’ roll and the ‘twist’, the older generation (including executives of the National Arts Council) initially opposed this new-fangled ‘traditional’ genre, claiming the dance was sexually suggestive. Some kpanlogo performers were even arrested by the police and it was only the CPP government’s endorsement of the kpanlogo in 1965 that this generational dispute was settled (See Collins 2002).

Since the 1980s other imported popular musical influences and associated youth fashions have become the trend with Ghanaian youth; such as Jamaican reggae and African-American “disco” type soul-funk music, followed more recently by hip-hop, rap and regga. Old-time highlife and indeed rock ‘n’ roll and soul are all now considered by the Ghanaian youth as ‘colo’ and have been swept away by these new youth music fashions. Local reggae artists such as Kwadwo Antwi, Felix Bell and Rocky Dawuni sport ‘dreadlock’ hair-styles and many of their followers profess the rasta faith and life style. Disco music became fused into highlife (particularly by Ghanaian living in the German town of Hamburg) and stars of the resulting ‘burgher’ highlife, such as Daddy Lumba and Nana Acheampong, are typified by their ‘jelly-curl’ hairstyles, flashy clothes and sentimental lyrics that dwell on ‘odoh’ or romantic love. Rap music in Ghana was developed into vernacular ‘hiplife’ (i.e. hip-hop highlife) by Reggae Rockstone, Tic Tac, Lord Kenya and others who dress in the baggy suits and untied shoes of US rap artists and present in their Twi and Ga lyrics a ‘macho’ and even misogynous view of love.

SIX: THE CREATIVE ROLE OF INTERMEDIARIES ‘HEROES OF THE CULTURAL CROSSROADS’

There is a general consensus amongst writers that is from the ‘intermediate’ social groups that have emerged in Africa in between the national bourgeoisie and the vast class of

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26 Invented by the Nigerian highlife musician Fela Anikulapo-Kuti
subsistence farmers that the practitioners and audiences of African popular performance – and indeed African popular art in general – are largely drawn. These middle-grade ‘intermediates’ are neither elite nor peasant, neither fully westernised nor fully traditional, but are rather comprise of cash-crop farmers and newly urbanised Africans who are semi-literate and perform semi-skilled work. As Coplan notes, this class actually had a local name in South Africa: the ‘abaphakathi’ or ‘those in the middle’.

Most Ghanaian concert party actors and highlife musicians come from this intermediate background. For instance the members of the Jaguar Jokers concert party whom I worked with between 1969-73 (see Collins 1994) had been tailors, cobblers, carpenters, electricians, steward boys, builders, timber yard workers, border policemen and auditors. Leaders of other concert parties had an equivalent background. Kakaiku was a miner, Yebuah a tailor, Onyina a shoe-maker, Kwaa Mensah at one time or another was a carpenter, a mining surveyor's assistant and a watchmaker, and his famous uncle Jacob Sam was a goldsmith. Sutherland (1970:5 and 18) makes a similar observation concerning the early concert party comedian Bob Johnson and his group, whilst Beattie Casely-Hayford mentioned that the early highlife song ‘Yaa Amponsah’ was associated with a group of local cocoa brokers who were sent by their British cocoa merchant employer, to Suhum in 1918. There they established this provincial town's first dancing club and brought in one of their sisters, Yaa Amponsah, who was proficient at both European and local highlife dancing.

A particularly important groups of intermediates for the development of African popular performing arts were seamen, either working onboard ship, or onshore as stevedores and longshoremen. Most important in West Africa were the Kru (or Kroo) people of coastal Liberia who having a maritime tradition of long distance fishermen were employed on European ships as early as the late 18th century. These seafaring African people also established ‘Kru Town’ settlements in many West African coastal towns where they introduced the ‘two-finger’ technique of guitar playing. For instance the Ghanaian guitarist Kwaa Mensah told me that his uncle Jacob Sam, the first to record the guitar in this style,  

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27 Ware (1978:363) states that most of Sierra Leone's popular musicians come from the lower middle classes whilst Alaja-Brown (1987) notes that Nigerian juju music originated with the ‘rascals’ and ‘area boys’ of the old Saro (immigrant Sierra Leone) Olowogbowo quarter of Lagos. In southern Africa Mitchell (1956) and Ranger (1975:133) observed that the beni-derived kalela and mganda dances were performed by tailors, miners, domestic servants and lorry boys, whilst Rycroft (1977:221) mentions that early 20th century wandering Zulu guitarists and concertina players were ‘neither traditional nor Christian.’

28 Barber (1987:29) provides the examples of Kenyan popular literature and the ‘Onitisha market literature’ of Nigeria in the 1950's to 1970's that was produced by and appealed to grammar school children, white collar workers, primary school teachers, traders, mechanics and taxi-drivers. Fabian and Fabian-Szombati (1976:4) also note that the popular painting of Zaire's Shaba Province was created by a ‘thin and fragile’ socio-cultural sphere of lower level workers and members of the petty bourgeoisie. Moreover both the producers and consumers of Shaba art gave this métier no special privileges, but rather treated it as a craft akin to carpentry.

29 Coplan (1979/80 and 1985) comments that this expression applied to the Zulu miners and domestic/ municipal workers who created the marabi music of the 1920's slumyard 'shebeen' bars.

30 At a 1987 conference in Accra organised by the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM)

31 Brooks (1972) say they worked on British merchant ships from the 1780's, on British men-of-war from 1819, on those of the United States African Squadron from the 1840's, and on British mail steamships form the 1850's.

32 Freetown's 'palmwine' guitar music was played by seamen, including Kru ones, for a 'Kroo Town' had been established there, according to Brooks (1972:11), as early as 1816. Both Waterman (1986,1990) and Alaja-Browne (undated and 1987) refer to the 'Krushbass' two-finger technique of 1920's Lagotian palmwine music.
was taught by a Liberian stevedore. Both 'Sam' and his nephew were Fantis, a coastal Ghanaian people who had many fishing communities on offshore islands stretching from Liberia in the west to the Cameroons in the east.

Generally speaking these intermediate artists had a low esteem in society. For instance the South African Zulu 'abaphakathi' were according to Coplan (1979/80:52 and 73) seen as 'uncouth fellows' and a threat to the 'civilised status' of the black south African middle-class. In Ghana the itinerant concert parties and associated bands were until very recently not highly regarded, with the guitar being considered to be of a particularly low status as it was also associated with palm wine bars and drunkenness. Similarly Low (1982:26) says the Kenyan guitarists of the 1950's were considered to be 'debauchers.'

Insiste of the intermediate and low status of these professional popular artists they were extremely mobile; both geographically and socially. The mobility of sailors is self-apparent. Less extensive travels were undertaken by some categories of the middle-grades already referred to; railway workers, taxi-drivers, messengers, postmen, and the clerks and low level staff transferred around by trading and government administrations. Other examples are domestic servants who move up and down the social ladder as they journey between humble home and opulent workplace, and the new urban migrants who are continually moving to-and-fro between the city and their village of origin.

West Africa is known for its 'hypermobility' associated with the transport and brokerage activities of the local trading companies and market women. The enormous distance covered by commercial West African popular performance groups can thus be seen in terms of this type of trade determined mobility. Ghanaian concert parties, for example, are basically itinerant businesses that go on the road in search of profits, whilst Yoruba travelling theatre, according to Jeyifo (1984:67), annually toured over areas of 30,000 square miles.

Here the examination shifts from the occupational background of popular performers to the innovative features exhibited by them that is a result of their intermediate position in society and their high social/geographical mobility. The two areas of innovation is their role as cultural brokers and their ability to 'hijack' elite culture.

**INTERMEDIARIES AS BROKERS OF THE CULTURAL CROSSROADS**

Many writers on African popular music have noted that popular artists are important cultural brokers in the fluid and heterogeneous African urban environment: what Ware (1978:314) calls 'cultural innovators', Coplan (1979/80:54) calls 'innovative strategists' and Jeyifo (1984:116) calls 'extremely socially aware'. For these performers operate at the intersection of diverse socio-cultural they are adept at negotiating and manipulating multiple cultural codes and expressive modes: the indigenous and imported, the old and the new, the rural and modern, between nascent classes and ethnic groups. Hampton (1983) and Waterman (1986:4) label this syncretic nexus as a 'confluence' whilst Barber (1987:12) calls it a 'novel conjuncture'. These confluences or conjunctures occur when popular entertainment culturally links Africa to the outside Muslim or Western world, or acts as an inter-ethnic bridge in polyglot African communities, or forges ideological connections between various sectors of modern African society.

The fact that popular entertainers operate within a multiplex situation throws into question older single factor theories of social change; such as the linear primitive-to-modern model of sociology or the 'centre' and 'periphery' tension of mass communication theories.
The 'confluence' hypothesis rather supports the newer developmental and mass communication theories known as 'multiplicity models' which, as its name suggests, are polycentric ones that posits no single line of development. They rather treat each countries growth as unique, with the national identities of the new nations emerging as a bricoleur of indigenous folkways, elite and popular culture, religious symbols and imported western technologies and ideas. In short, the perfect multiplex environment for the intermediary African popular entertainer.

INTERMEDIARIES AS 'HIJACKERS' OF ELITE CULTURE

Not only do African popular performers act as a link between the local elite and the masses, they sometimes adapt and 'proletarianise' high-class culture, usurping the innovative role that some social scientists have claimed is the sole prerogative of the elite. Some early Ghanaian examples include the 'hijacking' of the imported vaudeville and music-hall, patronised by the coastal African elite by the early concert parties during the 1930's and indigenising it as they spread this popular genre into the hinterland areas. Another example is the borrowing during the 1950's by the concert parties of musical ideas and instruments from the more prestigious dance bands. In both cases the more low-class entertainment of the concert parties has thrived up to the present day, whilst the more elite forms have declined or disappeared altogether.

Barber (1990:22 and 19/20) has observed a similar 'filter down' with the Yoruba travelling theatre; from the interwar 'native operas' and cantatas of the Lagotian elite to the intermediate classes after the Second World War. Again paralleling the Ghanaian case, Yoruba popular theatre has flourished whilst the high-class varieties have died out, which Echeruo (1962;74) claims is because they 'did not develop strong independent roots in Nigerian soil.' An example from the other side of the African continent is that of brass-band derived beni music of Kenya and Tanzania, which, as it moved from the coast to hinterland after the First World War became proletarianised. Yet another example was the penny-whistle kwela music of the late 1940's and 50's, that, according to Coplan (1985:159-161), was a poor man's version of the local swing bands of the black South African middle-class that themselves began to disappear around this time.

The fact that these proletarianised entertainment forms have been so much more successful and long-lasting than the local elite artforms from which they evolved challenges the 'dependistia' or 'liberation' developmental theories which emphasise the exclusive modernisation role of the national elites and intellectuals. These ideas were initially worked out in Latin America during the 1960's, where the intellectual was expected to

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33 Known as 'modernisation' and 'dependistia' theories
34 Particularly important were Bob Johnson concert party and the Axim Trio who went on long rural tours or 'treks' and began to use the Akan language, incorportion some traditional folk characters (such as the Akan trickster Ananse) and use an occasional local highlife song as well as the ragtime music of imported vaudeville.
35 They borrowed the double bass, 'jazz' or trap-drums and Afro-Cuban percussion from the more prestigious urban oriented highlife dance bands. It was also at this time that the concert parties (beginning with that of E.K. Nyame) began to fully integrate local highlife into their plays: resulting in the 'highlife opera' format that is still popular today.
36 Whereas the competition between late 19th century Kenyan beni groups were expressions of rivalry between traditional aristocratic clan moieties, later competitions were between what Ranger (1975:79) calls the 'posh' and 'vulgar'. Finally, during the interwar this syncretic popular dance music and it numerous offshoots became associated with migrants and 'poorman' (Ibid:90).
'conscientizise' and develop the peasants through education and the artistic medium, including that of drama. This notion of 'developmental theatre' was subsequently taken up and sponsored by some African states. Whatever type of government support or stimuli from university intellectuals, these officially sponsored forms of didactic entertainment have never had the mass appeal and staying power of the popular theatre genres.

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