GHANABA AND THE HERITAGE OF AFRICAN JAZZ

royal hartigan

The essence of jazz as an African American artform traces to the indigenous music of African peoples: their cosmology, way of life, aesthetics, instruments, performance practices, contexts, and meanings as expressed in the dance drama. While the connections between jazz and African diasporic musics in the Americas have been documented in the many styles of Latin Jazz—Afro-Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Brazilian—and through a body of research, its ultimate source, African music, has been little understood, researched, or presented in a significant way in the West, especially in a jazz context. The history of racial and cultural stereotypes which have plagued African peoples has had a musical counterpart, rather than the true sense of an ancient and dynamic heritage, highly specialized, refined, and diverse. The distance and relative inaccessibility of African villages has been one aspect of the problem, although in today's world this is less so. The media prevalence of mass market, electrified, pop styles of both Jazz and African music has also served to obscure a deeper connection between the traditional and acoustic styles in each tradition. Let us focus on one African musician who has dedicated his life to the development of African Jazz as an expression of the African diaspora in the twentieth and twenty-first century.

While many jazz artists have visited the African continent—mostly on concert tours, some for study—including trumpeter Louis Armstrong, pianist Randy Weston, and drummers Buhaina Art Blakey, Max Roach, and Edward Blackwell, only a few African musicians have had the opportunity to live in the United States and assimilate the jazz tradition. One such artist is Guy Warren of Ghana, known as *Ghanaba* ("born of Ghana"), *Odomankoma Kyrema* ("the Divine Drummer"). I will present a biographical sketch of his life, a discography and printed sources, selected writings,

and observations from my playing and interviews with him during my summer 1996 research in Ghana.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF GHANABA

Warren Gamaliel Akwei (Guy Warren) was born in Accra, the capital city of Ghana (at the time known as the Gold Coast, a British colony), on May 4th, 1923, the son of Richard Mabuo Akwei and Susuana Awula Abla Moore. His father, headmaster of the Ghana National School in Accra, named his son after United States President Warren Gamaliel Harding. Warren Akwei was educated at the Government Elementary Boys' School, Accra, from 1928 to 1939, leading the school band in his last two years. He was active in the dramatic arts, playing lead roles in the pantomime, "Zacariah Fee," produced by Governor Sir Arnold Hudson in 1937–1939. He then enrolled at the Odorgonno Secondary School, Accra, in 1940, and successfully auditioned for membership as a drummer in the Accra Rhythmic Orchestra led by Yebuah Mensah.

Warren earned a Teacher Training Scholarship to Achimota College, Accra, in 1941, where he was elected captain of the soccer and volleyball teams. He left college in 1943 to enlist in the O.S.S. (Office of Strategic Services), a United States agency dealing with overt and covert operations during the Second World War. This position brought him to the United States in 1943, and in the same year, he returned to Accra and joined the *Spectator Daily* newspaper, under the editorship of Robert Wuta-Ofei, as an undercover for O.S.S.

He worked for the Gold Coast Radio Broadcasting Service as a jazz disc-jockey in 1944, and soon joined with other Ghanaians to form the *Tempos*, whose personnel would include himself on drums; Joe Kelly, clarinet and tenor saxophone; E.T. Mensah (younger brother of Yebuah Mensah), trumpet; Pa Hughes, alto saxophone; Baby Nelson and Pete Johnson, guitar; Adolf Doku and Johnny Dodds Schall, piano; James Bossman and Serious Amarfio, bass. (Serious is the older brother of Sol Amarfio, who drummed with *Osibisa*, a well known Ghanaian band based in London.) The *Tempos* was considered by many to be the epitome of African jazz ensembles.

Warren was editor of the *Daily Echo*, *Gold Coast Independent*, and *Star of West Africa* from 1950 to 1952. While reporting in London for the *Daily Echo* during 1950, he did a series of jazz programs for the British Broadcasting Service, and played drums with Kenny Graham's *Afro-Cubist* ensemble. He formed his own *Afro-Cubist* ensemble in Ghana which performed at the 1953 inauguration of President William Tubman of Liberia. He remained in that country's capital, Monrovia, to become assistant director and resident disc jockey at station ELBC, the National Broadcasting Service of Liberia. His live playing and radio shows helped introduce many West Africans to jazz and Caribbean music.

In 1955 he moved to Chicago, and joined the Gene Esposito band as co-leader, percussionist, and arranger. This ensemble recorded his best known album, *Africa Speaks, America Answers* in 1956 for Decca records. It included his composition "*That Happy Feeling*," and he subsequently joined ASCAP as a composer in 1957. That same year he moved to New York City, forming the *Zoundz* ensemble, and continued to develop a musical style combining African musical elements with jazz, which he called *African Jazz* . The *Zoundz* included vibraphonist Ollie Shearer, bassist Ray Mackinney, and Guy Warren on a modified drum set employing a hand drum as a floor tom and the hourglass-shaped double headed string-tension armpit talking drum known as *dondo* (see *Downbeat* magazine May 4, 1955). This group played at the African Room, a nightclub at 780 Third Avenue in Manhattan.

Warren had heard the Afro-Cuban jazz style with hand drummer Chano Pozo in trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie's ensemble, and he wanted to create a new style of jazz which incorporated traditional African aesthetics, performance practices, forms, melodies, rhythms, instruments, and inflections. He had contact or performed with many jazz innovators, such as Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, Charlie Parker, Lester Young, Thelonious Monk, Billie Holiday, Max Roach, Buhaina Art Blakey, and Louis Armstrong. He subsequently recorded for RCA Victor, Regal, Columbia, and his own Safari label. He performed at the Ghana Jazz Festival in Accra in 1960.

Since the 1950s, he has gradually modified the jazz drumset, replacing western instruments with traditional African drums. He presently employs an African drumset consisting of carved wooden drums of the Akan people of central-western Ghana: two large *fontomfrom* placed on their side and played with foot pedals as bass drums, an *apentemma* directly facing him in the position of a snare drum, and two *fontomfrom* and two *atumpan* to his right and left on stands as toms. *Fontomfrom* are huge, long, deep-toned master drums, *apentemma* are medium-sized hand drums, and *atumpan* are large, deep-toned master drums, the talking drums of the Akan. Ghanaba uses the two long curved wooden sticks that are traditionally used on *fontomfrom* and *atumpan* in this new context. His pioneering work in jazz and African music also earned him the name *Ghanaba*.

He was associated with Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana (the former Gold Coast), following its independence from Britain in 1957.

Ghanaba has continued to pursue literary interests, writing a number of articles and essays. In 1966 he published a short autobiography, *I Have a Story to Tell*, which focused on his experiences in the American jazz world. This work was eventually expanded into his *Ghanaba, Odomankoma Kyrema, the Divine Drummer*. He has been active in theater, starring in Ethiopian-born Haile Gerima's 1993 film *Sankofa* (a Ghanaian proverb and Adinkra symbol meaning "remember the past, return to your roots"), which received a favorable review in the *Washington Post* (Sunday, October 24, 1993). Ghanaba also created a talking drums interpretation of the *Hallelujah Chorus* by Handel, which led to his being honored in 1981 as an *Odomankoma Kyrema*, by *Aklowa*, the African Heritage village based at Takeley, near London.

He has six children, four sons and two daughters. His eldest son, Guy Warren, Jr., is a sculptor, painter, and carver who lives in New York City; his second son, Glenn Gillespie Warren, is a jazz drummer who was featured on Ghanaba's 1979 Safari album titled *That Happy Feeling*. A third son, Gamal Abdel Nasser Warren, is a political science student, while a fourth son, Gamaliel Joseph Warren, is a jazz drummer living in Gary, Indiana. His first daughter, Midie, was born in 1977, while his second daughter, Gye Nyame Hossana, was born in 1982.

Ghanaba has compiled an African Heritage Library at his residence which focuses on the history of the African presence in jazz. The library includes large holdings of records, audio tapes, pictures, books, music, magazines (including the American *Downbeat*), newspapers, letters, paintings, sculpture, instruments, and other artifacts.

His use of African drums in a jazz drumset context has its Ghanaian precursor in the assemblage and playing by one musician of different sized and pitched indigenous drums, such as the *sogo*, *kidi*, and *kagan* of the Ewe people of southeastern Ghana. These instruments are traditionally played individually, one to a part. This practice was known as "one-man jazz," perhaps influenced by, and named as a result of, the exposure of Africans to jazz styles through radio and records since the 1930s, and international tours by such artists as Louis Armstrong, who performed in Ghana during the 1950s. In fact, the American drumset itself is known to this day in Ghana as "jazz drums."

Ghanaba has continued to compose, perform, and record up to the present time, making his home at the village of Midie, near Amasaman, a town near Accra. He has performed at many national and international events and is

well known for his large outdoor concerts at Black Star Square in Accra, in combination with African drummers and other ensembles. His solos include a vocabulary ranging from traditional ensemble and processional music to dance, song, chant, and jazz phrasing, as well as call-and-response with audiences numbering in the thousands. He was honored with a photographic exhibition of his career at the United States Information Service in Accra on the 40th anniversary of Ghanaian independence, March 6, 1997.

DISCOGRAPHY

Africa Speaks, America Answers, Decca DL 8446, New York; Brunswick LAT 8237, London. Recorded in Chicago October 15, 1956.
Emergent Drums, Columbia 33SX 1584; EMI Records, Hayes, U.K.
Themes for African Drums, RCA Victor LPM 1864, New York.
Afro-Jazz, Columbia SCX 6340; EMI Records, Hayes, U.K.
African Rhythms, Decca DL 74243, New York.
Native Africa: *Short African Music Suitable for Television, Radio, Cinema, Lecture Programmes*, KPM Co., KPM 1053 and KPM 1054, London.
The African Zoundz of Guy Warren of Ghana, Regal Zonophone SLRZ 1031; EMI Records, Hayes, U.K.
That Happy Feeling, Safari Records and Tapes SAF A1, Accra, Ghana.
Ghanaba! Live at the Arts Centre, Accra!! , Safari Records and Tapes SAF A2, Accra, Ghana.

GHANABA IN PRINT AS SUBJECT OR AUTHOR

Encyclopedia of Jazz. 1958, 1960. Leonard Feather, ed. New York.
ASCAP Autobiographical Dictionary. 1966. ASCAP, New York.
Dance Towards The Earth. (n.d. available). Deborah Berntonoff, Tel Aviv, Israel.
An Essay for UNESCO—The Intensity Factor. (n.d. available). Deborah Berntonoff, dancer and mimist, c/o the Dance Research Institute, 3 Senesh St., Holon/Tel Aviv, Israel.
Music Outside. (n.d. available). Ian Carr, London, U.K.
I Have A Story To Tell. (c. 1966.). Guy Warren, Accra, Ghana.
Dictionary of International Biography, Vol. XVII. Ernest Kay, International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, U.K.

International Register Of Profiles, 6th Edition. Ernest Kay, International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, U.K.

Ghanaba, Odomankoma Kyrema: The Divine Drummer—The Only Certified, Complete Autobiography. (n.d. available). Ghanaba, formerly Guy Warren, Accra, Ghana.

ESSAYS BY AND ABOUT GHANABA

The Intensity Factor by Deborah Bertonoff

The following essay is dedicated to the thesis that the secret of art in action is intensity. By this I do not mean energy but the capacity of the artist to concentrate his innermost forces into one single awareness. Intensity is a capacity to detach oneself from everything that we call the outer world, the faculty of self-dedication. It involves the total human being: his thoughts, his feelings, his will, his essence. It is the quality which marks the true believer, to whom service and mission are one.

The secret of this intensity lies beyond us, just as every creative power remains inexplicable in the last resort. However, we can always sense it, even if we can never measure it. I sense artistic integrity as a reciprocal onslaught: the object of art attacks the artist and he attacks the object. The artist's inherent technique comes into being in this way, being born of the intensity of the meeting. The deepest, innermost *I* expresses itself here.

As I said to begin with: the intensity I have in mind is the capacity of detaching oneself from everything we call the outer world. For not only the common man but also the exceptional one and even the true artist are all equally exposed to a multitude of voices, which call him and not infrequently drown out his innermost Self, the only-one that matters in this connection.

To hear this inner voice constantly and ever more exclusively—that, if I may say so, is the path and goal of intensity. Intensity permits you to hear this innermost voice of your hidden *Self;* and only when obeying this voice do you attain an ever more penetrating insight.

What impressed me most, I think, in the whole range of dancing, remains the lesson of an American-Italian jazz-dancer and teacher, which I observed

for twenty days when we both taught at the same seminar at the University of Legon, Ghana. He was then maybe thirty years old, and what struck me was his constant unrest. Early and late he was in a kind of exhaltation, as though he were actually hearing only with an inner ear. However, he had to link it with his duties in the outer world, but his behaviour was no more usual in the usual run of things than it was in his lessons. He would thank a pupil during a lesson as if she were offering him a gift, precisely because she had understood him. It was so moving to witness how he strove with all the fibres of his being to be understood; and it was this passionate wish which caused him to be so grateful. Before the lesson he was fully at one with his students, drawing them as it were to himself, and his "thanks" were there because he had been so thoroughly comprehended thanks to his movements. He was quite capable of going down on his knees at the slightest kindness or mark of attention. . . . It might be said that the movements of his body expressed, the very essence of his own Spirit-of-the-Dance, and he could formulate it through movement.

He certainly had a poorer verbal vocabulary at his disposal than the wealth and expression displayed in his movement. He is goodness itself, as can be seen in his exercises. When he exercises and extends his body, you can see patience, concern, and tenderness. His swift pacing resembles the padding of a light-footed animal, or even the swimming of fish in water; I am tempted to say that his thrust in the relation of his muscles to space, has never hurt the air. . . . One might add that he dances with every fibre and all his nerves.

Once he had an accident in which his face was badly injured. One eye began to squint and he wears sunglasses which, a sign of shortsightedness, do not seem to match those arms and legs of his in their reaching far into space. Shining black hair; a nose almost too delicate for a man; and a very sad, twisted mouth. He once betrayed the fact that he actually developed his extraordinary jazz technique only after the accident, when he learned always to cover his face with his arms. In his form, as I already said, there is constant unrest, even when he is simply sitting, standing, or walking. It is only the rhythm of music that brings him into a complete harmony and a coordination of soul and body. One more thing which is absolutely characteristic and I have never witnessed with anyone but him: he may, let us say, be sitting when he suddenly hears music, and is, as it were, raised from the chair. Without any preparation he can proceed from sitting into dancing.

. . . The excess of his inner adrour: at the beginning of the lesson he is already red-hot, at the end he is white-hot. Sparks flash from him and the

average cold pupil stands dumb before this Vesuvius. In this example intensity becomes visible. Only from this unique "how" do you attain the "what," whether you call it lesson or work of art. It never emerges into form. It is always at melting point. It is always fluid fire.

. . . For the Master Drummer of Ghana (Ghanaba) it is above all the counterpoint in his rhythms. Each separate finger of his is capable of beating a particular motif. His rhythms then combine together and merge one in the other, a mosaic. When he uses the drumstick, the drumstick is actually an extension of his hand, and the limited area of the drumskin becomes the medium for the various tones and the half-tones. From one and the same drum he can give expression to each and every stage, from the gentlest pianissimo to roaring outcry. The drum of his is more than a musical instrument. One might almost say that he writes novels on it. He gives an experience a narrative form with his drum. And it is with good reason that he names his works. . . . For his time sense is not that of the ever renowned day. His measure of time calls for collecting himself, concentrating himself, preparing to discover himself anew. So when he returns to the drum, maybe after months have passed, the practising, the repetition, have not ceased even for an instant. The drum is always in his consciousness and his technique for mastering it, his ever increasing joy in mastery, never abandons him.

Unlike the dancer, who may himself be more of an instrument upon which and through which someone greater plays, he is fully aware of being possessed. He is fundamentally spiritual, a deep thinker, a seeker after truth; he sees the hollowness of so-called world renown (and he himself is famous, although anonymous in the deepest sense). He knows that the most important, the deepest, the everlasting demand of the artist is made upon himself. His seclusion from the world, externally and internally, his unvoiced protest against prevailing untruth in Art, is in essence a confession of faith. He has never ceased to be a true son of Africa. The spirits of trees and rivers live in him and through him. . . . The strict discipline of the Indian penitant and the elemental wildness of the Animist are in his spirit, giving his drumming its unique quality.

Whether he is performing in public, or engaging in a rehearsal, or giving an example during a lesson: there is no difference in intensity. Everything about or within him is at work. The ultimate that must be attained is always before his eyes, and always torments him . . . between him and the drum there is no intermediary space, no intermediary thought, no intermediary emotion. . . . His is the elegance of African dignity, the elegance of

tears clad in finest silks, . . . connected across the spatial, temporal vastness by means of his drum.

* * * * *

When Ouspensky first saw the Dancing Dervishes in Constantinople, he grasped that this was not, as was currently claimed, some kind of craziness but the very opposite. In and by means of their wild whirling, they seem to solve the deepest of problems. . . . He saw them a second time several years later. And meanwhile, says he, he had come to understand the principle, and at the same time he comprehended why they do not reveal their secret: "It is easy to tell what they do and how they do it. But in order to understand it fully one must first know why they do it. *And this cannot be told.*"

The Evolution of the Drums in Jazz, by Ghanaba

1. The African slaves in the U.S.A. made drums from wood in their environment, and played them in the African Form. This Form was banned by the European slave-owners, because it was not conducive to public peace and harmony. Only European music and instruments were allowed, and non-African forms of drumming were encouraged socially in churches, marches, dances. . .

2. In the 1900s, the African American drummer developed a form of drumming which introduced the revolutionary bass drum foot pedal, and mostly reduced the drums to keeping tempo, staying in the background. Baby Dodds developed this African American form to solo-virtuoso level.

3. In the 1930s the African American drummer further developed the use of the European bass and side drums, and added other percussive instruments like gongs, cymbals, triangles, and so on, yielding Sonny Greer, Big Sid Catlett, and Papa Jo Jones.

4. In the 1940s the form was further developed by Kenny Clarke and perfected by Max Roach. At this point the Afro-Cuban form was added to the existing African American form by Chano Pozo, from Cuba.

5. In the 1950-60s the African-American-Cuban form developed still further, producing extensions of Max Roach, in the form of Elvin Jones, Tony Williams, Eddie Blackwell, Billy Higgins, and Sunny Murray.

6. In the 1950-60s the pure African form, which had been banned in slave days, was rewoven into jazz by Guy Warren of Ghana, a.k.a. Ghanaba, in

his album *Africa Speaks, America Answers!* (Decca DL 8446; Brunswick LAT 8237) featuring the "talking drum" or *dondo* , a traditional drum which has been in wide use in Africa for generations. This drum was unknown to the jazz world; it is shaped like an hourglass, and has two ends covered with skins. The skins are laced with leather thongs, which run back and forth from one end of the drum to the other. The drum is held in the armpit and is hit with a specially-designed curved stick. The drummer can vary the pitch of the drum by pressing the thongs with the inside upper arm against the upper chest or with the fingers. The drum can thus produce a wide range of sound. This African instrument was used to play *African Jazz.*

7. In the 1970s Ghanaba further replaced the traditional African American jazz drums with Ghanaian drums called *Fontomfrom*. These are huge hand-carved drums, named after the *zounzzz* they produce when they are played. He used the African American bass drum foot pedal to play the *Fontomfrom* for the first time in history. Traditionally the Ghanaian master drummer uses his hands, holding special sticks curved at the tip to play these drums. Ghanaba's form [of African Jazz] brought the evolution of the drums in jazz full circle, initiating three revolutions: (i) changing the construction of the music, by replacing Americo-European themes with African material; (ii) replacing traditional [jazz] rhythms with African rhythms; and (iii) replacing the traditional African American jazz drums [drumset] with African drums [drumset].

Excerpts from my Summer 1996 Research in Ghana **by royal hartigan**
photography by Heidi Mitchem

In my research on jazz and African music with master drummers Freeman Kwadzo Donkor, Abraham Kobena Adzenyah, and C.K. Ladzekpo, our conversations inevitably turned to Ghanaba, formerly known as Guy Warren, a Ghanaian jazz drumset player who had lived and performed in the United States and was famous in West Africa. On previous trips to Ghana I was unsuccessful in contacting Ghanaba, but Nick Robertson, the political affairs officer at U.S.I.S. Accra at that time, arranged transportation and introduced me to John Ray, a visual artist from Oakland, California, who lives in Accra and is a friend of Ghanaba. [Nick is an excellent vibraphonist who, during his tenure in Ghana, was part of a Ghanaian jazz ensemble in Accra and actively promoted jazz and the arts through live performances, support for indigenous musicians, and assistance with research on African diasporic culture and music.]

Figure 1: Ghanaba and his African drumset

Master drummer Godwin Agbeli, my video colleague Heidi Mitchem, and I travelled by auto on the road from Accra to Nsawam, going past urban areas and markets, meeting the rolling green hills of the countryside at Amasaman, and turning off the main motorway onto a dirt road near the

Figure 2: The countryside at Amasaman, near the village of Midie

Figure 3: L-R: photographer Heidi Mitchem, royal hartigan, Ghanaba, and master drummer Godwin Kwasi Agbeli

village of Midie. After about two miles, we saw a small dirt path barely wide enough for a car, but with a sign that read "African Heritage Library," and we knew this was our way. After proceeding a short distance surrounded by lush vegetation and trees we arrived at the farm, library, and home of Ghanaba. Going inside we saw two rooms full of artwork, instruments, and sculptures, with another large space containing records, tapes, newspapers, magazines, books, letters, and other writings. The walls were covered with posters, record covers, and other memorabilia showing a life of international music making. Suddenly a man in traditional Ghanaian dress greeted us, and this was Ghanaba. He stood quietly, with a dignity and calm intensity which made us feel at home.

We spent two days interviewing Ghanaba, focusing on his life growing up in Ghana, musical development, experiences in the United States as a jazz player, return to Ghana, and innovations in the genre of African jazz. Since my research derives from a direct experience of the music through performance, I asked Ghanaba at the end of our first day if we could bring a drumset to exchange ideas and he agreed, adding that he would bring out his African drumset and other instruments. On our second day we arrived and saw three pairs of huge Akan master drums in the form of a drumset. Two *fontomfrom* were laid on their side and connected to two bass drum pedals to function as bass drums; two *fontomfrom* and two *atumpan*, one

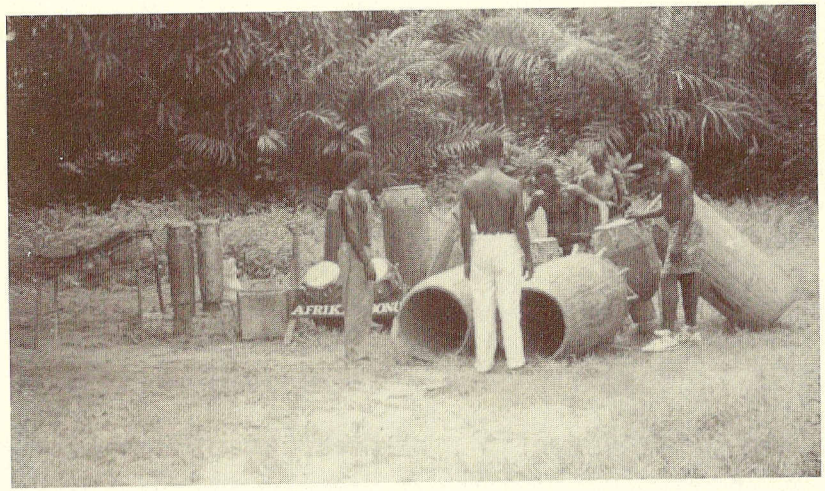

Figure 4: Setting up Ghanaba's drumset

on each side, were fixed on stands to function as toms; and a single smaller *apentemma* support drum was in the position of a snare drum. Since one *fontomfrom* is larger than an entire western drumset, his African drumset was truly awe-inspiring, from a purely visual perspective, a carved work

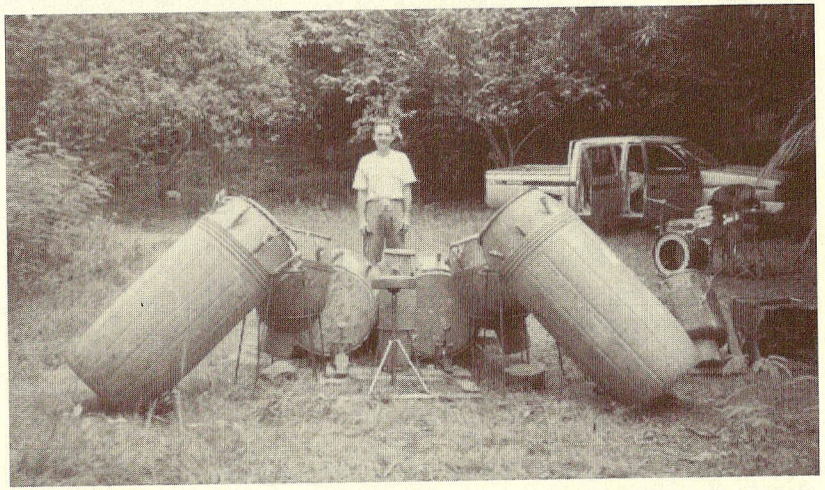

Figure 5: The author standing at Ghanaba's drumset; note the traditional drumset to right rear in front of Godwin Agbeli's truck

of art, dwarfing my tiny jazz kit. Its sound was like cannons in battle, as he played with traditional curved wooden sticks.

Ghanaba also set up other traditional drums, another pair of *Atumpan*, two *apentemma*, one hourglass-shaped armpit "talking" *dondo*, a *gongon* cylindrical drum, and a number of bells and rattles. Four Ghanaian drummers functioned as a support ensemble for his African drumset playing. I then set up my jazz set next to his.

He and the four drummers began with a processional, singing, dancing, and drumming around the open space where we had set up. After a time they took positions at the ensemble set-up and exploded into a fast twelve-eight style with *gankogui* double bells, *gongon*, and *atumpan* accompanying Ghanaba on his drumset. It was over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and they played for forty minutes at this intense pace.

Ghanaba motioned for me to join them and, as I sat at my jazz kit, he began playing phrases that I answered. He pointed to me and I played a series of *gongon* and *dondo* rhythms on bass drum and toms from the *Bambaya* music of the *Dagomba* people of northern Ghana.

At that point Ghanaba and his drummers created an ensemble groove that felt like a New Orleans second line, so I played an Ed Blackwell four-four

Figure 6: Ghanaba tuning his drumset, counterclockwise, L-R: large *fontomfrom* and *atumpan* in the position of floor toms; first *fontomfrom* laid on its side and played with a pedal as a bass drum; *apentemma* drum in the position of a snare drum; second *fontomfrom* on its side with a pedal as a second bass drum; and *atumpan* and *fontomfrom* in the position of toms to the player's left

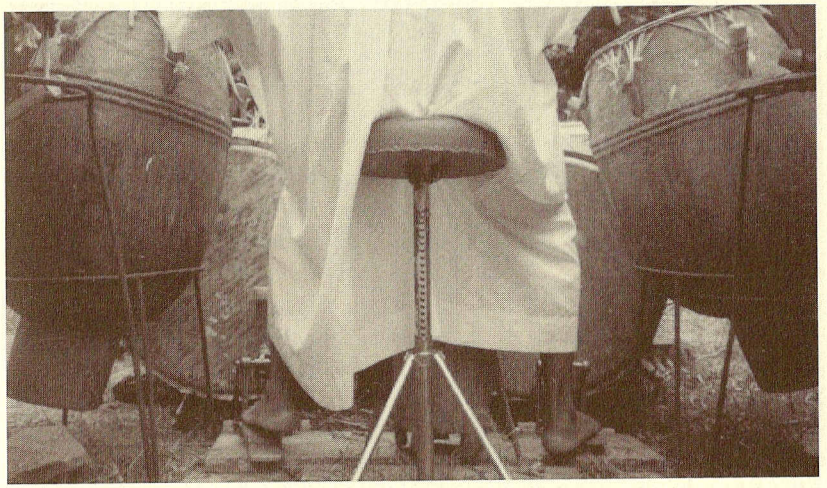

Figure 7: View showing bass drum foot pedals attached to two *fontomfrom* drums

snare rhythm in eighth notes with changing accents over a bass drum dotted-quarter—dotted-quarter—quarter heartbeat with open high hat foot splashes on beats two and four. He soloed over my groove, and his strokes on all the large drums sounded like a brass band full of horns. We were

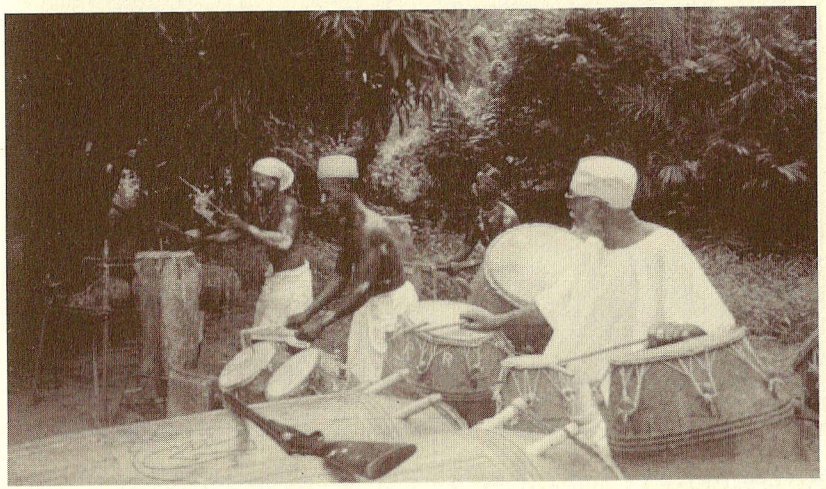

Figure 8: Ghanaba and his ensemble

sweating madly under the midday sun but laughing at the connections that were happening.

After bringing the New Orleans/Africa sound around a few times, Ghanaba's drummers left their drums, moving behind us and clapping in unison with my high-hat on two and four (in western terms). Godwin Kwasi Agbeli began to play the *atumpan* drums, and I instinctively moved to a Sidney Catlett floor tom style and felt a swing groove as never before in all my years of playing. Ghanaba started playing bebop figures on his African drumset in the midst of all this, so I responded, keeping time on ride cymbal as he played, and mirroring his phrases on snare, toms, and bass drum. We began to trade fours, sixes, eights, and twelves. By now the playing had been going on for almost two hours in the extreme heat and we were soaked, but the music just kept going.

Suddenly, he left his drums and started dancing phrases which I again answered in a bebop drumset style. His four drummers continued clapping what I heard as two and four, driving the time. I then joined him, laying out some tap dance rhythms with my feet on the Ghanaian soil. Ghanaba then sat at my drumset, and proceeded to play fours, sixes, and eights in a strong bebop style which I answered with my tap dancing. He and his drummers eventually formed a line which Godwin and I joined as a processional around and away from the main area, singing, dancing, and playing traditional drums, bells, and rattles. After more than two hours of hard playing and dancing, I felt a connection to the West African and African American traditions as never before, to Ghanaba and the other musicians, and to myself in ways unexplainable.

Figure 9: Ghanaba's drummers

Figure 10: Ghanaba and me trading phrases while his drummers clapped

Figure 11: Drum conversations with Godwin Kwasi Agbeli (right) playing Atumpan

After a break, we talked about his life commitment to the development of Africanjazz. He feels the African American jazz tradition will come full circle in the twenty-first century, looking back to its roots and forming a new and dynamic artform which continues his innovations of the last forty years, assimilating African cosmology, aesthetics, contexts of performance, themes, performance practices, melodic materials, harmonic approaches, rhythmic sensibilities, instruments, and drum ensemble textures. He sees African arts as the source for change in the coming years of social, economic, and political upheaval.

Ghanaba pointed out that mass market commodification of music through the media have historically allowed only the electrified pop styles of Africa and the Americas to spread to each other's continent. He feels that these are by nature diluted and superficial, while the less publicized acoustic and traditional styles of both jazz and African music are deep spiritual expressions of peoples' ways of life. He sees the meeting and cross fertilizations of these acoustic traditions as the future of meaningful Afrocentric expression, more powerful than "all the atomic energy stored up." The meeting of John Coltrane and the traditional Master Drummer, short circuiting, literally and figuratively, the commercialized imitations to forge a new African consciousness.

He showed us his African Heritage Library, with thousands of printed, audio, and photographic items showing the life of an African jazz musician

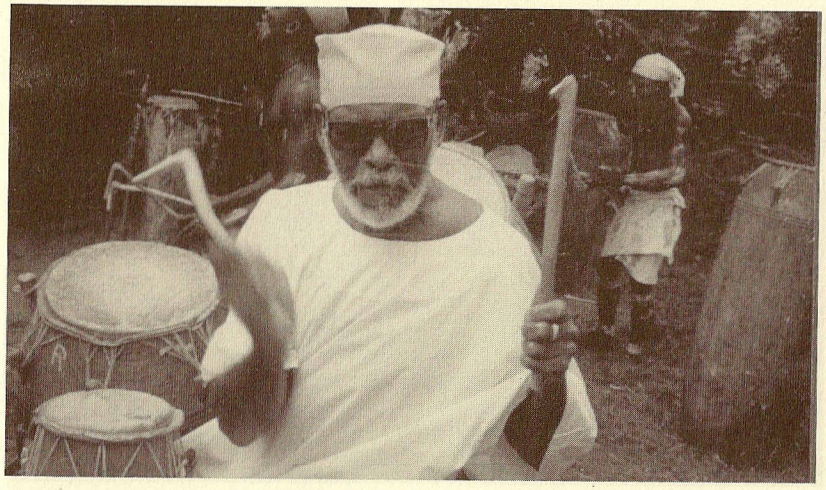

Figure 12: Connecting the African American jazz drumset to its African ancestors

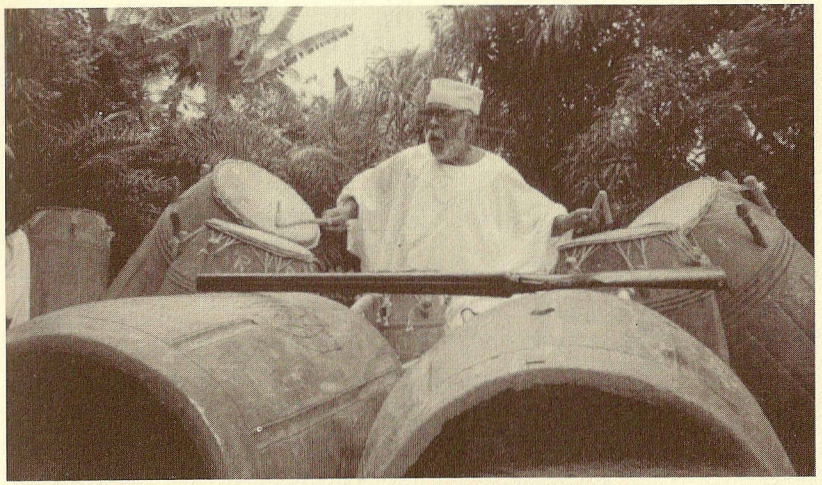

Figure 13: Completing the Circle of Jazz and African Music

and the African presence in jazz. He spoke of how he would like someone to preserve and curate his library of materials, which document the history of that presence. As he spoke I could see history before my eyes and ears, a man who grew up in West Africa, whose peoples are the source of so much of the beauty in the American fabric, despite the genocide of passages past and present; a man who grew up with Louis Armstrong and Papa Jo Jones in his ears, who had the rare opportunity to come to the United States and live as a jazz artist with New Orleans and swing musicians, beboppers, John Coltrane, and the experimental players. Someone who brought an African sensibility to jazz music, innovating melodies, rhythms, and radically reshaping the drumset with African drums. A man who returned to the homeland and spread African jazz.

As we were leaving the sun was getting lower in the sky and I heard Miles Davis' *Sketches of Spain* on his battery-powered stereo. The fragrance of jasmine incense was strong. We walked arm in arm and as we embraced I promised him I would let people know of his work in African jazz and return with other musicians who would continue his path. While vital and strong at 77 years of age, he is seeking someone to carry on his work, to bring his voice to the United States in performances, residencies, and lectures, and maintain and expand his African Heritage Library/Museum of Jazz: A path that will complete the circle of infinity.

NOTE

Ghanaba may be contacted at his home, P.O. box 44, Achimota, Ghana, West Africa, or by fax/telephone at 011 233 21 777 989. For more information, interested readers may also contact royal hartigan at the Music Dept., UMass Dartmouth, 285 Old Westport Rd., North Dartmouth, MA 02747-2300; tel. (508) 999-8572; fax (508) 910-6587; email: rhartigan@umassd.edu; website: <www.royalhart.com>. All audio and printed works, including unpublished ones, may be obtained only through direct correspondence with Ghanaba at his Ghanaian address. Reproduction in this article of excerpts of his writings are with his permission.