UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

'ASAMANASAW': A TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY AFRICAN
CLASSICISM ON THE DANCE OF THE DEAD

NANA AMOWEE DAWSON

2015

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

ASAMANASAW: A TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY AFRICAN CLASSICISM
ON THE DANCE OF THE DEAD

BY

NANA AMOWEE DAWSON

Thesis submitted to the Department of Music and Dance of the Faculty of
Arts, University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of Master of Philosophy Degree in Music Theory and Composition

JULY 2015

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this University or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature: .... Date: ....

Name: Nana Amowee Dawson

Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Signature: .... Date: ....

Name: Prof. Cosmas W. K. Mereku

Co-Supervisor's Signature: .... Date: ....

Name: Dr. Mawuyram Q. Adjahoe

ii

ABSTRACT

This thesis used the notion of life after death in the African traditional religion to create a picturesque or an imaginary 'African classicism' about the ancestors *(Nananom Nsamanfo)* coming out of their graves to dance. In addition, the concept of cultural return to roots has been used to blend Ghanaian traditional musical resources (tunes, rhythms, art, etc) and styles with scholarly compositional techniques. Within the present study, *Asamanasaw* is an instrumental composition for the orchestra, circumscribed to the Piccolo, Flute, Clarinet, Bassoon, Flugal Horn, B flat Trumpet, Piano Glockenspiel, Timpani, Bass drum, Snare drum ,Violins I and II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The music encompasses two musical trends, namely the Intercultural, and the Atonal. This falls in line with theories of musical reconstruction from traditional pre-compositional resources featured by Akin Euba's creative ethno-musicological approach and Nketia's syncretic approach to contemporary African composition.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The successful completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the support of more persons than I can mention by name. I wish to express my profound gratitude to my supervisors, Prof. Cosmas W. K. Mereku and Dr. Mawuyram Q. Adjahoe. Their pieces of advice, insightful observations, invaluable assistance, guidance, and encouragement aided this write-up.

Special heartfelt thanks go to my family and friends for your support in diverse ways throughout the period of my studies.

DEDICATION

In memory of my Father

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Undoubtedly, the African continent is the second largest continent in the world, and its populace constitutes a 10th of the world's population with about one thousand indigenous languages spoken throughout the continent (Stone, 1998, p.2). African societies, as organized and functioning human communities, have ethical values, principles, beliefs, and traditions that they hold in high esteem. These include belief in a Supreme Being, belief in spirits and other divinities, use of magic, traditional medicine, and veneration of ancestors – the belief that the dead have a continued existence, and/or possess the ability to influence the fortune of the living (Gyekye, 1995, p.123). African traditional music(songs and dances), as a component of its culture, has a long history that has been passed down from generation to another and can only be found in the arts, rituals and festivals, beliefs and customs, proverbs, and myths; therefore, it cannot be conclusive, but rather complex to talk about. All one can do is to only provide a panoramic view of what African Music is.

The motivation of this study is derived from the beliefs my people in the Bentsir area, Oguaa (Cape Coast), hold about the Dead. We believe that our ancestors are ever present in our consciousness. We always, and in diverse

1

ways, honour them by preserving their cultural creations and practices and also celebrate their memories. Gyekye vivifies this statement by saying that;

> The ancestors are believed to be interested in the welfare of their descendants and are ever willing and ready to help them and to treat them favourably. In this connection, they are also believed to take a keen interest in the moral life of the human society and to serve as custodians of the traditional moral system, having helped to create that system themselves. It is the belief of the African people that their ancestors have the power to punish those of their earthly kinsmen who break the traditionally approved moral code or fail to fulfil their moral obligations to their relatives, while rewarding those whose lives are in harmony with the traditional moral code (1998, p.121).

Critically looking at this assertion, we, the living, have a lot to do to celebrate our ancestors.

According to Schmidt's understanding of the African worldview, there is a close relation between the visible and the invisible world (2005, p.3). They are connected so closely together that we can describe the African worldview as mono-sectional. The dead do not leave the living but are always present, whether it is for good or for bad. Death is interpreted as a rite of passage to the ancestral level. *Asamanasaw*, therefore, is a picturesque or an imaginary *'African classicism'* about the ancestors *(Nananom Nsamanfo)* coming out of their graves to dance, as in Michael Jackson's (1988) Thriller's ghost scene.

Statement of the Problem

In the twentieth century, when western art composers left tonality and experimented with atonal harmonies (Rattle 2005, p.1), many contemporary African art composers found it difficult to create music with the intensely sharp dissonant harmonies which became the standard at that time. This was a

2

problem since many composers wanted to satisfy their tonal audiences. Hitherto, most Ghanaian art composers were so comfortable with the tonal tradition i.e., the old order of the 18th and 19th centuries. Composers like Ephraim Amu, Kwabena Nketia, Kenn Kafui, Michael Kwesi Amissah, Philip Gbeho, Alfred Entsua-Mensah, Augustus Adu-Safo, Charles Bernard Wilson, George Worlanyo Kwasi Dor, Kras Arthur, Newlove Annan, Robert George Kɔmla Ndɔ, Sam Asare-Bediako and Walter Blege, just to mention a few, contributed immensely towards this tradition. On the contrary, very few Ghanaian composers have been able to break barriers to satisfy the dissonant tradition that was on-going in art music during the twentieth century. Among these composers who have made significant contributions to instrumental contemporary African classicism are J. H. Kwabena Nketia, Adulphus Anthony Turkson, Atta Annan Mensah, Nicholas Zinzendorf Nayo, Gyimah Labi, Willie Anku, Victor Nii Sowah Manieson, Cosmas Mereku, and Towoemenye Kofi Ansah (Mereku, 2012, p.41).

To touch on some of their works, Omojola (1995, p.156) tells us that Nketia has 'Bolga Sonata' for violin and piano, 'Cow Lane Sextet' for wind and percussion, 'Dance of the Forest No. 1', '*Mmoatia Sankuo* No. 2' a trio for strings, 'Ewe-Fon Trilogy No.3', 'Dance of Joy' and the 'Dance of the Maidens Nos. 1, 2, and 3. Similarly, Mereku (2012, p.41 - 43) also talks about Anku's '*Ognolapk'* (2000), in which he experiments with a retrograde version of the *Kpalongo* genre; Euba 1993 mentions that Gyimah Labi has five orchestral works - four duos for violin and piano, a string quartet, trio for flute, bass clarinet and piano and a set of pieces for piano solo entitled *Dialects.* Manieson also has 'Anatomy of *Dondology*', '*Senorita'* and 'Voices

3

of our Ancestors' (British Council Library, Ghana 2008); whilst Mereku has 'Sasabonsam's Match' (*Pivicafrique*), 'Royal Requiem', 'Afro-Drumnietta', 'African Coronation Collage', 'Orkney Quartet', 'Ghana Rap-Ody' and *Akpini Electroacoustics*; and finally Ansah (2009) who was inspired by *Pivicafrique* composed a chamber work called *Aziza danz.*

These aforementioned works acknowledged belong to the harsh dissonant 20th century tradition. Although some of them were construed as programme music and mostly tell stories or depict an allegory of life phenomenon or situations or scenarios, interestingly, none of these composers used or ever thought of using the innovation to compose music for the dead or ventured into that genre – a work that will be called *Danse Macabre* or Dance of the Dead. The concept of ancestral veneration is one that cannot be neglected in all aspects of life, hence the attention it received from creative realm. Painters such as Peggy Ahwesh (1954), Rita Ackermann (1968), and David Blatherwick (1960) and some western art music composers such as Olivier Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie* (1946), Mozart's Requiem Mass *Lacrimosa* (1791), and Camille Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre*, Op. 40 (1874) are all arts creations that deal with death themes. The study therefore seeks to create an original composition using death themes that try to capture Michael Jackson's *Thriller's* ghost scene as mentioned earlier. *Asamanasaw*, the proposed title of the novelty, therefore, is a picturesque or an imaginary 'African classicism' about the ancestors *(nananom nsamanfo)* coming out of their graves to dance.

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this work is to use the notion of life after death in the African traditional religion as an allegory to create or compose a twenty-first century programme music about the dead.

Objectives

The objectives of the study will be to:

1. Collect myths and legends, sounds, music on the dead from the Bentsir Asafo Community, Asokyeano, and Menyamenwu, all of the Oguaa traditional area.

2. Analyse the collections looking at – melody, rhythm, texture, form, tempo, timbre, and all other related materials *(language, dance, drama or theatre, visual arts and media arts).*

3. Create a new work using the findings that will capture an African *Danse Macabre.*

4. Write a definitive analysis of the new composition.

Research Questions

This research was guided by the following questions:

1. Do the people of Bentsir Asafo Community of Cape Coast still extant the belief of ancestral veneration?

2. Which materials could be exploited from the findings and adopted by the composer for a new work?

3. How could these materials be used effectively to create and capture an essence of an African *Danse Macabre*?

4. How could a listener be guided to enjoy the new innovation?

5

Significance of the Study

This study will serve as a basis of reference for conducting similar research. It will also help students taking composition related courses like *film music* and *sound design* to identify the best musical idiom to use in their fields. This study, generally, will serve as illustration and reference material for educators, composers, and also students of African music. For listeners who enjoy listening to harsh dissonance harmonies, this study will satisfy their curiosity and appetite. Students also wishing to become folklorists and anthropologists may benefit from the literal materials collected on the 'music of the dead' as our universities in Ghana are making modest efforts to start with the formal introduction of oral literature courses in their programmes on one hand, and for multicultural education on the other.

Research Methodology

The findings contained in this thesis has been established on the basis of empirical study, conducted in the form of creative ethno-musicological fieldwork in the Central Region of Ghana, specifically in the Bentsir Asafo Community of Oguaa Traditional Area, Menyamenwu, and Asokyeano. The first area is by the Coast whereas the other two are inland communities. Since a creative ethno-musicological method was used to collect the data for the main work i.e. the compositions, I shall proceed to define what creative ethnomusicology is. As defined by Euba, the pioneer of this theory, creative ethnomusicology is a process whereby information obtained from music research is used in composition rather than as the basis of scholarly writing (Euba 2000, p. 1). He further states that the objective of creative ethnomusicology is to reveal hidden themes and also connect different

6

elements of different cultures. Another function of a creative ethnomusicologist is to create new ideas through 'selective and partial description of observed details' (Emerson et al. 1995, p. 67).

Participant Observation

A qualitative method was adopted for this thesis. Primary data was collected through participant observation and interviews. My interviewees included a mortuary keeper by name Kofi Mensah; three elders; *Supi* Mina, Ɔkyeame *(linguist)* Kojo Christian, and Opanyin Kwaa Sakyi; and a historian of Oguaa Culture, Mr. Kwamena Pra.

Spradley asserts that in undertaken a participant observation, one builds on this experience only when an unfamiliar social situation is selected. This is so because since you are a stranger to a new culture you may not know the 'rules for behaviour', and this may lead you to naturally fall into the role of a participant observer (Spradley, 1979, p. 53). He also states that once you learn these cultural rules, they become understood that you hardly pause to reflect upon your research or participant observation actions. I had no difficulty in observing and describing the phenomenon because they were so new to me. I took nothing for granted and adequately described my observations in my field notes. It was an advantage that I did the observation from a familiar environment because it enabled me to communicate in the environment without a translator.

A participant observer observes a social situation with two purposes; to participate in events that are related to the research objectives and to witness the events and people and the mundane aspects of the environment, necessary for the research (Spradley, 1979:54). It was for this reason that I visited the

7

cemeteries to observe and to get myself acquainted with the sounds for my new music. I picked up some indigenous death related tunes too in the process.

Interviews

Interview, as defined by the Webster's Dictionary, is a conversation between two or more people where questions are asked by the interviewer to elicit facts or statements from the interviewee. Interviews are very crucial in qualitative research. Compared to something like a written survey, interviews allow for a significantly higher degree of intimacy, with participants often revealing personal information to their interviewers in a real-time, face-to-face setting. As such, this technique can evoke an array of significant feelings and experiences within those being interviewed (Seidman 1998, pg.49)

On the positive end, interviews can provide participants with an outlet to express themselves. Since the job of interviewers is to learn, not to treat or counsel, they do not offer participants any advice, but nonetheless, telling an attentive listener about concerns and cares can be pleasing. As qualitative researcher Robert S. Weiss puts it, "To talk to someone who listens, and listens closely, can be valuable, because one's own experience, through the process of being voiced and shared, is validated" (Weiss, 1994, pg. 122) Such validation, however, can have a downside if a participant feels let down upon termination of the interview relationship, for unlike with figures like therapists or counsellors, interviewers do not take a measure of ongoing responsibility for the participant, and their relationship is not continuous. On the negative end, the multiple-question based nature of interviews can lead participants to feel uncomfortable and intruded upon if an interviewer encroaches on territory

that they feel is too personal or private. To avoid crossing this line, researchers should attempt to distinguish between public information and private information, and only delve deeper into private information after trying to gauge a participant's comfort level in discussing it.

Field notes

Field notes, according to Margery Wolf, are unvarnished descriptions of events as they occur. In other words, they are analyzed facts gathered from participants in events. (Wolf, 1992, pg. 86) Since I had been trained on how to conduct field studies during my course work, I was able to ask certain kinds of questions and take notes of all kinds of situation. On the field, I recorded what I saw, heard, thought and understood to be the happenings. Later on a notepad of musical ideas were created from the findings.

Location of Study areas

Three Fante communities in the Central Region of Ghana were selected for the first part of my thesis namely Bentsir Asafo community of Oguaa (Cape Coast), Asokyeano, and Menyamenwu. The research was done in these areas because of my ability to speak the *Fante* language and because there were cemeteries and other 'weird sites' to be observed there.

Process of Collecting Data

I arrived in the Bentsir Community of the Oguaa Traditional Area from Menyamenwu *(that is where I stay and also work)* on Thursday, March 12th, 2015 to begin the collection of myths and legends about the dead specifically the ancestors of the land for my research. I collected stories and some indigenous tunes that accompany them. My interviewees confirmed the assertions by Opoku and Gyekye that all the "Traditional Religions of Ghana

9

had a belief in a Supreme Being who created the universe including human beings and everything on the earth" (Opoku, 1978 and Gyekye, 1995). I was also told that beyond these deities and gods are the ancestors who were once living members of the society but at present, serve as mediators between those in the physical and spiritual world. Though dead, they never cease to dwell among the living. "They live among us", one of my informants said. The community honours their ancestors by frequently sweeping the cemeteries, repairing tombs, presenting bouquets, and sometimes praying for them.

Three days later, I left Cape Coast for Asokyeano. I set off around 5:55pm and I arrived in t he community around 6:30pm and headed straight to the cemetery. I met two watchmen and told them what I had come there to do. I told them I was there at that time to observe the place for my research. We sat down together and had a conversation for some time just to get familiar with them. At about 7: 20 pm I requested to be taken round to observe. I walked through with the help of my escorts, recorded some sounds including bird songs, animal cries, insect cries, the sounds the locking of the winds make, and how the interact, musically. It was very interesting interacting with nature at that time. My escorts found what I was doing so weird that they kept asking 'silly questions' and at a point thought I was insane. Because no normal person would come there and use a recorder to record nothing, I presumed that was what they were about thinking. One of them even said he thought I was there to take pictures. I smiled and went on with my work. When I was done with the observations, it was around 8: 45pm. It was all quiet and scary. Walking alone from the cemetery to Asokyeano town to pick a car seemed scarier so I asked and they offered to escort me to the police barrier to pick a

10

car home because they were no cars around at that time. We got to the barrier and I showed some ingratiation for their kindness and left for Cape Coast (Oguaa). It was an interesting observation.

I returned to Menyamenwu on 25th March, 2015 to put my findings together in order to start the main work. There was a forest behind my apartment so I also visited to get information to beef up what I had already collected. Here, I heard so many weird sounds. I picked up a few and added them to my results. This was the last fieldwork activity which I undertook.

Challenges

I had few challenges. First of all it was so risky being at the cemetery at that time because "ghost stories" were still hunting me. Also the fear of being attacked by animals coupled with the fact that I was a stranger in that town so that fear of being attacked by those two escorts was worrying me because I went alone. In all I was able to observe without any problems.

Secondary Sources of Data

Secondary sources of data including books, journal articles, book chapters, workshop papers, and other literature relevant to the thesis have been utilized and necessary acknowledgement given. Knowledge attained from my undergraduate degree education has also been used, built upon, and utilized for the thesis. Knowledge attained by my position as a Fante from the Central Region has also been used.

The compositional process

After the field work, I created a notepad of musical ideas from the composer's psyche (Agawu, 2011, pg. 55). These included forest sounds, bird songs, indigenous dance genre patterns and death related songs. These were

11

the key ideas for the composition. In all, one Asafo song, *'Kwadehyewa'*, about six forest effects and bird songs, and three newly created melodies were created for this composition. Music compositional techniques and processes like metrical regularization *(for regularising multi-metered tunes)*, augmentation, diminution, fragmentation, fussioning, fissioning, hocketting, scoring/arranging, among others, were used to 're-shape' the findings/materials/ideas to be used for the actual composition.

As I pondered on the objective of this study, a frame work started to emerge. I perceived a cemetery setting with the following sections: a cemetery with a thick forest, the dead gradually rising, the call to dance, and their retirement to their graves. My principal supervisor asked me to sketch the topography of my impressions in a table form to help me perceive the time-space of my music because he believed a composition must grow organically to be aesthetically fulfilling. I showed a unique architectural design that is not immediately obvious to the listener.

	1st Movement		2nd Movement	
MEASURES	1 – 66	67 - 188	1 -52	53 – 82
SECTIONS	The Rise	The Call	The Dance	The Retirement of Nananom to their Graves

Table 1: Compositional sketching process

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter attempts to present a systematic and selective review of various related literature under the following sub-headings; Theoretical Framework, African Traditional Religion, African Classicism, and Danse Macabre.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study was guided by three knotted theories namely; Nketia's syncretic approach to contemporary African composition (1982), Euba's creative ethno-musicological approach (1993) and the Peuquet's theoretical framework for discoverable composition (2007). This falls in line with Axtell's descriptive outline of the composition process (2009) which uses inventive approaches to making meaning, plays with African traditional musical idioms to create new effects, explores and experiments with Western twentieth-century contemporary musical ideas, materials, tools and techniques. Mereku (2013, p.40)

Nketia's syncretic approach to contemporary African composition and Euba's theory of creative ethno-musicological approach basically talk about a cultural return to roots where composers use materials derived from indigenous music, oral traditions, creative ideas, sources of sound, themes and procedures, and blends them with Western contemporary compositional

13

practices to create new music. These influences expand a composer's mode of expression. Nketia's African Pianism (1994), in which he tries to explore the percussive qualities of the piano and blends them with Ghanaian folk tunes; and Euba's "Solo Chant" from his opera, *Chaka*, where he transforms his research into composition (1993, p.6-7) illustrates these two theories, respectively.

The third theory i.e. Peuquet's theoretical framework for discoverable composition, is a theory that incorporates "ideas about the integration of art and life, music as dialectic between behaviour and environment, and performative context as a fluid and variable system" (p.1-18).

African Traditional Religion

Religion is a fundamental, perhaps the most important influence in the life of most Africans; yet its essential principles are too often unknown to foreigners who thus make themselves constantly liable to misunderstand the African worldview and beliefs (Schmidt 2005, p.3). When we speak of African traditional religion, we mean the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans. It is the religion which resulted from the sustaining of faith held by the forebears of the present Africans, and which is being practiced today in various forms and various shades by a very large number of Africans. Awolalu (1976, p.1), explaining the word "traditional", said it means "indigenous, and that which is aboriginal or foundational, handed down from generation to generation, upheld and practiced by Africans today. This is a heritage from the past, but treated not as a thing of the past but as that which connects the past with the present and the present with eternity."

14

Africa is the world's second largest and second most-populous continent, with diverse cultures (beliefs, practices, values, and morals) and over a thousand spoken languages (Mbiti 1975, p.10) However, following extensive researches in Africa as a continent, regularly occurring features have been discovered in the religious world views of African people. These include belief in God, belief in divinities, belief in spirit (deities), belief in ancestors, the practice of magic, juju, and medicine. For the sake of this study, let me touch briefly on the veneration of ancestors (Sage, 2009).

Gehman (1989, p. 54) says that "death is a necessary door through which the living pass in order to take up the inevitable role as the living dead. Death is transition to the final destiny of all men and women". Mbiti affirms life goes on beyond the grave (1975, p. 119). Taylor (2001, p. 107) agrees with Birago Diop when he endorses such a view claiming that those who are dead are never gone: they are in the thickening shadow… they are in the wood that groans they are in the fire that is dying… they are in the forest, they are in the house; the dead are not dead; thus the need for their recognition.

According to Ejizu (1986, p.6), the belief in ancestors is an important element of African traditional religions. The belief occupies an important place in the understanding of the role of the traditional religion in inculcating the ideal of harmonious living among African peoples. One needs however, to know the content of the belief to be better able to appreciate how it helps the people to realize the community ideal of harmonious living.

The ancestors, or the living-dead, as Mbiti (1990, p.82) refers to them, are believed to be disembodied spirits of people who lived upright lives here on earth, died 'good' and natural death, that is at ripe old age, and received the

15

acknowledged funerary rites. They could be men or women. But more often than not, male ancestors are prominent since patrilineage is the dominant system of family and social integration in most traditional African societies. For matrilineal groups like the Ashanti of Ghana and the Ndembu of Zambia, both male and female ancestors are duly acknowledged. With the completion of prescribed funeral rites, a deceased person is believed to transform into an ancestor. The funeral rites in this case, serve as some kind of 'rites du passage'. The disembodied spirit joins the esteemed ranks of fully achieved ancestors in the spirit world.

African Classicism

Africa is a very large and diverse continent with many musical styles across its different countries and regions. It is widely acknowledged that African music has undergone frequent and decisive changes throughout the centuries. What is termed traditional music today is probably very different from music in former times.

In early times, dance, music, and story-telling were among the art forms that flourished for many centuries in Africa. These were passed down from generation to another orally. Ancient African society did not separate their everyday life activities from their music and other cultural experience. Stone (1998, p.7) attests to the difficulty of separating music from the cultural context as she says:

Honest observers are hard pressed to find single indigenous group in Africa that has a term congruent to the usual western notion of "music." There are terms for more specific acts like singing, playing

16

instruments, and more broadly performing (dance, games, music); but the isolation of musical sound from other arts proves a western abstraction, of which we should be aware when we approach the study of performance in Africa.

Traditional art forms began to change when Africa came in contact with the outside world and especially with the introduction of Christianity. Many Africans (in the case of Ghana) had access to formal education. They could then read and write. This new development affected music too. People who were trained in music either started writing down our music or began composing in western styles.

The 20th century was characterized by a shift from tonal music to atonal music. Its music brought new freedom and wide experimentation with new musical styles and forms that challenged the accepted rules of music of earlier times. Prominent composers of this new tradition include Schoenberg, Anton Weber, Allan Berg, John Cage, and David Behrman, just to mention a few. Although African composers, according to Agawu (2011, p.60), faced challenges of finding ways to satisfy their audience(s) who were not used to the acutely harsh dissonant sounds of the 20th century, some composers used their compositions to eradicate this challenge. It is worth noting that Adulphus Anthony Turkson, Atta Anna Mensah, Nicholas Zinzendorf Nayo, Gyimah Labi, Willie Anku, Victor Nii Sowah Manieson, Cosmas Mereku, and Towoemenye Kofi Ansah have made significant contributions to instrumental contemporary African classicism.

Danse Macabre (Dance of the Dead)

The Dance of Death refashions the late-medieval allegory of the danse macabre as a reformist satire, and one can see the beginnings of a gradual shift from traditional to reformed religion (Wilson 2006, p. 96-103). It was originally a species of spectacular play akin to the English moralities. It has been traced back to the fourteenth century. The epidemics so frequent and destructive at that time, such as Black Death, brought before popular imagination the subject of death and its universal sway. The dramatic movement then developing led to its treatment in the dramatic form. In the plays, Death appeared not as a destroyer, but as a messenger of God summoning men to the world beyond the grave (Corvisier, 1998, p.10). The dancing movement of the characters was a somewhat later development, as at first Death and his victims moved at a slow and dignified gait. But Death, acting the part of a messenger, naturally took the attitude and movement of the day, namely the fiddlers, and other musicians, and the dance of death was the result. The purpose of these plays was to teach the truth that all men must die and should therefore prepare themselves to appear before the judge (Herbermann & Williamson 1908, p.1)

In music, danse macabre was performed frequently in compositions associated with death. Mimed representations were performed in Germany, France, Flanders, and the Netherlands. In the 14th century, a form of Dance of Death emerged in Germany and was known as *Totentanz* (Walker, 1933, p.152). This genre of the European Middle Ages was portrayed many times on the walls of cloistered cemeteries as a dance of linked hands between people of all levels of society and the skeletal figure of death. In the Romantic

18

period, a morbid fascination with death and the mysterious produced ballets such as the *ballet des nonnes* in Giacomo Meyerbeer's opera, *Robert le Diable* (1830), *Giselle* (1841), *La Peri* (1843), and *La Bayad Ère* (1877), all of which present scenes with ballerinas dressed in white, vaporous costumes representing spirits after death, floating on their toes or suspended by invisible wires and illuminated by moonlight. The most perennial is Mikhail Fokine's *Le Cygne* (1905), commonly known as *The Dying Swan.* Created for the dancer Anna Pavlova to express the noble death struggle of a legendarily silent bird who only sang at death (thus the idiomatic "swan song"), it remains in the repertory in twenty-first-century performances. The great dancer and choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky set the shocking theme of a virgin dancing herself to death by violent, percussive movements as a sacrifice for a fecund harvest in prehistoric Russia, matching composer Igor Stravinsky's iconoclastic score for *The Rite of Spring* (1913) – (Morgan & Graham, 1980).

The list of dance works treating the subject of death is very long, and the symbolic figure of death appears in many choreographic works. Titles like Andrée Howard's *Death and the Maiden* (1937); Frederick Ashton's dances in Benjamin Britten's opera, *Death in Venice* (1974); Erick Hawkins's *Death is the Hunter* (1975); Flemming Flindt's *Triumph of Death* (1971); and *Death* by the Indian choreographer Astad Deboo are numerous and underline the continuing fascination of dance creators for the subject.

19

CHAPTER THREE
1st Movement

21

22

23

25

26

27

28

31

32

33

34

35

41

43

44

48

49

50

52

53

55

57

58

59

61

63

64

65

68

69

73

78

82

2nd Movement

94

95

99

101

102

103

108

110

111

113

114

115

116

117

118

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS

The analysis presents sectional descriptions that give a bird's eye view of the entire composition. It will be based on two principles, namely the ***architectonic procedures***, which constitute a holistic template explaining the commonalities and differences underlying each composition; and the ***analytical paradigm***, which takes into account the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, formal, and textural structures, the latter referring to instrumentation and orchestration.

Architectonic Procedures

Asamanasaw basically attempts to implement thematic materials borrowed from African sources (i.e. Ghanaian folk songs and other original melodies composed in that vein) within a scholarly idiom. In other words, it attempts to blend African melodies and/or rhythmic motifs within Western idiomatic structures. The tonal organization or their absences within the compositions that constitute *Asamanasaw* are based on the Western scholarly idiom and their stylistic features are consistent with either the pre-20th century or the 20th century Western practices.

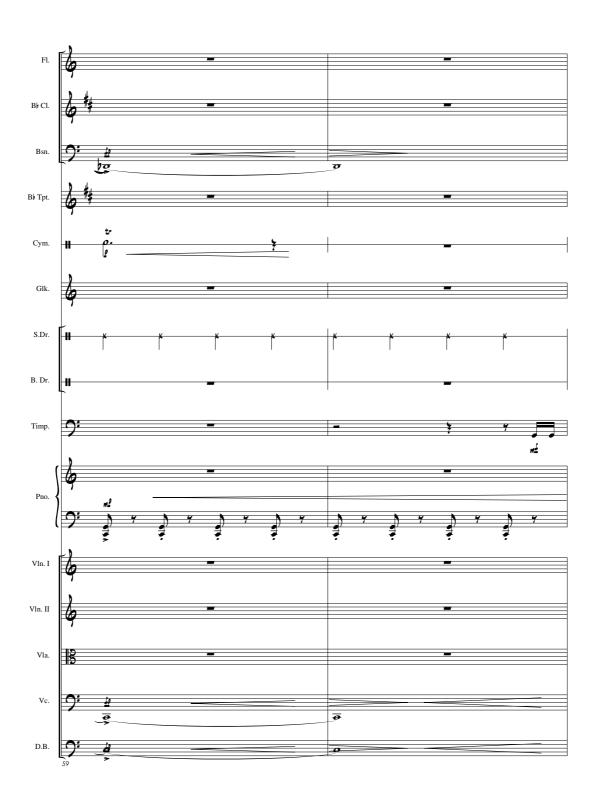The first movement attempts to create a polyphonic structure through the careful combination of different or independent rhythmic patterns and/or melodic lines. This is illustrated by the way each instrument uses its distinct melody or rhythmic pattern to complement each other to this effect, in a

124

concerto style. It actually vivifies the rise and the invitation all *'Nananom Nsamanfo'* to dance. Although it is dancelike in nature, it is not the main dance.

The second movement, i.e. the main dance, attempts to utilize the rhythmic resources of contemporary Ghanaian Rap Music style to create a polyphonic musical setting, through imitation of rhythmic patterns of percussions by melodic instruments. It illustrates the main dance and the gradual retirement of nananom to their graves.

Analytical Paradigm

The analytical paradigm of the two movements constituting *Asamanasaw* focuses on five parameters including melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, formal, and textural structures, where appropriate. The ***melodic structures*** will account for the scalic organizations or simply pitch sets within their specific tonal framework versus its dilution or its absence; they will feature, where appropriate, the melodic motion, and progression as well as the articulation of the theme into units of structure with their cadential closures. The ***harmonic structure*** is limited to a description of the combination of pitches in relation to the extended tertian system (tall chords, and polychords), quartal harmony, quintal chords, duodecad, chord clusters, twelve tone chords, or possible combination of those systems. Rhythmically, the focus will be on divisive rhythms, additive rhythms, and syncopations. In relation to form, the analysis will examine the relation of each piece to or its departure from the conventional Rondo form, Simple Ternary form, Compound Binary, or Sonata form, Through-composed, Binary form, etc. Lastly, textural structures will focus on instrumental settings and their orchestration.

The First Movement

Asamanasaw, First Movement, is an instrumental piece for the orchestra circumscribed to the Piccolo, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in B flat, Bassoon, Contrabassoon, Flugal Horn, Violins I and II, Viola, Cello, and Contrabass. It serves as an opening to the whole work and is in the Intercultural style. The music is in three sections i.e. simple ternary form (**A′ ‖: BA′ :‖**), with introduction. These sections are clearly defined by the pace of change of chords in the music, also known as the harmonic rhythm. The introduction spans 66 measures and it is atonal in character. It metrically modulates form simple quadruple metre to compound duple metre. Following the introduction is the first section or **'A'** (in C Major), which spans 53 measures i.e. from measure 66 to 119. The second or the **'B'** section is a 'short diversion', which begins from measure 120, in the parallel Major (E flat Major) and ends at measure 163 with a brief modulation to the parallel minor i.e. C minor. The third section is a variation of **'A'**. It spans 24 measures i.e. from measure 164 to 188, also in C Major. Generally, the hemiola and the hocket techniques are the common compositional techniques used in this composition. This section is in 3/8 metre.

The setting for this piece is a quiet cemetery and is conceptualized in two broad sections. The first part opens in free music style utilizing insect sounds *(depicted in the piccolo)*, bird songs *(depicted in the flutes and oboes)*, a dirge, and other effects, to depict a typical perceived African cemetery; weird. The notational challenge of creating this scene is solved by the employment of gliding intervallic effects that employed freer rhythms, micro-tonal devices, and dissonance as illustrated in Example 1.

126

Example 1: Opening of the 1st Movement of *Asamanasaw*

The transcriptions made for this composition are as follows:

Example 2: Insects sound

Example 3: Bird song

Example 4: Breaking Sound

Example 5: Duodecad Sonority

127

Example 6: Creaky rhythmic pattern

Example 7: Blowing wind

Example 2 sounds like the non-stopping sounds insects make when played with the piccolos and the violins: **Example 3** is a bird song; **Example 4**, when played in the Basses, sounds like graves or tombs breaking; **Example 5** is duodecad sonority; **Example 5** helps to portray the creaky nature of this scene rhythmically; and **Example 6** represents the blowing wind.

The opening (bars 1 - 15) is followed at bar 16 by a slow dirge with a duodecad sonority accompaniment. It spans 18 measures. It is the followed by semi-demi quaver rising passages which actually symbolises the rise (bars 34 - 42). A short passage introduces the main melody and shortly after, the (**A ‖: BA′ :‖**), sections follow respectively.

The Second Movement

This Movement is circumscribed to the Flute, Clarinet in B flat, Trumpet in B flat, Bassoon, Cymbals, Snare drum, Bass drum, Timpani, Piano, Violins I and II, Viola, Cello, and Contrabass. The sonic sphere of this music is atonal. Pitches used are from a chromatic scale. This movement is actually represents the dance and the retirement of the *Nananom* to their graves. It is in ternary form (**A ‖: B :‖ A′**), and uses the common time signature. It is contrapuntal in nature and generally uses a lot of effects i.e.

128

articulations. The **(A)** section spans 23 measures; the **(B)** section, 30 measures; and the **(A′)** section, 27 measures. Most of the effects used in the opening of the first movement serve as accompaniment for this movement.

The opening i.e. the prelude to the **(A)** section, is very loud and it is in unison. Soon after, the Basses and the Piano continue with a bridge punctuated by call and response dialogue, and other rhythmic accompaniments, which ushers in the main melody at bar 13. This melody is played by the Clarinet and the Bassoon and it spans 7 measures. The **(B)** section is contrapuntal in nature with many motives and patterns interacting and complimenting each other to vivify the real nature of a perceived ghost dance in the African perspective. This section spans 30 bars and it is then repeated.

The recapitulation is slightly varied in tempo and in instrumentation to depict *Nananom* retiring to their graves after the dance (bars 53 - 82). The atmosphere of this piece is created generally through the use of lot tremolos, gliding effects, and clashing tones. Chords were not really employed so much to create the sonic sphere of this movement i.e. atonal. Its character was generally created through the careful distribution of pitches to each instrument from the chromatic scale. There were no metrical modulations in this piece as compared to the 1ˢᵗ Movement, just tempo fluctuations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

To begin with, the thesis introduced the rationale for *Asamanasaw* in Chapter one. It also reviewed some literature relating to the thesis topic and research guide. It has described the method that was used to collect the data. These methods in no particular order were participant observation, interviewing, and field notes. The process through which the data was collected has also been presented. The locations for the first part of this thesis were also described briefly. Challenges that arose during the fieldwork have also been discussed. I have presented the full scores of the Two Movement Composition in Chapter Three. Chapter Four focused on the analysis of the entire piece through sectional analysis and description of the constructional processes involved.

Conclusions

The thesis used the notion of life after death i.e. Ancestral veneration in the African traditional religion to create an imaginary music about *Nananom Nsamanfo* coming out of their tombs to save a dance. The research answered the following questions:

- Do the people of Bentsir Asafo Community of Cape Coast still extant the belief of ancestral veneration?

130

- Which materials could be exploited from the findings and adopted by the composer for a new work?

- How could these materials be used effectively to create and capture an essence of an African *Danse Macabre*? *and,*

- How could a listener be guided to enjoy the new innovation?

At the end of the research, the following conclusions were arrived at; the research revealed that the people of Bentsir Asafo community still extant the belief of Ancestral veneration even though modernization has sunk or taken away most of their beautiful cultural creations handed down to them by their ancestors. Again, materials or ideas for musical compositions exist in abundance for composers to dwell on for the creation of new and original works. For example, the idea used in the creation of this novelty; the collection and usage of absurd 'Sonics' *(animal sounds, insects cries, bird songs, etc)*; and the exploration of rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic resources of indigenous ensembles. The thesis also vividly showed how these materials were put together to create a novelty which captured an essence of an *African Danse Macabre*. It is now obvious that carefully and creatively playing with 'indigenous materials' and 'ideas' help to create new musics without difficulty, as demonstrated in the two-movement composition. The analysis would also go a long way to guide listeners to appreciate and enjoy the innovation.

Recommendations

There are lots and lots of materials and ideas a composer can lay hand on to create new music. Euba (1992) emphasises this by saying that 'certainly several lines of musical development can coexist within the same culture and

131

it is not unnatural for people to be multimusical in the same way that they can be multilingual.' *Asamanasaw* as a musical piece speaks for itself and contributes to new knowledge in a way that words alone could not have done. Creating a musical artwork is always accompanied by the experience of letting go as the work quite suddenly belongs to the public domain (Goldhahn 2009).

I will also like to suggest that contemporary African scholars of music composition should do more than getting glued to the one way style of composition taught them. I observed that breaking barriers to satisfy this dissonance tradition can be very challenging but relying on indigenous materials or resources and other ideas, e.g. the notion used in the creation of this work, can help greatly to tackle this challenge and also help in creating new innovations. (Awolalu, 1976)

REFERENCE

Agawu, K. (2011). 'The challenge of African art music'. *Circuit: Musiques* , 21(2):49–64.

Anku, W. (2000). *'Circles and time: a theory of structural organization of rhythm in African music.*

Ansah, K. T. (2009). *Aziza danz: exploring rhythmic resources of agbekor drum music in contemporary composition. Cape Coast: University of Cape Coast, Ghana, unpublished Master's dissertation.*

Awolalu, J. O. (1976). *What is African Traditional Religion? Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol.10, No. 2. Retrieved August 11, 2013 from http:// www.studiesincomparativereligion.com.*

Corvisier, A. (1998). *'Les danses macabres.'.* Presses Universitaires de France. ISBN 2-13-049495-1.

Ejizu, C. (1986). *Igbo Ritual Symbol.* Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers Ltd. .

Euba, A. (1993). *Modern African Music: A Catalogue of Selected Archival Materials at Iwalewa-Haus.* Bayreuth: Iwalewa Haus, University of Bayreuth.

Gehman, R. (1989). *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective.* Kijabe: East African Educational Publishers Limited.

Gyekye, K. (1998). *African Cultural Values.* Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company Limited.

Gyekye, K. (1995). *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme, revised edition.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press; original edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Herbermann, C. a. (1908). *Dance of Death. In The Catholic Encyclopaedia.* New York: Robert Appleton Company.

Mereku, C. W. (2013). Creative re-constructional approaches to twenty-first century African classicism: illustrations from my piano trio-Pivicafrique. *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa is co-published by NISC (Pty) Ltd and Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group .*

Nketia, J. H. (1994). *African Pianism Twelve Pedagogical Pieces.* Accra: Afram Publications Ltd.

Nketia, J. H. (1983). 'Developing contemporary idioms out of traditional music. *' In International Music Council. Musicological Congress (Studia Musicologica), Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences,* 81–97.

Opoku, K. A. (1978). *West Africa Traditional Religion.* Accra: FEP International Private Limited.

Schmidt, G. (2005). *The Role of Ancestors and Living-Dead in the Life of Kenyan Christians.* Kenya: Maryknoll Institute of African Studies of Saint Mary's University of Minnesota/USA and Tangaza College, Nairobi/Kenya.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *Interviewing and Informant & Doing Participant Observation. In: Ethnographic Interview.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, pp. 55-68, 53-62.

Taylor, J. (2001). *Christian presence amid African Religions.* Nairobi: Acton

    Publishers.

Weiss, R. (1994). *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of*

    Qualitative Interview Studies. The Free Press.

Wilson, D. (2006). *Hans Holbein: Portrait of an Unknown Man.* London:

    Pimlico Revised Edition.

Wolf, M. (1992). *A Thrice-Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism, and*

    Ethnographic Responsibility. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

APPENDIX

Interview Guide

1. Do stories about the dead exist?

2. Who are ancestors?

3. How do you become one?

4. Are there any special rites which accompany the dead?

5. Do ghosts exist?

6. If they do, how are they like?

7. What sounds can one be possibly confronted with at the cemetery?

136