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# EWWE MUSIC OF GHANA

Recorded & Edited by S. K. Ladzekpo



Music 615

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Yewe Cult Dance  
Funeral Dirge  
Kpegisu  
Ga Dance  
Gadzo Dance  
Atsiagbekor Dance  
Brittania Hatsiatsia Songs  
Adzida-Hatsiatsia Songs  
Adzida-Afawu & Adzida

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Descriptive notes are inside pocket

**FWE MUSIC OF GHANA**  
Recorded & Edited by S.K.Ladzekpo

AHM 4222  
ASCH MANKIND SERIES



# MUSIC OF THE EWE OF GHANA

Recorded by S. Ladzekpo at Anyako Ghana

Notes by S. Ladzekpo

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## THE EWE PEOPLE

The Ewe speaking people live in the southern part of the Republic of Togoland and the southeastern corner of Ghana (in the Volta Region). Because of trade, marriage, agriculture, fishing and the present day westernization which is spreading in Africa like a wild fire set on a dried grass, the Ewe speaking people can be found almost all over the continent of Africa. But they are mostly centered around the coastal towns of West Africa.

Though there are many legends about the origin of the Ewes, it is generally accepted that they came from a place called Ketu or Ameokowe somewhere east of the river Niger. From there they trekked to Notsie in the Republic of Togoland, and from there spread throughout their present land in Ghana and Togoland.

## THE EWE MUSIC STYLE

For study and research purposes, music of Africa is grouped into three styles. Arab or Islamic style in the north, which is considered to be the simple style for a westerner. The most difficult and complicated in the

center, and the third style in the south. The Ewe style of music belongs to the second style, which is the most complicated one. This style of music is characterized by its overlay of rhythms, complexity of rhythmic patterns, gongs, rattles and other percussion instruments.

There is no strict line drawn in Ghana between theatrical and folk dance; although there are societies of musicians and dancers in every village, their performances often inspire members of the audience to join them or they may even invite friends out of the audience to join the dance. Neither is there a strict line between the Ghanaian musician and dancer; each drummer must be a proficient dancer or he is ridiculed, and many of the performers act as musicians for part of the time and as dancers for the other part.

The instruments most commonly used among the Ewe are gongs, drums and rattles. There are two kinds of gongs, the "gankogui" or double gong, which is played with a stick and keeps the tempo for the orchestra playing a constant pattern. The "atoke" is a small boat-shaped gong that rests on one palm and is played with a nail; there is a high-pitched and a low-pitched atoke. The rattle is a large gourd with a loose net of beads covering it; it is called "axatse". The drums, covered on one end with antelope, sheep or goat hide and made of wood, are

usually four sizes from small to very large: "Kaganu", "Kidi", "Sogo" and "Atsimewu", the 4-1/2 foot high master drum. In addition there are talking drums and drums played on both ends. During the performance the dancer has a close relationship to the musicians, taking most of his cues from the drum.

The texts are usually in parables which are impossible to understand without the composer's explanation. This he is not bound to give. This aspect of Ewe songs makes it very difficult to give literal translations.

The Ewe performance cycle is in three parts, "Hatsiatia", "Afa v" & the main dance. Hatsiatia is the interlude played during the course of a dance performance while the drumming and dancing have stopped. The dancers accompanied by gongs, sing as they relac. Afa v consists of songs accompanied by drums, rattles and gongs. Afa v is used as an introduction to the main dance to get the blessing of

the physicians and their gods. The main dance is long, lasting about an hour, a very large orchestra is used.

#### DANCE CLUBS

They consist of a group of people, both men and women, usually of an age grade, who are interested in the art of music and dance, they come together to form a voluntary association so that they can meet at hours of convenience to enjoy themselves. Though the clubs are free and voluntary they are strictly organized and governed by the rules and by laws. Membership of these clubs are open to everybody who lives in that division (or section of the town) and are interested in the art.



Side 1

Band 1. YEWE CULT (Membership-male & female)

The Yewe music is only performed at special occasions. It might be during an annual festival of this ritual organization, at a funeral of a dead member of the Yewe religion or some other kind of activity related to this cult. Yewe is a secret society whose affairs are carefully guarded so that non-members are not allowed to take part in its musical activities. The Yewe cult is called SHANGO in Nigeria & Trinidad. The

piece performed here is HUSAGO, a ritual dance.  
Instruments: Sogo, Kidi, Kangnu (drums), Gankogui (bells) and Axatse.

Band 2. FUNERAL DURGE

Dzenawo is the name of the composer of this song. There are few groups or dance clubs which carried the name of the leader or composer. This particular song is one of the many songs about the evils of death.

TITLE: "THE WARRIORS HOUSE HAS BECOME EMPTY"



Band 3. KPEGISU

A dance form, not a club. Though it can be found in a number of villages and towns, it is more or less a family band than a dance club. Its songs are full of war and after war stories. They are exciting, stimulating and appeasing. They can be sorrowful and mournful. The performance here has two parts. The first part is an intermission (Hasiatsia) and the second, which is fast is at regular dance tempo.

- TITLES: 1. "ONE SHOULD NOT LAUGH AT HIS NEIGHBOR'S MISFORTUNE"  
2. "A YOUNG RAM CANNOT ACT LIKE A FULL GROWN RAM"  
3. "THE DEAD HAVE FORMED A DANCE CLUB"  
4. "A CHICKEN HAS CAUGHT A COBRA AND SWALLOWED"

Band 4. GA

A social and recreational dance among the Ewe. It was solely for the old men in the past, but now anyone can take part in it.

- TITLE: "I WILL SHOW MY BRAVERY ON THE MUZZLES OF A GUN"

Band 5. GADZO

A theatrical dance for young men which came originally from Togoland as a war dance done with swords. Two small drums and a middle size Congo-like drum are used with the double gong and five or six rattles. The music and dance are just and vigorous. A slow professional dance proceeds this as it does in most Ewe dances.

- TITLE: "KAYIBOE, THE CHILD IS NOT MATURED"  
(or The Child is Underage)

Band 6. ATSIAGBEKOR

It was originally a war dance, but war is no longer associated with it now and it has become a social dance. The dance is led by a master drum which is very tall in size and played by a standing drummer. The dancers listen very attentively to the rhythmic patterns produced by the drummer. The music is very rhythmical, typically in the Atsiagbekor form a slow section precedes a fast (double time) one.

Instruments: 5 drums, 1 double gong, rattles ranging from 3-6, order of the drums: Wuga (master drum), Kroboto, Totozi, Kidi, Kaganuj, Ganhogui (double gong), Axatse (rattle).

- TITLE: "IF IT COMES TO FIGHTING WITH GUNS"

Side 2

Band 1. BRITANNIA

Arrangement:

A. Main Britannia music for dancing, but no drum accompaniment.

B. Slow rhythm for procession, with no drum accompaniment.

C. Slow Hatsiatsia, it can be prelude or intermission. (Instruments: Two atoke, boat shaped gongs and one gankogin).

- TITLES: A- 1. "WE SHALL ALWAYS CARRY OUR PLANS THROUGH"  
2. "A DEAD ANIMAL NEVER FEARS KNIFE"  
B- 1. "BRITANNIA'S SONGS HAS COME"  
2. "THE UNHIDDEN SUN IS BOTH THE RICH AND POOR"  
C- 1. "SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED TO CANTO GA"

Band 2. ADZIDA HATSATSIA SONGS

- TITLES: 1. "COME AND LET US PRAY"  
2. "WE DANCE WITH ONE ACCORD"  
3. "A BOAT NEVER OVERTURNS AT THE HEAD AND LEAVES THE TAIL BEHIND"

Band 3. AFAUU-ADZIDA

- Afa Songs: 1. "MEMBERS OF THE AFA CULT, BY YOUR LEAVE"  
2. "AWUNS BOKO LETEWOGBE, BY YOUR HONOUR"

SETH KOBLA LADZEKPO was born in the village of Anyako in the Volta Region of Ghana and learned as a child to dance and to drum. Under the influence of the colonial mission schools, he and other children were forbidden to participate in or watch dancing and drumming, but learned it by sneaking in to ceremonies and practicing on the outskirts of town. He joined Gboke's "Drumming and Dancing Research Group" and became its leader. The group performed at Ghana's independence celebration and at the Independent African States Conference and the All-African People's Conference in 1958. As the movement to preserve the rich tradition of Ghanaian culture became stronger after independence, Mr. Ladzekpo was appointed instructor in drumming and dancing at the Ghana Institute of Art and Culture and instructor and research assistant at the School of Music and Drama, University of Ghana. With various dances companies, he has toured in Russia, Nigeria, Israel, Malawi and the Eastern United States. As a dancer and musician, he plans to work at recording and analyzing the dances and music of his people, and to continue to spread the knowledge of these forms to non-members of his tribe.

