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Concert: African Drumming and Dance

Ithaca College African Drumming and Dance Ensemble

Baruch Whitehead

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AFRICAN DRUMMING AND
DANCE

Baruch Whitehead,
Music Director

Ford Hall
Tuesday, 12 October, 2010
7:00 p.m.

African Drumming and Dance

Upper West Region

Bewaa

Lobi (Dagara Funeral Music from Northern Ghana)

Alfred Kpebesaane

Gola (Dagara Recreational Music)

Ye Ye Kole (Dagara Recreational Music)

The source of Dagaaba communities in the pre colonial era remain a point of debate. The evidence of oral tradition is that the Dagaaba are an outgrowth of the Mole-Dagbani group which migrated to the semi-arid Sahel region in the fourteenth century CE. They are believed to have further migrated to the lower northern part of the region in the seventeenth century. From well before the appearance of Europeans, the Dagaaba lived in small scale agricultural communities, not centralised into any large state like structure. Ethnological studies point to oral literature which tells that the Dagaaba periodically, and ultimately successfully, resisted attempts at conquest by states in the south of modern Ghana, as well as the Kingdoms of Dagbon, Mamprugu and Gonja in the north. One thesis based on oral evidence is that the Dagaaba formed as a breakaway faction of Dagbon under Na Nyanse. The colonial borders, demarcated during the Scramble for Africa, placed them in northwestern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso, as well as small populations in Côte d'Ivoire.

Greater Accra Region

Kpatsa (Ga tribe recreational music)

Kpatsa is a traditional Ghanaian dance of the Ga-Adangme people; it is said to be associated with *abodo* (dwarfs). The music and dance imitate the limping, uneven walking and dancing of the dwarfs which some people claim to have seen. ('Dwarfs' should be understood as supernatural beings – like fairies.) The Ga-Adangme people live in central southern Ghana around the capital, Accra and this dance is said to have originated in Ada, a coastal town about 100km east of Accra. *Kpatsa* was part of an annual festival and is now frequently performed at durbars (gatherings of chiefs and people), funerals, and at Christmas or Easter celebrations.

Worlds of Music Class

Volta Region

Sowu (Ewe Tribe, Festival Dance)

Sowu is called the “dance of life” because it teaches the traditional values of the Ewe people to the youth through movement. As with almost all African dances, the movement, drumming and song must be together and interact with each other, like members of a community.

The Ewe people occupy southeastern Ghana and the southern parts of neighboring Togo and Benin. Oral tradition suggests that the Ewe immigrated into Ghana before the mid-15th century.

African Drumming and Dance

Africa Unites

Alfred Kpebesaane and Sulley Imoro

Nigeria

Calabash Music (Nigeria, women water gathering dance)

Volta Region

Atsiagbekor (Ewe war dance)

The **Atsiagbekor** is a contemporary version of the Ewe war dance Atamga (Great (ga) Oath (atama) in reference to the oaths taken by people before proceeding into battle. The movements of this present-day version are mostly in platoon formation and are not only used to display battle tactics, but also to energize and invigorate the soldiers. Today, Atsiagbekor is performed for entertainment at social gatherings and at cultural presentations.

One of the outstanding features of the dance is the interaction between the master drummer and the dancers. Every rhythmic theme played on the master drum has a corresponding sequence of dance movements which is timed to precisely match the drum rhythms. Atsiagbekor songs constitute an important heritage of Ewe oral tradition. Most of the songs contain historical references to their chiefs, war leaders, migration stories, themes relating to the invincibility of the Ewes against their enemies, themes of loyalty, bravery, and death etc. To watch an Atsiagbekor performance today in Ghana is to watch scenes, which may have their actual origins in battles that were fought as the Ewes trekked through hostile countries in search of peace.

World of Music Class

Northern Region

Gyl Piece

Alfred Kpebesaane, Alpha

Bamaya (The Valley is Wet: Dagomba, rain dance)

Bamaya, a Dogomba harvest dance usually performed by men in ladies' skirts, involves wiggling of the pelvis. This story is believed to have started because there was no rain in the village. The villagers consulted the elder who was over one hundred years old. He told them to sacrifice animals to the ancestors but still no rain so they returned to him. The elder told them he had a dream and the ancestors told him that the women should dance and the rain would come. However, women were not allowed to dance so the men dressed as women performed the dance and the rain came as long as they continued to dance. The dancing lasted all night.

Greater Accra

Fume Fume

(Ga tribe- spiritual healing dance of the ancestors)

Mustapher Tetteh Addy, the founder of the Music Academy at Kokrobitey, Accra, created Fume Fume music and dance. The energy and vigor of this dance takes your entire soul into another realm. The dancers wear grass skirts characteristic to that of the ancient warriors of the land.

“*Funtre ma ye ye yee*”... a call for Fume Fume dancers, they charge into the dance ring. It is a creative dance with explosive energetic movements based on Ghanaian traditions.

Biographies

Sulley Imoro was eight years old when he began learning African drumming and dance from his father, a dancer well-known throughout his native Ghana. “Anytime in the village when we didn’t have entertainment, Father would bring the drums out and play,” Imoro said. “Sometimes we didn’t have light in the village, and if the moon was bright, we would come together and play and dance.” Since then, Imoro has become a renowned performer and teacher of traditional Dagomba drum, dance and song. Currently the director and founder of the Mbangba Cultural Troupe and the Degara Bewaa Culture group of Tamale, Imoro has performed throughout Africa, Europe and the United States. In Ghana, he and his troupe entertained numerous high-profile visitors, including former President Bill Clinton.

Percussionist Alfred Kpebesaane also calls Ghana his home. Although he performs with many traditional instruments from southern Ghana, his main instrument is the *gyil* (xylophone), which originates from the Dagara tribe in northwestern Ghana. He began performing at age 12 at elementary and government schools in his native land. A former student of Imoro’s, Kpebesaane has toured and performed at workshops and festivals throughout the world. He is a member of Imoro’s Mbangba Cultural Troupe.

Worlds of Music Students:

Christine Angevine
Briana Bender
William Benoit
Hannah Braun
Hailey Brent
Monami Choudhury
Brett Cohen
Nadine Cohen
Hillary Cox
Andrew Dobos
Heather Dube
Camille Dunham
Elise Edwards
Daniel Feinstein
Adam Francis
Casey Georgi
Caitlin Ghegan
Michael Glicini
Carly Halpin
Brian Keefe
Ninfa Leal
Alexandra Light
Christopher MacNamara
Edward Meyersburg
Tera Milligan
Bryan Moon
David Moore
Victoria Nasoff
Nicholas Patrikis
Brian Porreca
Daniel Purcell
Cherrie Rhodes
Maia Root
Taquesha Rowland
Jillian Rubin
Brittany Ruggiero
Sherry Shen
Rebecca Sibner
Helene Strange
Ian Tapler
Charles Thomas
Karl Thompsen
Danielle Torres
Paul Ukena
Alexis Wallace
Zachary Weg
Emily Wilson

African Drumming and Dance Students:

Mikhail Admasu
Theresa Bargh
Daniel Bates
Brianna Bortz
Nick Dell'Anno
Alpha Diallo
Valerie Falconieri
Melissa Feron
Adam Francis
Allie Goldsmith
Juliana Gonzalez
Adam Gruschow
Jenny Harris
Donald Haviland
Samantha Hecht
Maima Jones
Kaitlin Kohberger
Andrew Loretz
Valerie Loucks
Nicole McAdoo
Dana McCalla
Shaileen McKenna
Stephanie Mercado
Carolyn Mohn
Natasha Tanner
Noah Vella
Michael Wade
Lauren Way
Jacqueline Widun
Amber Zadrozny