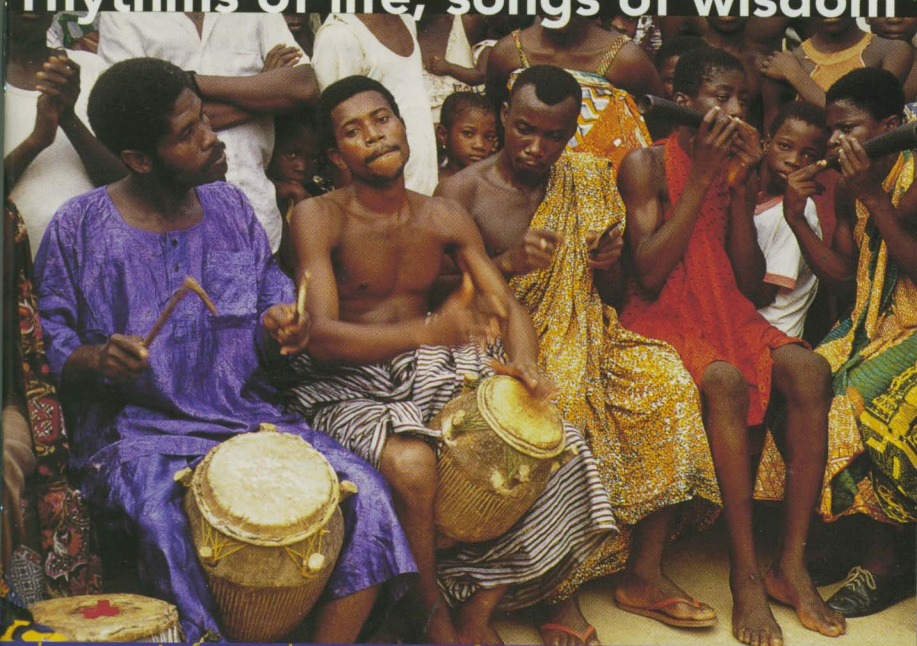
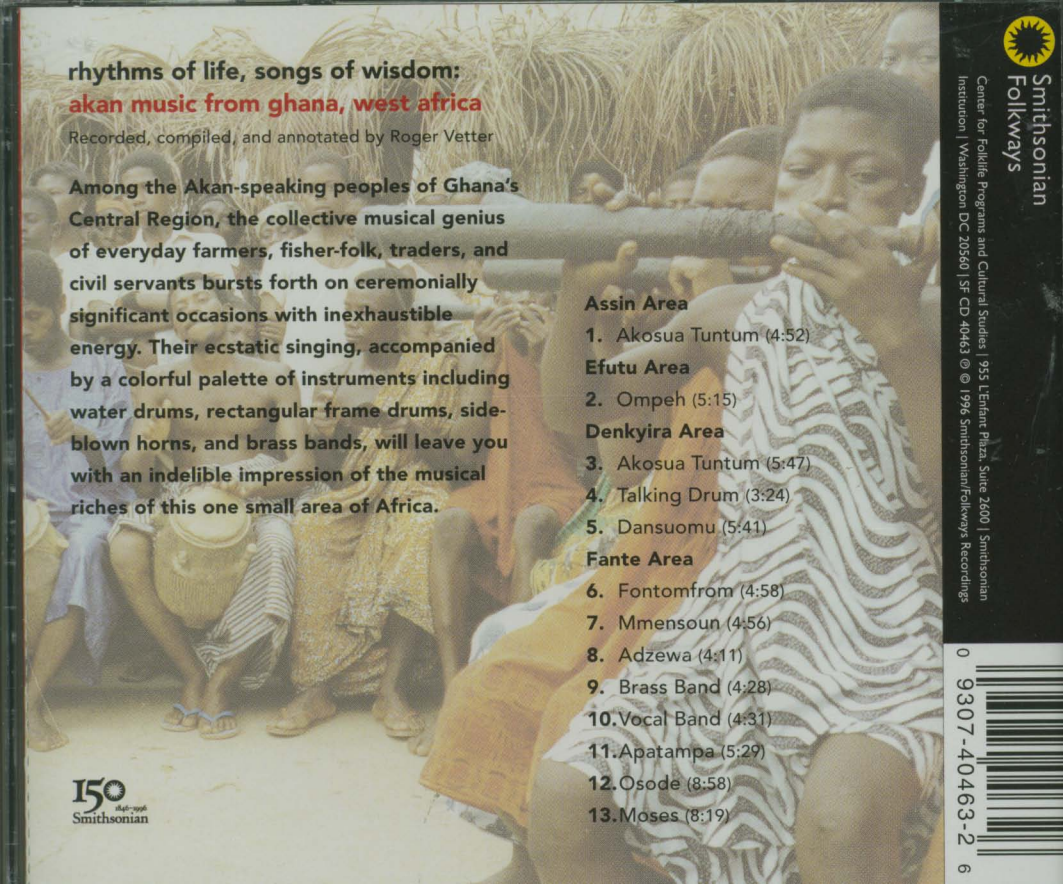


# rhythms of life, songs of wisdom



akan music from ghana, west africa



**rhythms of life, songs of wisdom:  
akan music from ghana, west africa**

Recorded, compiled, and annotated by Roger Vetter

Among the Akan-speaking peoples of Ghana's Central Region, the collective musical genius of everyday farmers, fisher-folk, traders, and civil servants bursts forth on ceremonially significant occasions with inexhaustible energy. Their ecstatic singing, accompanied by a colorful palette of instruments including water drums, rectangular frame drums, side-blown horns, and brass bands, will leave you with an indelible impression of the musical riches of this one small area of Africa.

**Assin Area**

1. Akosua Tuntum (4:52)

**Efutu Area**

2. Ompeh (5:15)

**Denkyira Area**


3. Akosua Tuntum (5:47)
4. Talking Drum (3:24)
5. Dansuomu (5:41)

**Fante Area**

6. Fontomfrom (4:58)
7. Mmensoun (4:56)
8. Adzewa (4:11)
9. Brass Band (4:28)
10. Vocal Band (4:31)
11. Apatampa (5:29)
12. Osode (8:58)
13. Moses (8:19)

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## rhythms of life, songs of wisdom: akan music from ghana, west africa

Recorded, compiled, and annotated by Roger Vetter



Breasted drum, Ompeh group of Winneba

Cover photo: *Mmensoun* group of Asafra  
Back cover photo: *Fontomfrom* ensemble of Eyisam  
Rear card photo: *Mmensoun* group of Asafra

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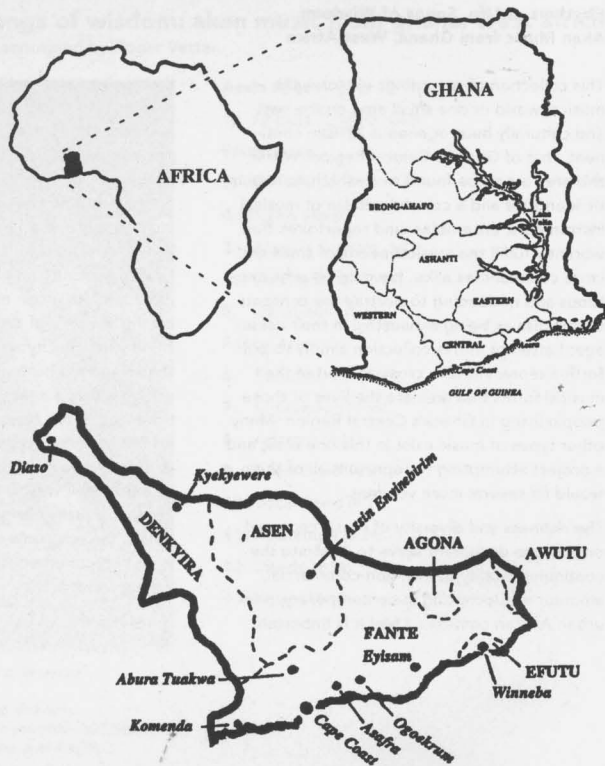
## Rhythms of Life, Songs of Wisdom: Akan Music from Ghana, West Africa

This collection of recordings explores the musical world of one small area on the vast and culturally heterogeneous African continent, that of Ghana's Central Region. Within this area are to be found several ethnic/linguistic identities and a colorful palette of musical instruments, ensembles, and repertoires that vibrantly fulfill the musical needs of small and large communities alike. It would be presumptuous and misleading to portray the contents of this disc as being exhaustive in their coverage; I attempt in this collection simply to put forth a representative cross-section of the musical forms that animate the lives of those people living in Ghana's Central Region. Many other types of music exist in this one area, and a project attempting to represent all of them would fill several more volumes.

The richness and diversity of music captured on this one document serve to illustrate the continuing vitality of live, non-commercial, amateur music-making in contemporary, non-urban African contexts. I feel it is important

that such musical activity continue to be documented and made available to non-African audiences interested in African music, to help put into perspective the numerous commercialized urban forms, with their star performers and slick studio sound, that have become increasingly available on recordings over the last few decades in the West. For contemporary Ghanaians living in the Central Region and outside of an urban environment (this would be the majority of the population), music identified with the city and music associated with the village are both part of their lives—rural/village music is nearly always heard live, while urban styles are typically heard on pre-recorded cassettes or over the radio. Since urban African studio-recorded musics are more likely to make their way to the outside world than are the equally intriguing forms of traditional music, the emphasis of the present collection is on non-commercial forms of traditional musical expression.

Map of the central region,  
showing language areas  
and recording sites



## The Akan

There are close to one hundred ethnic/linguistic groups in Ghana, a small (92,099 sq. miles) West African country about the size of its former colonial overlord, The United Kingdom. Approximately 45 percent of Ghana's estimated 14 million inhabitants speak one of a number of closely related languages collectively referred to as Akan (a language cluster within the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo language family). Akan speakers are concentrated in the southern half of the country, in the Brong-Ahafo, Ashanti, Eastern, Central, and Western Regions. The boundaries of these regions were sensitively articulated by the founders of the country to reflect the realities of the area's ethnic/linguistic complexity; two of the regions even bear the names of their dominant groups. The Central Region, where the present recordings were made, is dominated by the second largest Akan group, the Fante, but also encompasses the traditional homelands of the Denkyira, Asen (or Assin), and Agona—all Akan groups. Small pockets of non-Akan speakers, the Efutu and Awutu, whose languages belong to the Guan cluster of the Kwa branch, are also to be found in the Central Region (see map). So, although the geographic scope of this collection is conveniently defined by a politically construed boundary (the Cen-

tral Region), the peoples contained within those borders constitute a reasonably coherent ethnic/linguistic unit.

Besides language, a number of other binding elements are to be found among the Akan. The exogamous matrilineal clan is the primary unit of social organization among Akan peoples. All individuals who can trace themselves through their mother, their maternal grandmother, etc., to a common ancestress an appropriate number of generations back are viewed as blood relatives and consider themselves fellow clan members. As a clan member one is entitled to the use of clan land, the right of inheritance from other clan members, and proper burial rights. It is the obligation of all clan members to participate in ritual observances honoring family ancestors, a practice that is still central to Akan identity even among those who have converted to Christianity. Clan members share the financial burden involved in funeral celebrations for their kin, and when a member faces any kind of legal problem it is expected that he or she will receive the unqualified support of other clan members regardless of guilt.

Another distinctive feature of most Akan people is patrilineally determined membership in some sort of social organization. The nature of this element of an individual's identity differs among the various Akan subgroups. Amongst

the Fante, the group best represented in this compilation, warrior organizations called *asafa* are the institutions which a Fante inherits membership from his or her father. The presence of both matrilineally and patrilineally inherited membership in clans and other social units has led to the rather rare anthropological characterization of the Akan as practitioners of dual descent.

In addition to the importance of ancestral worship mentioned above, indigenous Akan spiritual beliefs articulate a supreme deity who, although not worshipped directly, is thought to have created the world and humans and is felt to be omnipresent and omnipotent. This supreme god also created a number of lesser spirits or deities, who are believed to reside in such places and objects as rivers, springs, trees, and rocks. These localized gods watch over the activities of men and punish those who act contrary to the customs of the society. A priesthood has long existed to service these nature spirits. It consists of individuals, both male and female, who have been possessed by a deity and thus called into its service—they are called *akomfo*, “the possessed ones.” This indigenous spiritual world has been challenged by the introduction of religions that are non-Akan in origin, especially Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Islam. Proselytizing on the part of a number of Catholic and Protestant

denominations began in the first half of the 19th century, and it is estimated that over half of the present-day Akan population is Christian in their religious orientation. As a result, among the contemporary Akan, one finds, in addition to animists, many Methodists and Catholics as well as numerous adherents to a wide range of Pentecostal sects.

Of the approximately fifteen ethnic/linguistic groups comprising the Akan, the Ashanti (or Asante), the majority of whom reside in the Ashanti Region, are both the largest in number and the best represented in the ethnographic and ethnomusical literature. Other Akan groups have received far less attention, including those groups represented in this collection (the Fante, Denkyira, and Asen). Although the Ashanti loom impressively in the literature, it would be wrong to assume that all Akan music is derived from Ashanti practices. Ashanti military and cultural hegemony has impacted all Akan peoples at various times over the past two centuries, but in all realms of culture, including music, this has not led to complete homogeneity. Similarities abound, but in reality numerous dialects of Akan music exist, and these certainly are not all derivative of Ashanti musical practices.

### Music Ensembles

It appears that the norm for Akan music ensembles is to specialize in one of the many recreational, cult, chiefly, or church performance genres/repertoires found throughout southern Ghana. Some groups that develop relationships with government cultural offices may perform limited repertoires of a few to several styles of Akan music; they can be considered folkloric troupes and their main venue of performance is for official government functions rather than everyday village or town ceremonial needs. Such groups are a significant minority of music organizations, but are distinct in that they reflect subtle shifts in the way Ghanaians view and use their performing arts.

Most of the groups heard in this collection are mono-stylistic recreational ensembles of amateur singers and instrumentalists that exist independently of any affiliation with traditional religious, social or political institutions. Each band, as these ensembles are frequently called, is identified by a music/dance style label such as *akosua tuntum*, *ompeh*, *apatampa*, brass band, vocal band, *osode*, *Moses*, or *dansuomu*. These labels connote a general instrumentation, a repertoire of stylistically consistent melodies almost always arranged in a call-response format, a characteristic temporal quality shaped by tempo and the intertwining rhythms performed on several idiophones

and membranophones, and a characteristic movement stylization that is associated with the beat of the music. These bands are referred to as recreational because their members can decide to gather and play for no other reason than the sheer enjoyment the activity brings them. But more often than not they are found performing at wakes and funerals. Ghanaian funeral celebrations are not nearly as morose in character as Euro-American ones. Although far from parties, they are festive in nature, for the passage of an individual's soul from the mundane world to that of the ancestors is considered a positive one. The music and dance enacted on such occasions encourage the participants' emotional and spiritual engagement with this transition.

Several other types of ensembles exist not as independent musical organizations, but as part of traditional political, social, or religious institutions. Such ensembles serve the ritual and ceremonial needs of these institutions, and each has its own distinctive instrumentation and musical personality. The sound of each of these kinds of ensembles is inextricably associated with chieftaincy, warrior and hunter associations, or religious cults, and these forms of ensembles are heard only during the rites that constitute the ritual core of each particular institution. Ensembles and musical styles associated with such institutions heard in this col-

lection are fontomfrom, mmensoun, adzewa, and talking drum appellation.

Below, in the descriptions of the individual selections, I precede each ensemble/genre label with an ethnic/linguistic identifier. I am not suggesting by doing this that the musical genre heard in that particular selection is original and specific to that Akan subgroup. Many of the kinds of ensembles represented in this collection may be found among several Akan subgroups. It is very difficult to trace with any certainty the specific subgroup identities or origins of the various types of ensembles. Determining when a particular genre of music coalesced is likewise a formidable challenge. Thus, when below I label a selection "Denkyira *akosua tuntum*," this should be interpreted as meaning "an example of how the Akan music known as *akosua tuntum* is performed among the Denkyira people." Two distinct examples of *akosua tuntum* recreational music from the Denkyira and the Asen peoples are included here, but it is unlikely that this genre of music is original to either of them. Likewise, the example of *mmensoun* music from the Fante area heard in this collection differs markedly from the *mmensoun* music I heard in the Denkyira area (not included here). These examples point out the dialectal nature of musical styles in an area such as the Central Region. Many readily noticeable aspects of perfor-

mance practice differ from area to area, even village to village, for most of the genres of music represented in this collection.

### Musicians

If we take the simplest definition of "professional musician" to mean an individual who earns most, if not all, of his or her living from making music, then not a single one of the approximately one hundred fifty singers and instrumentalists heard on this recording should be labeled a professional. What we hear on this document is the talent of subsistence farmers, fisherfolk, hunters, petty traders, manual laborers, lorry drivers, teachers, and carpenters who receive little or no compensation for their musical services. The majority of these musicians belong to recreational clubs or bands that are totally non-commercialized, performing almost exclusively in their own village or town of residence for non-concert occasions such as wakes, funerals, and community-wide celebrations. Recompense for a "performance" is largely in the form of food and locally brewed alcoholic beverages provided by the event's patron. What money does pass from a patron to a group is sure to be too little to split up between all the group's members and is more likely to go to one or a few of its most valuable members—its lead drummers—or to the group's treasury to purchase new, or repair old, instruments.

Although the membership of some bands is restricted along gender lines, many types of clubs have both male and female members. Membership in these clubs is voluntary, but what motivates people to join bands differs with each individual. In some cases, the sheer enjoyment of music-making and the dancing it stimulates encourages participation. Many feel pride in the musical product they create and in the social contribution to their community it constitutes. For some, membership might be a kind of ceremonial investment that ensures there will be a band present to enliven their own funeral celebration with music and dance. The bottom line is that, in a society where monetary resources are scarce and daily life is often a struggle, a number of individuals find music-making a fulfilling activity worthy of doing even without any expectation of significant financial return.

Contrary to romanticized Western views of Africans, not everyone is a drummer. Akan women, for instance, do not, outside of rare ceremonial contexts, perform on drums at all. This should not be construed to mean that women are incapable of drumming. On the contrary, they displayed the ability to sing complex rhythms and to play rhythmic idio-phones, and I saw nothing to indicate that women lacked the requisite talent to drum. Rather, women do not drum for cultural rea-

sons. Although I asked a number of musicians why women do not drum, their answers were far from consistent. In general, issues of menstruation, blood, the spirit of the drum, and ritual defilement appear to be involved. Even if women did drum, it is highly unlikely that any greater percentage of them would drum than of men. This is because several types of drumming require exceptionally talented individuals and the acquisition of specialized knowledge to perform. In any one type of ensemble with multiple drum parts there will probably be several male members capable of fulfilling certain perfunctory drumming roles, but only one or a few individuals qualified to perform lead drumming roles. So, although I would go so far as to say a very high percentage of Akans have developed an excellent sense of rhythm and timing that they display in their dancing, singing, and their playing of instruments, only a small percent of the male population are actually drummers.

Individuals learn music in a casual, non-institutionalized manner. Opportunities exist for children to experience the contextual performance of music from a very early age, subconsciously building a reservoir of musical knowledge to be tapped later in life. When a person joins a band, he or she picks up quickly the finer details of texts and performance practice through doing and through criticism

from more experienced members. I do not believe much purposeful teaching of even the most complex drumming roles in ensembles takes place, although, at least in the past, it appears as though speech-mode/talking drum specialist knowledge was passed on in a more purposeful fashion along kinship lines.

No stigmas appear to be attached to being a musician per se, although some musicians might be looked down upon by a certain segment of society as a result of accompanying an activity or organization that is marginalized. For example, Ghanaians who are fervent Christians frown upon indigenous religious practices, and the musicians that accompany such activities may be looked upon negatively because of their association with these institutions. Otherwise, involvement with music-making appears not to tarnish the way an individual is viewed by the community at large.

### Texts and the Speech-Music Interface

Due to the scope of this recording project and the remote locations in which it was carried out, full song texts were not gathered. I did, however, ask performers what their songs were about and can thus present some generalizations about textual content.

The texts heard in performances of recreational music can be characterized as dealing with

local history, topical subject matter, traditional morals as expressed through proverbs, and group pride. A typical performance by a group will consist of several short songs strung together, each song repeated several times according to the whim of the group cantor/lead singer. Narrative texts do not appear to be used in the recreational genres represented in this collection, although there are story-telling groups that present narratives on subjects such as the exploits of the Akan folk hero, the spider Anaanse.

Performance genres associated with chieftaincy, if texted, generally have historical, proverbial, and genealogical foci. Texts in these genres serve to praise the wisdom and bravery of a chief and his predecessors. A sense of this sort of text can be gleaned from the transcription and translation of Selection 4 (see page 17), which is the type of text that would be drummed for a paramount chief of the Denkyira people.

One aspect of enduring interest in the study of many African musics is the effect of tonal and rhythmic qualities of speech on various aspects of musical performance. One practice the Akan are well known for is their talking drum tradition, in which the tonal and rhythmic character of well-known texts can be approximated to such a degree that a knowledgeable listener can recognize the text in the drumming. Selec-

tion 4 affords us an opportunity to vicariously experience this phenomenon with a line-by-line juxtaposing of spoken and drummed text. Texts or text fragments can be delivered on a pair of differently tuned drums (Selection 4), on a single variable-pitch pressure drum, on a two-pitch horn, or on two or more single-pitch horns performing in hocket (Selection 7).

The speech rhythm and tonal contour of texts also contributes to the shaping of the sung melodies that carry the texts. To an Akan speaker, a sung text that clearly reflects the high and low tones and the long and short syllables of the spoken text will always be more comprehensible than one that does not. Therefore it is unavoidable that certain qualities of spoken language should contribute to the melodic styles heard among the various Akan peoples.

### Instruments

One encounters an impressive array of musical instruments in the Central Region, membranophones and idiophones being the best represented. A few general observations about the instruments in these two categories are worthy of mention here.

The numerous drums used in Akan music can be divided into two sub-categories: those that are original to the Akan or shared with nearby

West African peoples, and those that are inspired by European or New World models. Most indigenous drum types are barrel-shaped, or some variation of it, with the body carved from a solid block of wood and a single animal-hide head stretched over a hoop and held in place by rope lapped around pegs. (See the back cover photo of the *fontomfrom* ensemble, in which three versions of barrel drums are seen, from left to right, two *eguankoba*, a pair of *atumpan*, and two *from*.) Other indigenous drum types are the hour-glass drum and the gourd vessel drum (not used in any of the ensembles in this collection), both of which are widely distributed throughout West Africa. The most common non-indigenous drums are locally produced congas, rectangular frame drums, and small marching drums. Such drums are not, to my knowledge, found in chiefly or cult ensembles, but only as part of recreational and church bands of more recent origin.

Practically all Akan ensembles have one or a few metal time-keeping instruments at the core of their musical texture. These come in a variety of shapes—percussion plaques, single and double clapperless bells, vessel bells, banana-shaped bells—and are struck with beaters made from either wood or iron. The clear and penetrating sound of these instruments and the iterative rhythmic patterns per-

formed on them constitute the musical glue that holds the other instrumental and the vocal parts in synchrony.

The musicians were not always sure of the names of instruments, and several instruments appear to be known by different names in different areas. On page 20 of this book I include an inventory of Akan instrument names given to me by the leaders of the groups heard in this collection; I have made every attempt to cross-reference multiple names of any given instrument.



Water drum (*dansuomu*), village of Kyekyewere

## Selections

### Assin Area

1. Akosua Tuntum, recorded in Assin Enyinabirim. Kobina Owusu, group leader; Yaa Boadwe-wa, Akosua Addae, and Ama Awona, lead singers.

Akosua Tuntum, as the legend was conveyed to me, was the name of a woman earlier this century whose singing was so admired that recreational groups imitating her style became known by her name (Akosua is the name given to females born on Saturday, and tuntum means "black"). These bands have a mixed male and female chorus, female lead singers, and a fascinating array of drums, bells and rattles that varies from area to area. This band from the town of Assin Enyinabirim (1984 pop. 2,144) calls its drums *dondo*, *apenteng*, *pate*, and square drum, its metal bells *afirikiyiwa*, *dawuruta*, and *aggre*, and its rattle *akasaa*.

### Efutu Area

2. Ompeh, recorded in Winneba. Stanley Ato Bortsie and Ato Quartey, group leaders; Ernest Yamoah and Peter Dennis, lead singers.

This selection represents a not uncommon phenomenon along the coast of Ghana. The Efutu are not an Akan people, but they are heard here performing an Akan genre of music

known as *ompeh*. Many Efutu are fisherfolk and have had long and close contact with other ethnic/linguistic groups along the coast, especially the Fante. The *ompeh* group recorded here was formed in the early 1960s, and many of their song texts include mention of Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, who was then at the peak of his popularity. One interesting point of instrument construction concerning this kind of band is that the large bass drum (*ompehkyen*) often features one or two pairs of female breasts prominently carved on its shell. I could not elicit an explanation for this distinctive design feature, nor can I say with confidence that breasted drums are unique to *ompeh*. One art ethnographer, Doran Ross, points out that the Fante (and the Akan in general) are matrilineal and that members of popular bands often refer to the master drum as "the mother of the group." The other instruments in the ensemble are *ogyamba*, *afirikiyiwa*, pan rattles, and slit drum. Membership in *ompeh* bands is predominantly, but not exclusively, male.

### Denkyira Area

3. Akosua Tuntum, recorded in Diaso. Akwasi Dwira, group leader; Amma Dwasoa, lead singer.

The band heard in this selection represents another stylistic dialect of *akosua tuntum*

recreational music. Its instrumentation is less different from that of the group heard in Selection 1 than the names of the instruments suggest—a single instrument can be known by a variety of names in a linguistically diverse area such as the Central Region. The instrumentation of the ensemble heard in this selection, recorded in the Denkyira village of Diaso (1984 pop. 2,232) in the northwestern corner of the Central Region, consists of *apentemaa*, *dondo*, and two stick-beaten dzema drums, and *dawuta*, *agyegyewa*, and *afirikiyiwa* iron bells.

4. Talking Drum, recorded in Kyekyewere. Elizabeth Kumi, appellant; Joseph Manu, drummer.

Most of the drumming heard on this recording is meant for accompanying dance. This selection features another facet of Akan drumming art—drumming in the speech mode. Chiefs would in the past, and many still today, retain drummers who could render appellation texts glorifying themselves and their lineage. Whereas this genre can be performed by a drummer alone with no spoken text, what we hear in this selection is a text both spoken and drummed. This allows us an opportunity to sense the tonal parameter of spoken Twi (the language of the majority of the Akan, including the Denkyira) and how it is transformed into drum impulses performed on a pair of *atumpan*, which is commonly referred to as a "talking drum." A



complete transcription and translation of this text is found below. The performers are in their teens and are members of a local *adowa* band called Nyame Bekyere; they are not the linguist and drummer of an official chief.

5. Dansuomu, recorded in Kyekyewere. Abena Konadu, group leader; Yaa Ataa and Abena Konadu, lead singers.

Drumming is a male specialty in Akan society. When the membership of a group is entirely female, some type of surrogate drum (an instrument that sounds like a drum but has no stretched membrane made from an animal hide) is likely to be employed. The female-made music heard in this selection actually takes its name from such a drum surrogate. The *dansuomu* is a water drum with a resonant and inflection-rich sound—and no drum head. It consists of a large hemispheric gourd placed face down in a water-filled brass basin (women carry heavy loads in these basins on their heads). All other instruments in this ensemble are metallic bells: *afirikiyiwa*, *agyegyewa*, and *dawuta*. Although the members of this group consider themselves a recreational band, one can speculate that at some time in the past such an ensemble might have been used for woman-specific ceremonies such as the initiation of girls into womanhood. But this is only speculation; the reality is that today groups

such as this one, recorded in the town of Kyekyewere (1984 pop. 2,013), will be heard in the same contexts as other recreational bands.

### Fante Area

6. Fontomfrom, recorded in Eyisam. Eyisam Mbensoun; Opanyin Yaw Amoah, group leader.

Modern-day Ghanaian society, with its parliamentary government, judiciary, and military, still allows for the existence of traditional chiefs among its many ethnic groups. In fact, most small scale claims involving land issues or domestic disputes are mediated by village, district or regional chiefs. One emblem of chieftaincy is the right to own certain kinds of music ensembles and have them accompany your appearance during festival processions and durbars, or at your funeral. One such royal ensemble is the *fontomfrom*. The set heard here is quite typical in its instrumentation: two *from*, an *atumpan*, two *egunkoba*, and one *gongon*. Whether the instruments are played in a stationary position or beaten during a procession, the sound of this purely instrumental ensemble informs everyone within earshot that an important individual is present.

7. Mmensoun, recorded in Asafr. Asafr Catholic C.Y.O. Mmensoun Group; T. K. Aidoo and J. K. Amakya, group leaders.

Another traditional Akan ensemble associated with chieftaincy is the *mmensoun* (seven horns; *mmen*=horns [singular=*aben*], *soun*=seven). In some Akan areas, these side-blown horns are made of elephant tusks graduated in size; in other areas, such as the coastal Fante area where this recording was made, they are constructed from wood and string, and covered with a native paint. Each horn in such a set, except for the smallest and highest pitched one, is capable of producing a single pitch—the longer the horn, the lower its pitch. The smallest horn has a thumbhole at its apex allowing the player to produce two pitches.

Two musicological observations should contribute to one's appreciation of this music. First, there are really two parallel ensembles heard here. One is vocal and organized in the typical call-response pattern of soloist-chorus; the other is instrumental (the horns) and is organized similarly with the solo horn doing the calling and the rest of the horns responding as a chorus. Both groupings are heard over a polyrhythmic grounding provided by two drums (*ekukura* and *opentsin*) and a metal percussion plaque (*gongon*). Second, the material performed by the vocal and horn groupings is basically identical, the melodies they sing and play being shaped by the tonal patterns of the performed text. This identity is most clearly perceivable when the melodies of the choral

responses are compared with those of the horn responses. In the vocal responses, only two pitches are used—the sung pattern of high and low pitches, determined by the spoken tonal pattern of the text (Fante, the language, is tonal). When the horns render the same text, they do so by being divided into two groups of three horns each. The “chord” produced by one of these groups sounds higher than the “chord” of the other. Thus the tonal pattern of the text can be rendered by having the two groups of horns hocket their respective high and low clusters.

Similar to the *fontomfrom* ensemble heard in Selection 6, the *mmensoun* ensemble is most typically heard accompanying chiefs in processions or at their funeral celebrations.

8. Adzewa, recorded in Cape Coast. Bentsir Adzewafo No. 1; Madam Aba Wansema, group leader and lead singer.

Adzewa groups are women's auxiliaries to Fante warrior organizations known as *asafo*. All members of an *adzewa* group are daughters of male members of a particular *asafo* company. Traditionally, *adzewa* groups followed their *asafo* company to the battlefield to provide support services. Today there are no battlefields, but *adzewa* groups still provide moral support for their *asafo* companies during festival processions and at funerals, as

well as providing their own music on such occasions. The group heard in this selection is attached to the Bentsir No. 1 *asafo* company of Cape Coast, and has been in existence for more than 120 years. This is recreational music performed by a chorus of women accompanied by *ampaa* (played by a man), *asow*, and several *danka*.

**9.** Brass Band, recorded in Ogoekrom. Ogoekrom Brass Band No. 2; John Alex Acquah, group leader and trumpet.

The small farming village of Ogoekrom (1984 pop. of 177), located on a dead-end road about five miles inland from the coast, is about the last place on earth you would expect to come across a brass band. But, due to Methodist missionary contacts earlier this century, a set of battered old British-made instruments does exist there, and the subsistence farmers who play them are hired two or three times a month to provide lively music for festivals and funerals in surrounding towns and villages. Ogoekrom has had a brass band since 1954. The original group disbanded sometime in the 70s, but was revived in 1983 and named Ogoekrom Brass Band No. 2. The group's repertoire consists of at least twenty pieces, most of them church hymns or highlife tunes grouped into four categories according to the particulars of their tempo, meter, and drum

rhythm: *warries* (waltzes), *bruse* (blues), highlife, and *adaha*. The two melodies heard in this selection, "Yesu ye medze" (Christ is Mine) and "Nyame ye osahen" (God Is King of All Warriors), are both church hymns performed to the highlife beat. No one in the group reads music; arrangements are worked out by ear and elaborated spontaneously in performance by the individual players. The instrumentation of this group is: one trumpet, one alto horn, two baritone horns, two valve trombones, one tuba, one helicon, one tenor drum, one snare drum, one bass drum, a pair of small crash cymbals, rattles, *tomtom*, *afirikiyiwa*, and *adawur ntaa*.

**10.** Vocal Band, recorded in Abura Tuakwa. Odo ye few korye kuw Vocal Band; Moses Quianoo, group leader; Moses Quianoo and Victoria Sam, lead singers.

Abura Tuakwa (1984 pop. 494), a small subsistence farming village about twenty-five miles inland, supports two recreational bands. One is a storytelling group that presents the exploits of the Akan culture hero, Ananse the spider, to the village children. The other group, recorded here, is what is labeled as a vocal band. Such groups are common in villages; in towns they may be associated with a company or a workers' union (e.g., railway workers). They are probably of fairly recent

origin and might have grown out of the singing band traditions of the Methodist and Catholic churches, which are likewise heavily influenced by popular highlife music. Their instrumentations vary; the group heard here consists of an *afirikiyiwa*, *maraca*, *dondo*, and *tomtom*. Membership is evenly balanced between females and males.

This group, Odo ye few korye kuw Vocal Band (Love Is Beautiful Unity Vocal Band), was formed in 1989 by Mr. Quianoo and provides music for the typical village occasions—wakes, funerals, and yearly festivals.

**11.** Apatampa, recorded in Komenda. Nana Kweku Atta, group leader; Nana Adaade, Aba Buduāh, lead singers.

*Apatampa* bands have female singers accompanied by an unusual set of instruments played by males. The lead drum of this ensemble is not really a drum at all, but a large rectangular plywood crate (about 4x2x1.5 feet) called *adaka*. One end of this instrument rests on the drummer's lap, the other on the ground. By striking various areas with either clenched fists or open palms, a variety of membranophone-like sounds are produced. The rhythms performed on the *adaka* mix with those played on a real drum, the *akonkon*, itself interesting in that it is obviously of European origin. Two single-pitch metal whistles (*aben*), not unlike sig-

nal whistles one would expect to hear on boats, provide a gentle background ostinato. One wonders if long contact with European traders in some coastal Fante port such as Komenda (1984 pop. 5,287), where this recording was made, wasn't responsible for the unusual collection of instruments found in *apatampa* recreational bands (the only clearly indigenous instrument used by this group is the time-keeping *afirikiyiwa*). The group heard in this selection has been together since 1970.

**12.** Osode, recorded in Cape Coast. Twerrampon Traditionals; Kwamena Prah, group leader; Kofi Arba, lead singer.

All of the groups represented on this disc, with the exception of Twerrampon Traditionals heard on this track and on Selection 13, are what I would refer to as mono-stylistic, amateur, folk ensembles. Each group specializes in one, and only one, form of traditional or neo-traditional recreational or royal music and expects to be hired locally to provide their specific kind of music for non-concert contexts such as funerals or community festivals. Twerrampon Traditionals, by contrast, is more of a folkloric group that learns to perform a few pieces each from a variety of Akan and non-Akan recreational band styles. Thus, although the group membership is primarily Fante, they perform several Fante, Ashanti, and even

Dagomba (Northern Ghana) and Ewe (Eastern Ghana) styles of music. They rehearse daily in the evening at Cape Coast Castle, are loosely affiliated with the Center for National Culture, have costumes, and are comfortable with performing on a stage in front of a seated audience. In my estimate, they are a very fine musical group, just different from the other groups heard on this recording in terms of their identity and social orientation.

Twerrampon Traditionals is heard in this selection performing the Fante recreational music known as *osode*. The instrumentation of this music is *adaka*, a pair of *atumpan*, *gyirama*, *afirikiyiwa*, *ndaawa*, and a chorus of male and female singers.

**13.** Moses, recorded in Cape Coast. Twerrampon Traditionals; Kwamena Prah, group leader; Kofi Arba, lead singer.

Moses is basically an offshoot of *ompeh*, the primary difference between the styles being their texts—Moses texts tell about Moses and the Ten Commandments and other biblical stories. Most *ompeh* and Moses music is performed with a slow beat (referred to as *famu*), but there is a more spirited tempo called *sor* which can be used as well. Both “cool” and “hot” tempos are heard in this performance. The mixed male and female chorus is accompanied by *ompehkyen*, *gyirama*, *afirikiyiwa*,

*ndaawa*, and electric guitar. Obviously this final instrument is not indigenous to Ghana, although a variety of Western acoustic and electric guitars have come to be used in many types of Ghanaian music making over the past century. The incorporation of the electric guitar into Moses is, as far as I know, an innovation of the leader of Twerrampon Traditionals, Kwamena Prah, who plays the instrument on this recording.



Brass band helicon, Ogoekrom

### Transcription and Translation of Talking Drum Text

Transcribed and Translated by  
Dr. Daniel Agyei Dwarko, Lecturer in History,  
University of Cape Coast

#### Greetings to Those Present

*Me ma mo atena ase, Nana ne ne mpaninfoo*  
I welcome you, Nana and his elders

*Owura dwamtenani,*  
Mr. Chairman,

*Enanom ne agyanom,*  
mothers, fathers

*ne anuanom a yeahyia ha,*  
and brethren here gathered,

*yegyeme asonā*  
the response to my greeting is “asonā”

*Saa atweneka yi fa Odeefoo Boa Amponsem,*  
*Denkyira hene ho*

This drum language is about Odeefoo  
Boa Amponsem, King of Denkyir

*Odomankoma kyerema, ma no nko*  
Creator’s drummer, let it go!

#### Actual Drum Language Glorifying The King of Denkyira

*Adawu, Adawu, Denkyira mene sono.*  
Adawu, Adawu, Denkyira the devourer of  
the elephant

*Adawu, Adawu, Denkyira pentenprem,*  
*Omene sono, ma wo ho mene so*  
Adawu, Adawu, Denkyira the quicksand,  
devourer of the elephant, come forth in thy  
light, exert yourself

*Pentenprem, ma wo homene so,*  
Quicksand, come forth in thy light,

*Ma wo ho me ne so*  
Exert yourself, in glory

*Kronkron, kronkron, kronkron;*  
Your holiness, holiness, holiness;

*Amponsem Koyirifa, ma wo ho me ne so*  
Amponsem Koyirifa, come forth in thy light,  
in glory

*Ako nana ma wo ho mene so*  
Grandson of the Parrot, come forth in thy light

*Ako nana a ho a ne mframa mene boo,*  
*ma wo ho me ne so*  
Grandson of the Parrot whose winds  
sweep and devour even the stones,  
come forth in thy light

*Wo a wofiri dodoo mu*  
you who came from many,

*Wo a wutu a ewiemu den se asamando,*  
*ma wo ho me ne so*  
You who fly and the skies become  
still like the cemetery, come forth in thy light

*Amponsem nana a "odi sika to," atomprada,  
ma wo ho me ne so*  
Amponsem's grandson who "eats  
mashed gold dust," and uses only  
freshly mined gold in his daily  
transactions, come forth in thy light

*Agona adehyekan nana*  
First grandson of the Agona line,

*Wo a wode osee ye oyo*  
You promise and you fulfill it

*De nkoden akyekyere Denkyiraman,  
de ape no sibre, ma wo ho me ne so*  
Having fought hard to establish the  
Denkyira state, and having found  
it a place among the nations, come forth  
in thy light

*Ayekra Adebo nana*  
Grandson of Ayekra Adebo [first  
ruler, fetish priestess of Denkyira]

*Ahihi Ahaha nono*  
Grandson of Ahihi Ahaha

*Wirempi Ampem nana a owo ntam na yenka,  
ma wo ho me ne so*  
Grandson of Wirempi Ampem whose oath is  
not to be sworn,  
come forth in thy light

*Otibu Kwadwo nana*  
Grandson of great King Kwadwo Otibu,

*Wo a wode Denkyiraman firii*  
*Abankesieso baa Jukwaa,*  
*ma wo ho me ne so*  
who led the Denkyira people in their great  
migration from Abankesieso to settle  
in Jukwa, come forth in thy light

*Odeefoo, ma wo ho me ne so*  
Benefactor, come forth in thy light

*Ma wo ho me ne so Agona,*  
The Agona clan,

*Denkyiraman da wo ase,*  
The Denkyira state

*Yeda wo ase a ensa,*  
Expresses its endless

*Esie ne kagya nni aseda*  
Gratitude to you

**Segue to Poetry Honoring The River Tano**

*Asuo twa okwan,  
okwan twa asuo,  
opani ne hwan?*  
The river crosses the path,  
the path crosses the river,  
who is elder?

*Asuo twa okwan,  
okwan twa asuo,  
opani ne hwan?*  
The river crosses the path,  
the path crosses the river,  
who is elder?

*Yeboo kwan no kattoo asuo no,*  
The path was cut to meet the river,

*Asuo no firi tete,*  
the river is of old,

*Asuo no firi Odomankoma a oboo adee*  
the river comes from "Odomankoma" the Creator

*Konkon Tano,  
Konkon Tano,*

*Brefa-Tano,  
Brefa Tano,*

*Asuo brekete  
Asuo brekete*

*Agya Kwaa Ata ei!*  
Father Kwaa Ata ei!

*Asu berempon*  
The great river

*Asuo twa asuo*  
River that passes/crosses a river

*Takasi berempon*  
Takasi the Great

*Woama Bosompra adi afasee*  
You have caused Bosompra to eat the water yam

*Me nam, Me nam, Me nam,  
Ma si Ta ko mu*  
I have wandered, and wandered, and wandered,  
I have stepped into the deep floods of Ta

*Takasi berempon,*  
Takasi the Great,

*Frampon damirifa*  
Frampon, condolence,

*Damirifa,*  
Condolence,

*Damirifa,*  
Condolence,

*Damirifa due,*  
Deepest condolence,

*Damirifa due,*  
Deepest condolence,

*Takasi berempon*  
Takasi the Great,

*Frampon, damirifa*  
Frampon, condolence

*Asu berempon,*  
Great River,

*Frampon damirifa*  
Frampon, condolence

## Inventory of the Instruments Heard in the Recordings

### **aben**

1) one- or two-pitch side-blown wood horn played in hocket fashion, used in a speech mode to present text fragments in *mmensoun* ensemble; 2) single-pitch whistle, used in pairs in a time-keeping function in *apatampa* ensemble

### **adaka**

large, rectangular crate made of plywood that the performer strikes with his hands, used as a rhythmic instrument (a surrogate drum) in *apatampa* and *osode* ensembles

### **adawur ntaa**

hand-held iron double bell (clapperless) struck with a stick beater, used as a rhythmic instrument in brass bands (similar to *agyegyewa* and *dawuruta*)

### **afirikiyiwa**

iron vessel clapper, used as a time keeper in vocal and brass bands and Moses, *apatampa*, *ompeh*, *dansuomu*, *akosua tuntum* and *osode* ensembles

### **aggre**

claves, used as a time keeper in *akosua tuntum* ensemble of Assin area

### **agyegyewa**

clapperless iron double bell struck with a wood stick, used as a time keeper in *dansuomu* and *akosua tuntum* ensembles of the Denkyira area (see also *adawur ntaa* and *dawuruta*)

### **akasaa**

see *danka*, used as a rhythm instrument in *akosua tuntum* ensemble of Assin area

### **akonkon**

small, double-headed, cylindrical drum modelled after a European side drum and struck with a single stick beater, used as a rhythmic instrument in *apatampa* ensemble (see also *pate*)

### **ampaa**

goblet-shaped hand drum, single head attached with pegs, used as a rhythmic instrument in *adzewa* ensemble

### **apentemaa**

goblet-shaped hand drum, single head attached with pegs, used as a rhythmic instrument in *akosua tuntum* ensemble of the Denkyira area (similar to *ampaa* and *apenteng*)

### **apenteng**

see *ampaa*, used as a rhythmic instrument in *akosua tuntum* ensemble in the Assin area

### **asow**

metal percussion plaque struck with a stick-like iron beater, used as a time keeper in *adzewa* ensemble (see also *gongon*)

### **atumpan**

pair of goblet-shaped, stick-beaten drums, each with a single head attached with pegs, used in a speech mode (talking drum) for appellation texts and in a rhythmic mode for *fontomfrom* and *osode* ensembles

### **danka**

necked-gourd rattle with external beads woven into a net, used as a rhythmic instrument in *adzewa* ensemble (see also *akasaa*)

### **dansuomu**

water drum consisting of a large, hemispheric gourd overturned in a basin of water. Two women strike the gourd, with one stick beater each, while one of the women adjusts the depth to which the gourd is submerged to achieve a variable pitch effect, used as a rhythmic instrument (a surrogate drum) in the *dansuoma* ensemble

### **dawuruta**

clapperless iron double bell struck with a wood stick, used as a time keeper in *akosua tuntum* ensemble of Assin area (see also *agyegyewa*)

### **dawuta**

banana-shaped iron bell struck with a stick-like iron beater, used as a time keeper in *dansuomu* and *akosua tuntum* ensembles in the Denkyira area (see also *ndaawa*)

### **dondo**

double-headed hourglass-shaped variable pressure drum beaten with a hooked stick, used as a rhythmic instrument in vocal bands and *akosua tuntum* ensembles

### **dzema**

rectangular frame drum struck with a wooden stick beater, used as a rhythmic instrument in Denkyira *akosua tuntum* ensembles (see also square drum)

### **egunkoba**

medium-sized barrel-shaped drum with one head attached with pegs and struck with two long and straight sticks, used as rhythmic instruments in *fontomfrom* ensemble

### **ekukura**

barrel-shaped drum with a single head attached with pegs, struck with two hooked stick beaters, used as a rhythmic instrument in *mmensoun* ensemble

### **from**

tall and heavy barrel-shaped drum with a single head attached with pegs and struck with two hooked wood beaters, used as a rhythmic instrument in *fontomfrom* ensemble

**gongon**

1) large hand-held clapperless iron bell struck with a wood stick beater, used as a time keeper in the fontomfrom ensemble; 2) metal percussion plaque struck with an iron rod, used as a time keeper in *mmensoun* ensemble (see also *asow*)

**gyirama**

double-headed cylindrical drum struck with a single stick beater, used as a rhythmic instrument in Moses, *ompeh*, and *osode* ensembles

**maraca**

gourd rattle (often suspended from player's neck) with external beads woven into a net, used as a rhythmic instrument in vocal bands

**ndaawa**

banana-shaped iron bell struck with a stick-like iron beater, used as a time keeper in Moses and *osode* ensembles (see also *dawuta*)

**ogyamba**

alternate name for *gyirama*

**ompehkyen**

large, barrel-shaped hand drum with a single head attached with pegs, used as a rhythmic instrument in *ompeh* and Moses ensembles

**opentsin**

small (in comparison to *ampaa*), goblet-shaped hand drum, single head attached with pegs, used as a rhythmic instrument in *mmensoun* ensemble

**pan rattles**

ad hoc rattle made from a small aluminum pie pan with numerous paper clips loosely attached to its rim, used as a rhythmic instrument in *ompeh* ensemble

**pate**

small double-headed cylindrical drum modelled after a European side drum and struck with a single stick beater, used as a rhythmic instrument in the *akosua tuntum* ensemble of the Assin area (see also *akonkon*)

**slit drum**

bamboo slit drum struck with a wooden stick beater, used as a time keeper in *ompeh* ensemble

**square drum**

rectangular frame drum struck with a wooden stick beater, used as a rhythmic instrument in the *kosua tuntum* ensemble in the Assin area (see also *dzema*)

**tomtom**

pair of tall, conical-shaped, single-headed hand drums mounted on a common stand, used as a rhythmic instrument in vocal and brass bands



The *akosua tuntum* ensemble of Assin Enyinabirim

## Credits

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Recordings and notes by Roger Vetter, who was a Fulbright Visiting Lecturer and Researcher at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, in 1992-1993. He is an ethnomusicologist specializing in Javanese music and teaches in the Department of Music at Grinnell College.

Photos: Valerie Mau Vetter and Roger Vetter

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All recordings were made outdoors using a Sony TCD-D10 Pro II digital recorder and two AKG C1000S cardioid condenser microphones.

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