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## Textual Analysis and Interpretation of Adzewa And Adzeba Songs of the Fante and Guan People of Ghana

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### **Abstract**

*This study is based on an ongoing research in adzewa and adzeba music and dance of the coastal Fanti and Guan people of Ghana. It examines a corpus of traditional Ghanaian music as resource material for the study of traditional African music in Ghana. Adzewa is an occasional traditional music and dance ensemble of the Fanti and Guan people along the Fanti Coast of Ghana. However, among the Mankoadze people and the Effutu of Winneba the term adzeba is used rather than adzewa while the people of Senya Breku use the term adoba. The study has a collection of 54 adzewa and adzeba songs. It includes 28 songs from the Winneba Adzeba group, 16 songs from the Mankoadze Adzeba group and 10 songs from the Central Folkloric Dance Company at Cape Coast. The main themes of the songs are identified under seven headings as follows: Death/Dirge, The plight of women, Adzeba performances, Envy and Hatred, Praise Singing, Recitatives and asafo warrior-like songs and Songs involving mixture of languages. The study examines three of the themes. These are: Praise singing, Death/Dirge, and Recitatives and asafo warrior-like songs. The words of three adzewa and adzeba songs are transcribed and interpreted to illustrate the three themes while the songs are analyzed using Western and traditional African musical concepts.*

**Keywords:** Textual, Analysis, Interpretation, Adzewa, Adzeba

### **1. Introduction**

Newlove Annan's *Mobdawuran* SATB choral composition is analyzed using musical analytical parameters like scale, rhythmic texture and harmony to serve as a basis for the study and composition of choral works. In another publication, the authors do a critical analysis of selected *asafo* songs of the Kyirem Asafo No. 1 ensemble of Ajumako Mando in the Central Region of Ghana to provide a framework for the analytic study of indigenous Ghanaian music (Acquah & Amuah, 2014; Amuah & Acquah, 2013). Unlike *asafo* and *adowa*, *adzewa* music has received very little attention from scholars of traditional African music in Ghana. The purpose of the study is to transcribe and interpret the words of three *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs and analyze them using Western music theory and African musical concepts and thereby increase the interest of music scholars in the study of *adzewa* in particular and traditional African music in Ghana in general.

The songs were recorded between August 2012 and January 2014 in an ongoing research work I am undertaking on *adzewa* and *adzeba* music. *Adzewa* and its variants are occasional traditional music and dance ensembles of the Fanti-Akan and Guan people of the Central Region of Ghana. They are mainly performed during traditional festivals and funerals. *Adzeba* and *adoba* are variants of *adzewa*. Winneba and Mankoadze are among the Fanti coastal towns where *adzeba* music is performed while in Senya Breku *adoba* is performed.

### **2. Methodology**

The paper focuses on the textual or structural rather than the contextual meaning of *adzewa* and *adzeba* music and dance. Textual analysis of the words and music of *adzeba* and *adzewa* are examined within the theoretical framework of the integrated approach to the problem of meaning in African music (Nketia, 2005, 1976, 1975, 1973, 1962) and the phenomenological data analysis method in coding and categorizing the texts of *adzewa* and *adzeba* music (Kleiman, 2004). Nketia refers to meaning in African music in terms of musical analysis as the musical conception of the African. Agawu sees it as clear, definable *musical* attributes, rather than as a mere extra musical factors while Ekwueme seeks a theoretical basis on such aspects of music as notation, form, melody, scale, harmony and rhythm as African music's *raison d'être* (Agawu, 1986; Ekwueme, 1974; Nketia, 1973).

The main themes of the songs are identified under seven headings as follows: Death/Dirge, The plight of women, *Adzeba* performances, Envy and Hatred, Praise Singing, Recitatives and *asafo* warrior-like songs, and Songs involving mixture of languages.

Three of these themes are examined in this paper. These are: Praise singing, Death/Dirge, and Recitatives and *asafo* warrior-like songs.

The methods for collecting data include listening, observing and interviewing of the three musical ensembles at Winneba, Mankoadze and Cape Coast. The study has a collection of fifty-four *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs. It includes 28 songs from the Winneba *Adzeba* group, 16 songs from the Mankoadze *Adzeba* group and 10 songs from the Central Folkloric Dance Company at Cape Coast. The notated musical transcriptions include five songs from the Winneba *Adzeba* group; six songs from the Mankoadze *Adzeba* group and six songs from the Central Folkloric Dance Company in Cape Coast. This brings the notated *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs for the study to seventeen.

The information gathered from the performances and interviews are stored on the computer. The words and music have been transcribed, codified and analyzed using textual analytical methods. The *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs are notated using music finale software and analyzed into the following categories: melody, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, texture, and form and structure. The use of used concepts of Western music theory and elements of African music are used in the analysis of *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs (Music Teachers Resources, 2012; Musical Analysis Writing Guide, 2012; Cowall, 2011, Ampomah, 1997).

**3. Results and Discussion**

All the groups use the gourd rattles and the *dawur* (bell) as musical instruments during their performances. The *Dentsefo* Winneba *adzeba* ensemble has no drums whereas the Mankoadze and Cape Coast ensembles use the hourglass drum and the *apentsima* drum respectively. The *Dentsefo* Winneba group has only females whereas the other groups have both male and female ensemble members.

The study identifies two types of traditional *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs. The first type is known in Fante as *Osebɔ* and involves the singing of songs without any instrumental accompaniment such as *Asomfo* (Servants) by the Winneba *Dentsefo adzeba* ensemble (See Example 2). The second type involves singing with full instrumental accompaniment of gourd rattles, *dawur* (bell) rhythmic handclapping and a drum (either *apentsima* or *dondo*) as exemplified in the song, *Egya 'Esi Manko* (Sunday born Father *Manko*) by the Mankoadze *adzeba* ensemble (See Example 1).

The *Dentsefo* Winneba *adzeba* ensemble has two soloists, the Mankoadze group has three soloists while the Folkloric Dance ensemble has one main female soloist but almost all the females could sing the solo in any of their songs. Among the Mankoadze *adzeba* ensemble, singing and dancing sessions begin with a clarion call by ensemble to show their readiness to perform.

*3.1. Transcription, analyses and interpretation of adzewa and adzeba songs*

The transcription, analyses and interpretation of excerpts from three songs illustrating three of the themes into which *adzewa* and *adzeba* music are classified merit an examination. The three themes are: Praise singing, Death/Dirge, and Recitatives and *asafo* warrior-like songs.

3.1.1. Praise Singing

Example 1: *Egya 'Esi Manko* (Sunday born Father *Manko*)

|        | Fante Text                    | English Translation                            |
|--------|-------------------------------|--|
| SOLO:  | Woana 'noma ma wo ee?         | Who stands surety for you?                     |
|        | Woana 'noma ma wo ee, Komfoe? | Who stands surety for you, traditional priest? |
|        | Woana 'noma ma wo a?          | Who stands surety for you?                     |
|        | Yenamanadwonayemfagya         | Through the night without light                |
|        | Yebɔkɔhɛ                      | We shall go there                              |
| CHORUS | Onoma ma wo eeeeeeee          | He stands surety for you                       |
| :      |                               |  |
|        | Eturrihimoooo aye!            | Guns are firing, oh yes!                       |

3.1.1.1. Interpretation

The words of the song above by the Mankoadze *Adzeba* group praises the god of the town, Sunday born (*Akwesi* which is shortened to *'Esi*) Father *Manko* for his bravery and protection of the people through thick and thin.



Figure 1: The Manko Mountain Range

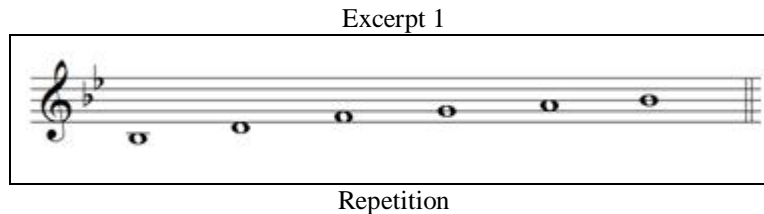
The continuous mountain range culminating in a peak towards the coast serves as a natural boundary between Winneba and Mankoadze. The mountain range is said to be the abode of Sunday born Father *Manko*. Those who claim to have ever seen him describe him as a tall, stout person who assumes an air of importance with a slight forward bend of the upper part of the body. The people of Mankoadze take solace in his stature and posture for their protection. In times past, it was their belief that he led them successfully through wars. In the song, god *Mankostands* surety for the people and so they can even go to him in the night without light. Even when guns are firing, he remains their surety.

Though the song refers to the olden days when the people used to go to war, it is very applicable today in the absence of wars. The people still look up to the god, *Manko* as the protector of the village. I witnessed this experience during their *Iyi So Oye* (This is also good) traditional festival in August 2012, where the people sang praises to his name and called on him to forgive them for their wrongdoing. At the climax of the festival, the people swept their rooms and dirty surroundings and followed the traditional priestess of the village, who led them to dump all the filth of the village into the sea to symbolize the cleansing of the village and the beginning of a new traditional year.

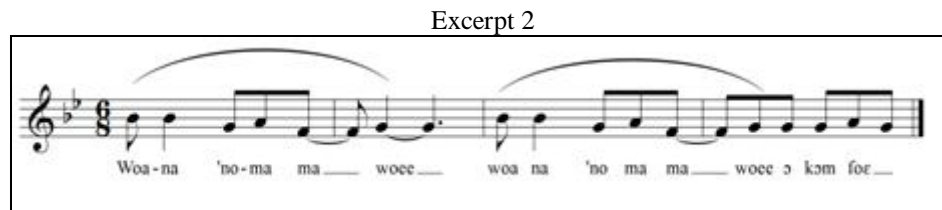
In the song, ancestral leaders who had given the people exemplary leadership were recognized. One such person was chief Ocran, once *Krontsihen* (next in command to the chief) of the town. In the song, he is referred to as *Egya* (Father) Ocran.

### 3.1.1.2. Musical Analysis

The song belongs to the second type of *adzeba* songs which involve singing with full instrumental accompaniment. The song has been notated in compound duple time (6/8). Instruments used in this song are *mfoba* (gourd rattles), one *dawur* (bell), one *dondo* (hourglass drum). The *mfoba* play two different patterns (*Mfoba* I & II). The Form of the music is a solo and response with harmonized chorus in three parts (I, II & III). The chorus is harmonized in parallel thirds with the solo part in the pentatonic scale of B<sup>b</sup> Major as shown in Excerpt 1 below:



The feature of repetition is used as a tool for placing emphasis on certain parts of songs. Examples of exact repetition in the same part for emphasis are illustrated with excerpts from *Egya 'Esi Manko* by the Mankoadze *adzeba* ensemble as shown below:



In the above example, the melodic repetitions are indicated by phrase marks. The melody of the first two bars is repeated in the third and fourth bars.

Syncopation is also a characteristic feature of the song. The section the soloist sings *Etur him ooBaawae* has a series of syncopated rhythm as shown in Excerpt 3 below:



### 3.1.2. Recitatives and *asafo* warrior-like songs without instrumental accompaniment

Example 2: *Asomfo* (Servants)

|         | Fante Text                   | English Translation                 |
|---------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| SOLO:   | ɔsaeeyaayee!                 | ɔsaeeyaayee!                        |
| CHORUS: | Yee yaayee!                  | Yee yaayee!                         |
|         | Yee yaayee!                  | Yee yaayee!                         |
|         | Y'araAsomfo a, Y'araAsomfo a | We the Servants, we the Servants    |
|         | sɛyɛbɛyɛ o, sɛyɛnnkɛyɛ o,    | Whether we are able to do it or not |
|         | Yeedusar mu oo               | We have reached the grassland       |

### 3.1.2.1. Interpretation

The transcription above is an excerpt from a medley of recitatives by the *DentsefoAdzeba* group of Winneba. It is in the style of *Asafo-esi*, one of the five varieties of singing in the Akan *Asafo* traditional warriors' music in which the performers sat or stood while singing without instrumental accompaniment. *Asafo* is a military and socio-political institution of the traditional system of the Akan and other tribes in Ghana.

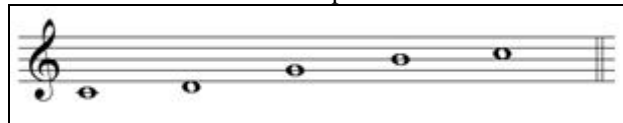
The song brings to the fore the place of the *Dentsifo Adzeba* group in the structure of the *Asafo*. According to Adu Bortsie, each of the two *Asafo* groups in Winneba has three subgroups. The *TuafoAsafo* warriors have *Akɔmfo-adze-fo* (*Akɔmfo*, traditional priestly group), *Apagyafɔ* (Wrestlers, Fire Strikers) and *Kyir-emim-fo* (Fraud detesters). The *DentsefoAsafo* warriors have *Asomfo* (Servants), *Petufɔ* (those from *Petuanɔ*) and *Nkyirimbafo/Etsibafo* (those who came later) (Adu Bortsie, 2006. pp. 8-9).

The song depicts two militant scenarios: the first involves the Antelope-Catching festival of the Effutu people of Winneba while the second is about a war situation. In the medley of recitatives, the *DentsefoAdzeba* group refers to itself as the *Asomfo* (Servants). This confirms that the position they occupy in the hierarchy of the *DentsefoAsafo* structure is within the *Asomfo* group. They show their prowess by asking whoever takes them for granted to observe that they are already on the grassland. This has reference to the *Aboakyer* (Antelope-Catching festival) in which the two *Asafo* companies in Winneba compete, once every year, for the one to be the first to catch a live antelope from the bush (grassland) for the *Aboakyer* ceremonies. In the reference to the war situation, the brave men of *Etsibafo* are directing the other warriors to be in their line formations (*ɔtsen*) because they have surrounded the enemy. Symbolically, these recitatives are militant calls to show that the *Adzeba* group is ever ready to play its role and execute any assignment given to it. The expression *ɔsa ee yaayee!* followed by the response *Yee yaayee!* wereclarion calls for war among the Akan people in the olden days. *ɔsa* means war in the Akan language. The expression and its response are now used as solidarity calls among Akan and other tribes of Ghana.

### 3.1.2.2. Musical Analysis

The recitative *Asomfo* by the *Dentsefo* Winneba *adzeba* ensemble belongs to the first type of *adzeba* songs known in Fante as *Osebɔ* involving the singing of songs without any instrumental accompaniment. It is in the scale of C major. It uses the tetratonic scale consisting of the tonic, supertonic, dominant and leading note as shown in Excerpt 4 below:

Excerpt 4



It is a solo followed by a double chorus in unison until the cadential point where the second chorus sings a different part. The endings of expressions like *sa e yaa ye*, *sɛyɛbɛyɛ o*, *sɛyɛnnkɛyɛ o*, are glides in sound in African music which do not have definite pitches hence the use of *glissandos* to denote the sounds as shown in Excerpt 5 below:

Excerpt 5

### 3.1.3. Death/Dirges

Example 3: *Na w'aka me nsa* (It has bitten my hand!)

|         | Fante Text        | English Translation    |
|---------|-------------------|------------------------|
| SOLO 1: | Na w'aka me nsa!  | It has bitten my hand! |
|         | Me nsa, moruwu o! | My hand, I am dying!   |
|         | Na w'aka me nsa!  | It has bitten my hand! |
|         | Me nsa, moruwu o! | My hand, I am dying!   |
| SOLO 2: | Moruwu o!         | I am dying!            |
|         | Fasuenikan        | Crab in the lagoon     |
| CHORUS: | Na w'aka me nsa!  | It has bitten my hand! |
|         | Me nsa, moruwu o! | My hand, I am dying!   |

### 3.1.3.1. Interpretation

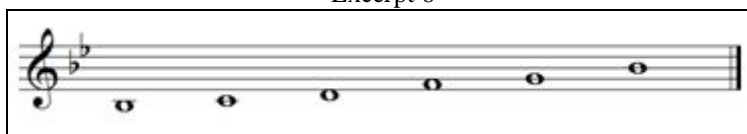
*Na w'aka me nsa* are the words of an *adzewa* song by the Central Folkloric dance ensemble in Cape Coast. It is a scream by someone resulting from being bitten by a crab in the lagoon to the point of death. It is a taboo in Cape Coast to go and fish inside the lagoon on Tuesdays. It is an offence to the gods of the land. In all probability, the person in question might have defied the ban and had to suffer the consequences for taking that action. Though the song does not say whether the person in the song died or not, it is believed that very few people are able to survive after such an encounter.

### 3.1.3.2. Musical Analysis

The song belongs to the second type of *adzewa* songs which involve singing with full instrumental accompaniment. It is a double solo with four chorus parts in compound duple (6/8) time. The instruments used are the *dawur* (bell), the banana bell, *mfoba* (gourd rattles), *apentsima* drum, *peti* drum and rhythmic handclapping. The harmonies of the chorus parts are unconventional with traditional *adzewa* and *adzeba* music because they use Western four-part harmony including a bass part. *Ofieyewura*, another song by the ensemble is a solo with four chorus parts including a bass part. The Folkloric Dance ensemble uses additional bells and drums in its performances instead of a single bell and a single drum (for an *adzewa* ensemble that uses a drum) in the traditional *adzewa* ensemble. These are good examples of the new trend in the performance of contemporary *adzewa* and *adzeba* ensembles for the stage.

*Na w'aka me nsa* is in the key of B<sup>b</sup> Major. The first solo part uses the pentatonic scale as shown below:

Excerpt 6



The first solo part begins the song while the second solo part joins the first solo part in singing *Moruwu o! Fasu enikan* (I am dying! Crab in the lagoon) as shown in Excerpt 7 below:

Excerpt 7

**Fasu Enikan**  
(Crab in the lagoon)

1st Solo

2nd Solo

Na w'a-ka me nsa me nsa mo-ru-wuo Na w'a-ka me nsa me nsa mo-ru-wuo fa-su eni-kan  
mo-ru-wuo fa-su eni-kan

The four-part chorus comes in immediately after the first and second solo parts have sung *Moruwu o! Fasu enikan* (I am dying! Crab in the lagoon). The four-part chorus is harmonized in soprano, alto, tenor and bass as shown in Excerpt 8 below:

Excerpt 8

CHORUS

na wa ka me nsa me nsa mo-ru-wuo

This is very unconventional with traditional *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs and many traditional African songs in call and response form. The harmonies of the soprano, alto and tenor parts are very characteristic of traditional African songs. In the chorus, the soprano and alto are harmonized in perfect fourths, major thirds and minor thirds. The alto and tenor parts are also harmonized in major and minor thirds. Indigenous Ghanaian songs in Call and response form are never harmonized in four parts. The rendition of this song in its present form, together with the use of additional drums and bells as well as the integration of dance drama into the performance, is a contemporary development of *adzewa* by the Folkloric dance ensemble for the stage.

### 3.2. Discussion

The study examines *adzewa* and *adzeba* music within the theoretical framework of the integrated approach to the problem of meaning in African music. This means that understanding both the words and sounds in a song makes meaning more complete. The transcription and interpretation of the words of *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs are based on the Fante text of the songs as well as interviews with the *Adzewa* and *Adzeba* groups involved in the study. These are the Winneba *Dentsefoadzeba* ensemble, the Mankoadze *adzeba* ensemble and the Central Folkloric Dance ensemble, Cape Coast. The translation of the Fante text into English has been done in consultation with Fante-speaking lecturers at the University of Education, Winneba.

The main instrumental resources of *adzeba* or *adzewa* are the gourd rattles, the *dawur* (bell), rhythmic handclapping, drum (either *apentsima* or *dondo*), a solo and a chorus. However, the ensemble may be classified into two as an all-female ensemble on the one hand and a predominantly female ensemble on the other. The performances are integrated with dance. The form and structure of *adzeba* and *adzewa* music is in solo and response/chorus form. Both words and music determine the structure of the songs.

The major themes of *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs in the study are on death and funerals, praise singing, and recitatives and warrior-like songs. The problem of meaning in musical analysis has been examined using the scale, form and structure, repetition, syncopation, and harmony of the songs. There are no recorded modulations in any of the songs from the ongoing research.

The tempi of the songs are more relaxed with the *osebo* songs but become livelier as the performance gets to the level of songs involving the full ensemble. The sound of the *dawur* (bell) and drumming generally overshadow most of the singing. In many of the songs by the Winneba *Dentsefoadzeba* group for instance, it is quite difficult to make out the words of the songs because the sounds of the bell and drum overshadow the singing. This is why going back to the group and listening to the songs over and over again became necessary.

### 4. Conclusion

This study is based on an ongoing research in *adzewa* music and dance of the coastal Fanti and Guan people of Ghana which examines a corpus of traditional Ghanaian music as resource material for the study of traditional African music in Ghana. The paper focuses on the textual or structural rather than the contextual meaning of *adzewa* and *adzeba* music and dance. This means that understanding both the words and sounds in a song makes meaning more complete. Textual analysis of the words and music of *adzeba* and *adzewa* are examined within the theoretical framework of the integrated approach to the problem of meaning in African music (Nketia, 2005, 1976, 1975, 1973, 1962) and the phenomenological data analysis method in coding and categorizing the texts of *adzewa* and *adzeba* music (Kleiman, 2004).

The study identifies two types of traditional *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs. The first type is known in Fante as *Osebo* and involves the singing of songs without any instrumental accompaniment such as *Asomfo* (Servants) by the Winneba *Dentsefoadzeba* ensemble (See Example 2). The second type involves singing with full instrumental accompaniment of gourd rattles, *dawur* (bell) rhythmic handclapping and a drum (either *apentsima* or *dondo*) as exemplified in the song, *Egya 'Esi Manko* (Sunday born Father *Manko*) by the Mankoadze *adzeba* ensemble (See Example 1). The tempi of the songs are more relaxed with the *Osebo* songs but become livelier as the performance gets to the level of songs involving the full ensemble. The problem of meaning in musical analysis is examined in the scale, form and structure, repetition, syncopation, and harmony of the songs.

A critical analysis of selected *asafo* songs of the Kyirem *Asafo* No. 1 ensemble of Ajumako Mando in the Central Region of Ghana is among the few studies on traditional African music in Ghana. It provides a framework for the analytic study of indigenous Ghanaian music (Acquah & Amuah, 2014). Unlike *asafo* and *adowa*, *adzewa* music and dance has received very little attention from scholars of traditional African music in Ghana. The purpose of the study is to transcribe and interpret the words of three *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs and analyze them using Western music theory and African musical concepts and thereby increase the interest of music scholars in the study of *adzewa* in particular and traditional African music in Ghana in general. The words of the songs and their interpretation give a deeper meaning of the people whose music is being studied. They tell us about the people as well as their ancestors and deities and in this way help us to understand how the people lead their lives in various situations of life.

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