



# Pat's Polemics

by Pat Barrett

Sat, 04 Nov 2006: **Me and the African Diaspora**

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My wife and I bought a pig-in-a-poke, tickets to a performance at ASU, but it had to do with the influence of African dance on American. I've seen these before, even done one or two, but I was unprepared for what I saw. Outstanding performances out of African and Afro-American traditions.

As we sat there, a lady leaned over us to talk to a gentleman, a gentleman whom I had mistaken for a street person. It turned out both were scholars of ethnomusicology and dance, specializing in Indonesian traditions. They had flown in for this performance, bringing students with them. "Wow," I thought, "This must be something special." And it sure was.

African drummers brought out a troupe of young girls who danced, but this was after an Ewe master drummer offered an invocation. I heard the name Ganyo in the otherwise impenetrable Ewe and so asked him during the intermission if he had indeed invoked that name. He had. I told him I had studied under Mr. Ayitee at UCLA in 1963, the teacher of C.K. Ganyo, Ewe master drummer, now deceased. Starting with my friend, Valentin, all my teachers of drumming have been Ewe, three of them. Quite a coincidence.

The lady who had conversed over my head I had said she was from UCLA, so my wife and I recounted to her our story of my summer there studying with Kwabena Nketia. It turned out she had been there, too, and knew Mantle Hood, the great American ethnomusicologist.

It was so nice to talk to someone who knew all these people from a field I have always been fascinated with but have never pursued professionally. My wife is a walking reservoir of African-American culture. She was raised in East Texas amid trees with the moss hanging down. I can put on a recording supposedly of ancient lineage, made by some ethnomusicologist back in the 40s, and my wife will come dancing through the room saying, "Oh, we used to dance off that", things like nailing a wire up to the porch, sticking snuff bottles under it, and tapping it with a stick - a descendant of the African earth bow. I took her to see Black Orpheus and she immediately recognized the reflexes in the candomble scenes of the Pentecostal church services she had been raised in. I fell in love then.

We visited the church she was baptized in this summer - a classic little church with a drum kit filling a good part of the sanctuary and tambourines piled high. The birthplace of American music. It's a sign of good changes that in this very heart of Black culture and the still-segregated Black life of East Texas, the pastor's musical director is White.

So it was with great pleasure that I observed the huge and sophisticated crowd for this wonderful performance, recognizing as it did the continuity of African culture throughout the Diaspora on down to the step dancers at my high school. I can remember when Africans were written out of our culture and their music denigrated. Just this past month I sent a 1966 AMSCO Spanish III workbook to a colleague and noted that in all of the material on Latin-American culture, history and geography, Africa never appeared once and the prefix Afro- only once, describing the rumba as an "Afro-cuban dance", an expression that would not have allowed readers in the 60s to make any connection between African and Latin-American cultures. El Camino Real, the dominant textbook of the 50s, mentions Afro-Latin culture once in the second level book.

Things have changed and for the better. I am taking my granddaughter to the performance tomorrow, she loves dance so much. She'll see performers from Liberia, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, and the U.S. The rhythms are authentic and overpowering, the costumes stunning, the choreography dazzling and inspiring. She'll especially enjoy the little girls. I liked the big ones.