

**“Grooving at the Nexus:
The Intersection of African Music and Euro-American
Ethnomusicology at UCLA”**

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As part of UCLA’s 1999-2000 “Year of Africa” thrust, Dr. Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje in the Ethnomusicology department asked me to explore the history of African music at UCLA. Through interviews with African and North American ethnomusicologists involved with UCLA’s Institute of Ethnomusicology, as well as archival research, I have been able to piece together an intriguing story, small portions of which I would like to present to you today. I will first discuss the birth of the Institute of

Ethnomusicology at UCLA, exploring how performance of African music became central to its functioning. I’ll then relate the stories of several professors and students over the years, and the creative and intellectual milieu in which they worked. I’ll conclude with some implications of this history for the future study of African music.

Throughout the presentation, I’ll show pictures from the archives at UCLA, and more recent photographs. Some of the people you’ll see on the overheads are here with us today, so I also hope to leave enough time for them to correct my errors, and for you to ask questions of them. One initial caveat: I wrote this paper as part of a celebration of African music at UCLA, and so it is more celebratory than critical. However, it points to issues beyond UCLA, and I invite you to use this bit of history to spark your own thinking about the practice of ethnomusicology where you find yourself.

Overview

The creation of the Institute of Ethnomusicology at UCLA in 1961 set the stage for a new kind of relationship between European-American and African musicians and scholars—I use the terms European-American, Euro-American and North American synonymously, to refer to scholars trained in academic traditions based in Europe and North America. This relationship began with the wide-eyed naiveté of European travel logs in the fifteenth century (Arom 1991, 45), moved to the scientific researcher/object-of-study relationship of the early 20th century, followed by the growth of scholarship by African musicologists in the mid-1900s of which Western scholars were largely unaware (Nketia 1998, 62). In the early 1960s, philosophical, educational, personal, and financial forces converged to force the change from a monologue *about* African music by European Americans, to a dialogue *between* Africans and North Americans. My title points to the central aspect of this story: Africans and non-Africans grooving together – by ‘groove’ I mean perform, make, and enjoy music. This grooving invigorated and informed the scholarly dialogue that happened simultaneously. Dialogic grooving—instigated by the Institute of Ethnomusicology’s invitation to African scholars and musicians to come to UCLA to teach—has profoundly affected African music scholarship in the United States, and provides a model for African scholarship in general.

Beginnings



Mantle Hood was the central personality in the creation of UCLA's Institute of Ethnomusicology. After receiving Bachelor's and Master's degrees from UCLA, and a Ph.D. in Holland, Hood arrived at UCLA in 1954 to teach in

the music department with the goal of forming an ethnomusicology research unit (Hood 1985); he stayed until 1974. In 1959 he and Boris Kremenliev wrote a proposal to form the Institute, which officially came into existence in 1961. Hood had developed many relationships with Indonesian musicians, and so a gamelan orchestra became the centerpiece of the Institute's studies. A plan to study African music was relegated to an addendum in the proposal, outlining Hood's intent to travel to Ghana in 1962 and 1963 (Hood and Kremenliev 1959).

Hood's trips to Ghana resulted from communication with the other central figure in our story: Professor J. H. Kwabena Nketia, a Ghanaian composer and scholar. Prof



Nketia—as his students came to call him—had first visited UCLA while studying in the U.S. on a Rockefeller grant in 1959. With a travel and study grant from the Ford Foundation, Nketia made a return visit to UCLA in 1961. In 1963, James S. Coleman, the director of the UCLA African Studies Center, invited Nketia (Nketia 2000, 2) to teach a one-time summer

course in African music, unique in the U.S. at the time. In the spirit of reciprocation, Nketia asked Hood to go to Ghana in order to teach in the Institute of African Studies that Nketia was helping to establish at the University of Ghana in Legon. Soon after, Dr. Hood requested that two master musicians from Nketia's Institute come to work as instructors at UCLA. These two were Robert Anane Ayitee—an Ewe master drummer—and Robert Osei Bonsu—an Asante master drummer (Nketia 2000, 3,7).

Thus, African music studies at UCLA—and, essentially, in the United States—began with two African performers and a scholar. Hood's concept of bimusicality—that scholars can and should learn musics much as they learn languages—fuelled the belief in the necessity of performance in a musical tradition in order to understand it, and the importance of indigenous experts to teach it.

Performance

After Ayitee (Hood 1999, 41-42) and Bonsu, the next performer who came to UCLA was an Asante master drummer, Kwasi Badu, in 1969 (Nketia 2000, 8; Hood 1999, 42). Hood met Badu in Ghana, and Badu gave him lessons on the *atumpan* drums. Soon after he began studying with Badu in Ghana, the Asantehene—paramount chief—heard Hood practicing on these talking drums and asked for a performance. Here is Hood's retelling of what happened next:

So, I got in front of the drum, and [Badu] tapped out something on my shoulders, and apparently I executed it beautifully, very accurately, but . . . when it was finished, that whole gathering just roared [with laughter]. . . . So, I looked up. I knew, at least thought, I had played it reasonably well and wondered what the humor was. And so I went back.

The Asantehene complimented me: 'Very well done,' and I said, 'Incidentally, what was I saying on the drums?' And the professor of the university said, 'Well, you said, 'I am only a foolish white man'' (Hood 1985, 48-50).

broader public by playing in schools and conferences, and organizing festivals of world music; this tradition continues even now (Anderson 1999, 15).



Thus, from its inception, the Institute of Ethnomusicology—with support from the African Studies Center, linguistics department, and funds from the Ford Foundation—provided a context where Africans taught North American students, and where they grooved together.

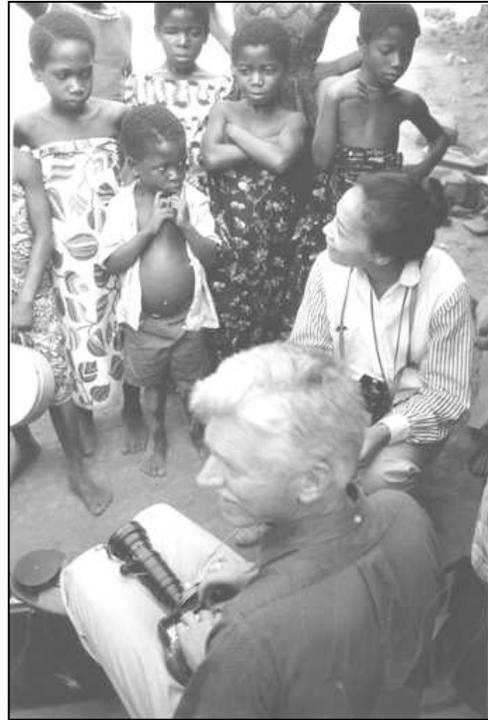
Atumpan



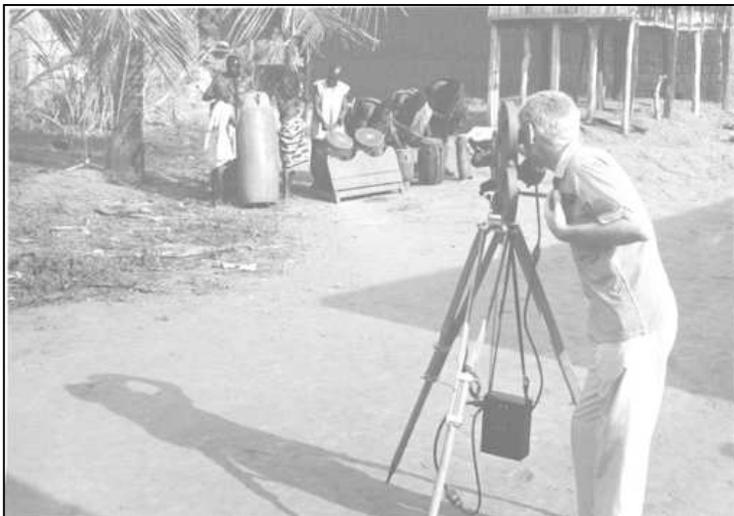
One of the most influential products of these early dialogues is the film “Atumpan: The Talking Drums of Ghana,” shot by Mantle Hood in 1964. “Atumpan” reenacts the commissioning and construction of a pair of *atumpan* drums for an Asante paramount chief. The creation of this film is noteworthy for many reasons. First, it was an unprecedented collaboration between North American and African institutions—the Institute of Ethnomusicology and African Studies Center of UCLA,

and the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. Nketia translated and narrated the drum poetry, his students worked as scriptwriters and camera crew, and Hood filmed—collaboration in creation, dialogic grooving.

Second, it exemplifies the effective approach of using one culture as a basis for teaching African music as a whole. As Nketia explains, “We all realize that there is a lot of diversity [in Africa], but that doesn’t mean to say that you can’t take any of the diverse forms and look at what makes it African. So that each one



you take merely exemplifies something bigger. But until you [really] **know** what the



bigger thing is, looking at one small example enables you to get some idea of what the bigger thing might be like” (Nketia 2000, 5).

Third, the film depicts performance both in a traditional context as well as recontextualized in a

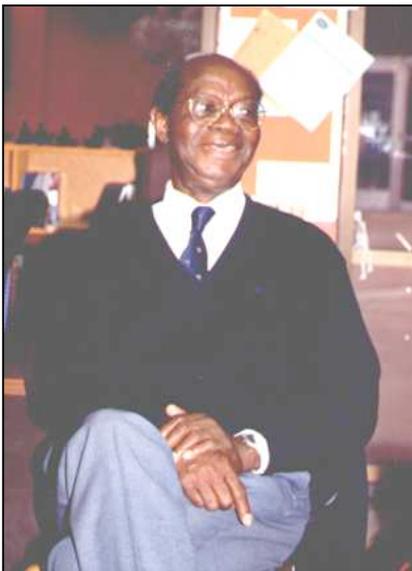
contemporary setting (p. 5); it treats change seriously.

As a final interesting note about the film, **Atumpan** became a favorite of Ghana’s first post-colonial president, Kwame Nkrumah, who used to show it to dinner guests. The parts he liked best were – in Dr. Nketia’s words – “where the wife of the drum carver

comes with the food and sets it down like exactly what happens in the village. Every time it would get there he would chuckle” (Nketia 2000, 4).

Professors

In 1964, Klaus Wachsmann—a German with extensive experience in Uganda (1963-1968; KPW Festschrift Committee 1977) established the first formal lecture course on African music (“Music of Africa”, Music 176). Not only was Wachsmann the foremost European Africanist of the period, but he brought with him an extensive collection of African instruments (DeVale; Hood interview). He profoundly shaped the professional and personal lives of many students—including Lois Anderson, Max Brandt, Roderic Knight, Isaiah Mapoma, and others, and Prof Nketia invited him to teach in Ghana. That same year, a performance ensemble of Ewe and Ashanti music and dance

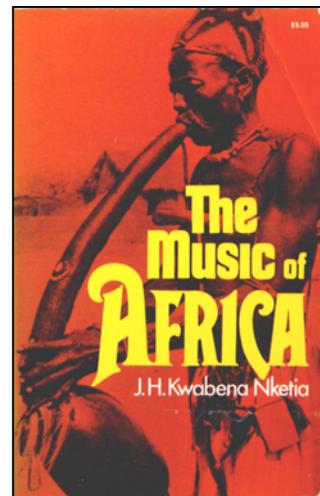


was offered. Hood and Wachsmann also incorporated African research into other classes.

In 1968, J.H.K. Nketia (DjeDje 1989) arrived at UCLA and taught there until 1983. He is the foremost scholar on African music today, with an illustrious career: Director of the International Centre for African Music and Dance at the University of Ghana, Legon;

Professor Emeritus at UCLA; former Chair and Andrew Mellon Professor of

Music at the University of Pittsburgh; and so on. Nketia has written extensively on theory and method in ethnomusicology and issues related to African music. One of his seminal works is *The Music of Africa*, which he developed extensively while at UCLA; Nketia is also an accomplished composer.





After Nketia came Ron Vlasak and Sue Carole DeVale (1983-1993), and one of Nketia's students, Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje (DjeDje 1999). Dr. DjeDje has been at UCLA since 1979, and was the force behind all of the grooving and dialoguing that occurred during the Year of Africa, which I will describe in a moment.

Students

But first, students. The Institute of Ethnomusicology began as part of the Music Department, changing its name to “Program in Ethnomusicology”—on a level equal to programs in music history, theory and composition, systematic musicology, and music education—in the mid-1970s; it has since become the Department of Ethnomusicology in the School of Arts and Architecture. The significant majority of students in this academic stream have been European Americans. The first to be awarded the Ph.D. in ethnomusicology with an African focus was Lois Anderson, who studied in Uganda. Others include Roderic Knight, who conducted his research in Gambia, and has become one of the most respected non-Manding authorities on the *kora*; James Koetting; and Craig Woodson, an educator who did his research in Ghana and whose most recent adventure has him developing ways to construct musical

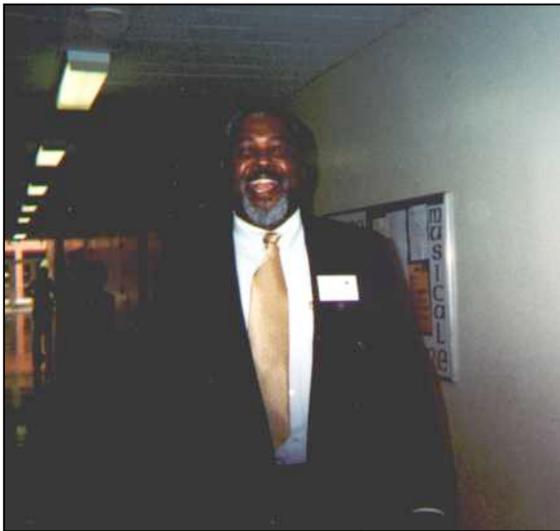


instruments for the first colony of humans on Mars. There are many professional and personal stories to be told from this group.

In addition, since the 70s, there has been a growing number of African Americans in the program. Jacqueline DjeDje was the first African American to receive the Ph.D. in ethnomusicology at UCLA. Other African American students include William Carter, who wrote on Akan court music; Barbara Hampton, who performed a pioneering study of women in Ga musical life; and Karin Patterson, who wrote her thesis on South African Zulu music.

Finally, Africans from diverse regions have studied ethnomusicology at UCLA. In the 1960s and 70s, Tunji Vidal—a Nigerian, Kazadi wa Mukuna—a Congolese, and Nissio Fiagbedzi—a Ghanaian, were in the program. African students there in the 80s included the Kenyan Matilda Mutere. In the 90s, James Makubuya from Uganda, Chuks Iwotor from Nigeria, and Jean Kidula of Kenya have studied ethnomusicology at UCLA. I'd like to tell one story that illustrates some of the issues African students have faced in the field of ethnomusicology.

Kazadi wa Mukuna was one of the first students in the ethnomusicology program



at UCLA. He is a Congolese man who came to the U.S. with The International Christian Youth Exchange (ICYE) program in 1961. He soon moved from business studies at El Camino College to music at UCLA. He received his B.A. in 1966, his M.A. in ethnomusicology in 1970, and his doctorate in 1978. He performed archival

research in Tervuren, Belgium, fieldwork in Brazil (writing his dissertation in

Portuguese), taught at the University of Zaire, coordinated music for the International

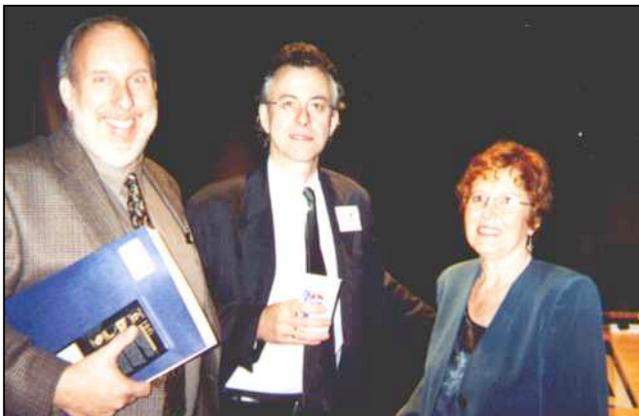
Folk Festival for the Smithsonian Institution, and taught at Michigan State (1978-80)—a very accomplished scholar. However, for three years in the late 80s, he was forced to enter the restaurant business in Washington, D.C. because he could not find a job in music. One day when he was in this period of moving from job to job, he received an invitation to present a paper at a conference in Berlin. Here is how Kazadi describes what happened:

I refused to go, because I was bitter. I had been looking for a job for so long, and now you want me to come and give a paper? But I went, and lo and behold, who was there: all these big guys were there: Nketia, Tre van Khe, Gunter was there They were shocked: “So! We heard you went into the restaurant business ... why would you do that?” “You guys don’t give me a job. . . hey. I’ve gotta eat.” “Oh, no, you’ve got to leave the restaurant and come back to academia.” So I pulled back and told them off. I really told them. I said, “Well. Jobs are gotten because . . . someone pulls strings. **You** are the people that get the jobs for everybody else. Because if . . . they ask you- ‘Oh, we got a position here for Chinese music.’ They’ll ask one of you, who do you suggest? None of you has suggested my name. That’s why I’ve been writing 300 letters of application and nothing has come my way. I’ve gotten these degrees for nothing—just exercise.

A month later, Nketia called Kazadi and asked if he was interested in a teaching position at Kent State University. He has been a professor there since 1989.

Intellectual Energy

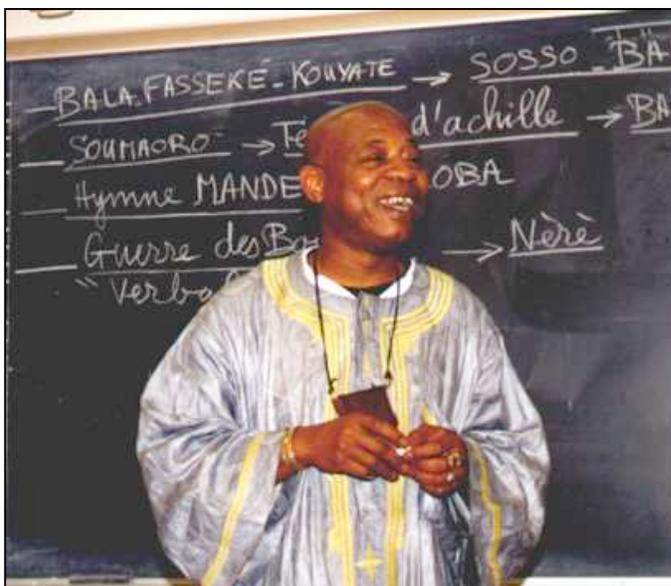
The unique confluence of great intellects, performance, and the newness of Hood’s model of bimusicality created a heady stew of intellectual production. Students recall the Wednesday Afternoon Seminars—Music 280A—with awe. Hood, nicknamed “the Orchestrator” by Charles Seeger, would lead far-ranging discussions dealing with the very essence of music, its meaning, its measurements, its relationship to society. Students and other scholars hammered out many ideas that have been important to ethnomusicology, down in that basement room. Scores of articles and books about African music have resulted from UCLA professors and students: sections from Hood’s *The Ethnomusicologist*, *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology, Volume V*, the two volume



African Musicology Series, Nketia's *Music of Africa*, and most recently, *Turn Up the Volume*, an important compilation of essays that accompany the UCLA Fowler Museum's recent exhibit on African music. I could mention many more.

Year of Africa

The history of African music at UCLA reached a climactic moment in the 1999-2000 academic year. There were concurrent exhibits on different aspects of African music at three Los Angeles museums: The Fowler Museum of Cultural History, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the California African-American Museum; a



symposium on the globalization of African music; visiting scholar-performers Donald Kachamba-*kwela* musician from Malawi, and Cheick-Tidiane Seck-Malian traditional and popular recording artist; numerous special lectures; and the visit of Joseph Shabalala of Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

The sometimes frenetic activity of all of these events sparked not only fatigue, but intellectual and musical creativity, and an excitement about African music on the campus as a whole. Courses taught by Seck and Kachamba resulted in significant new research into Manding and Malawian music. The Ethnomusicology @ UCLA Artists Series has released **West**

African Music Meets Jazz (2002) a recording of Seck with UCLA students and other artists, accompanied by extensive liner notes; a posthumous release of recordings of Kachamba are in progress. Concerts, museum exhibits, and lectures also drew standing-room-only crowds not only from UCLA, but from the greater Los Angeles community. This extended UCLA's early emphasis on outreach "beyond the ivory tower."



Conclusion

A nexus is a place for connections, a center or focus of activities (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th edition). Characteristics of the ethnomusicology nexus at UCLA include high energy and African scholars and musicians teaching people of many cultural backgrounds to perform and think about African music. Dialogue. Groove. The people and ideas that have emanated from this context have exercised profound effects on the study of music around the United States. In addition, scholars from this program have gone on to found departments of ethnomusicology in other universities, bringing many of the same values of dialogue and performance that they encountered at UCLA.

This brief survey has resulted in two lessons I'd like to leave with you. First, it is essential that we maintain and extend Mantle Hood's vision of bimusicality—or, as I believe he would prefer, 'polymusicality' or merely 'musicality.' That is, we must continue to resist a framework where Western scholars talk to each other *about* Africans, to one in which scholars and musicians from all continents learn *from* each other and create *together*. The most important aspect of incorporating performance and musicianship into the scholarly study of music is not the insights it affords into the music

itself, but the cross-cultural relationships it helps engender. It is not easy: forming a nexus where people from different cultures can create together requires the expenditure of a great deal of time, money, and creative energy.

Second, one result of this deep interaction between people—rather than merely ideas *about* people—will be a recognition that identity is a complex issue. For example, some people identify closely with a single culture and language and music. Others have tied into the world more broadly and define themselves according to music, or their creative urge to push boundaries. Jean Kidula, the Kenyan graduate of UCLA I mentioned, told me that when her students at a US university where she taught learned she played the piano, they responded, “ ‘You play keyboard, Oh my God! You are an



African.” She expands: “I think that’s sad that people try to push you into this box because an African should do this. Or because you’re Italian you should only study that Italian stuff. [A]s a musician, you already know that. So what happens is, you get

into other music because it makes. . . you start incorporating it into your own being” (Kidula 1999). Cheick-Tidiane Seck bristles at the moniker ‘world musician’: “‘World music’ is third world music. I cannot be in it. I refuse. You can’t reduce me to one style” (Seck 2000).

UCLA has served as a point of connection for the study and performance of African music. Scholarship about Africa is ultimately not communicating ideas about other people. Rather, it’s about grooving, creating *with* each other through a process of dialogue and respect.

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Brian with Prof Nketia and Dr. Kidula