

# The Challenge of African Art Music

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### Résumé de l'article

Cet article livre des réflexions générales sur quelques défis auxquels les compositeurs africains de musique de concert sont confrontés. Le point de départ spécifique se trouve dans une anthologie qui date de 2009, *Piano Music of Africa and the African Diaspora*, rassemblée par le pianiste et chercheur ghanéen William Chapman Nyaho et publiée par Oxford University Press. L'anthologie offre une grande panoplie de réalisations artistiques dans un genre qui est moins associé à l'Afrique que la musique « populaire » urbaine ou la musique « traditionnelle » d'origine précoloniale. En notant les avantages méthodologiques d'une approche qui se base sur des compositions individuelles plutôt que sur l'ethnographie, l'auteur note l'importance des rencontres de Steve Reich et György Ligeti avec des répertoires africains divers. Puis, se penchant sur un choix de pièces tirées de l'anthologie, l'article rend compte de l'héritage multiple du compositeur africain et la façon dont cet héritage influence ses choix de sons, rythmes et phraséologie. Des extraits d'œuvres de Nketia, Uzoigwe, Euba, Labi et Osman servent d'illustrations à cet article.

# The Challenge of African Art Music

Kofi Agawu

In 2009, Oxford University Press published a five-volume anthology of *Piano Music of Africa and the African Diaspora* edited by Ghanaian pianist and scholar William Chapman Nyaho.<sup>1</sup> This unprecedented and potentially eye-opening event went by largely unnoticed. There were no book-signings in Accra, Berlin, Lagos, or London, no celebratory broadcasts on NPR, the BBC or VOA, and no recitals in Carnegie Hall or Wigmore Hall. Although notice of its publication appeared in the journal *Ethnomusicology*, it was decidedly low key.<sup>2</sup> Only a few educators and music lovers, among them members of piano teachers' guilds, some looking for new, perhaps exotic or at least different repertoire to adorn rather than replace the old canon, heard strains of the anthology's sound world from Nyaho's live demonstrations at their meetings.

How could this publication have gone unnoticed? How, indeed, have the controllers of discourse on African music been able to downplay the historical fact that black Africans since at least the middle of the nineteenth century, have routinely composed sonatas, études, suites and any number of arrangements of folk songs and negro spirituals, as well as operas, cantatas, choral anthems and symphonies?

Ours is a busy world. Events come and go, registering differentially on our radar screens according to our dispositions and expectations. Colonialism came and went, leaving its traces on politics and culture, but no one, it appears, has been waiting for a Mozart or Beethoven to emerge from the African continent. Saul Bellow famously gave voice to this prejudice: 'When the Zulus produce their Tolstoy we will read him.' And with that facile encapsulation of race-based superiority, our historical oppressors are absolved from looking out for the kind of music enshrined in Nyaho's anthology. 'When the Ewes produce their Bartók,' they might say, 'we will listen to him'.

1. Nyaho, 2009.

2. Rae, 2009, p. 146-151.

But there are other reasons. If African music includes traditional, popular and art music, then art music is the least prominent of the three. By this is meant art music's relatively limited presence in village and city, whatever its symbolic potency. Whereas traditional music is tied to ritual, social and entertainment functions that form the fabric of daily musical life, and whereas popular music, given its media-aided mode of circulation, has become unavoidable in urban and increasingly rural locations, art music in its modern guise as the performance of composed (written) scores for non-participating audiences reaches only small audiences. This poor showing is partly due to the recent histories of African nations, with political, economic and social factors impinging on the training of musicians, the availability of patronage, and audience reception. Another factor is the nature of the relationships between art and traditional music, on one hand, and art and popular music on the other.<sup>3</sup>

'African music' was once indexed primarily through its traditional music, in particular its drumming traditions, which seemed to hold a special fascination for (mostly foreign) observers from the fifteenth century on. Never mind that song rather than drumming was and remains the predominant mode of expression, never mind that the continent's nearly billion people represent a diversity of musical cultures whose cumulative richness is dramatically undermined each time we reduce 'African music' to 'African drumming' (on the jembe, no less!), and never mind that what is expressed on drums (and, for that matter, on many other African instruments) is so thoroughly infused with the sound and sense of various indigenous languages that those champions of drumming who routinely ignore its linguistic bases aren't really getting it. True, traditional music boasts a long and deep history—partly real, partly fanciful—with a different sound world from popular music. And yes, the elaborate and sophisticated structural procedures of traditional music performed solo or in ensemble on horns, xylophones, voices and drums have become better understood only in recent times, thanks to dedicated efforts of scholars like Simha Arom and David Locke seriously examining the structural rather than superstructural elements.<sup>4</sup> Soon, however, the priority enjoyed by traditional music had to contend with an emerging new music. Just as the modern African novel emerged in the twentieth century out of a vast and varied oral literature and in response to a network of outside stimuli comprising secular and religious literatures aimed at a new literate class, so African art music began to be cultivated in the new institutions that colonialism brought.<sup>5</sup>

The high value placed on African traditional music by ethnographers often overlooks the fact that its potentialities are best revealed not by gathering and

3. On the conditions of possibility for African art music, see Irele, 1993, p. 56-71.

4. See Arom, 1991 and Locke, 1987.

5. The broad impact of colonialism on African music is discussed in Agawu, 2003, p. 1-22.

confining samples of the music to sound archives and museums, but by probing the music compositionally, engaging it through creative violation. It is impossible to overestimate the quality and quantity of the kinds of knowledge that are produced from self-conscious manipulation of traditional music's materials and procedures. Unfortunately, though perhaps not surprisingly, ethnomusicologists have shown little interest in such music-on-music exploration. This task has been left to African scholar-composers like Akin Euba and his followers.<sup>6</sup>

There are many examples of compositional probing from traditions around the world showing the potential for enriched knowledge. Béla Bartók comes most readily to mind as a "role model for African composers in general."<sup>7</sup> There is exemplary fieldwork in Eastern Europe and North Africa, a large body of folk songs meticulously transcribed, and, best of all, a body of original compositions that range in content from the merest inflection of a folk tune by endowing it with an accompaniment that seems already derived from the tune itself, through learned manipulations of and additions to such tunes in the context of art music, to the most intricate and subtle incorporation of the aura of folk music into the most decidedly anti-folk environment of the string quartet, art music's most intellectual genre.

No wonder that Akin Euba, one of Africa's leading art music composers, is himself a disciple of Bartók. His notion of 'creative ethnomusicology' emphasizes the connection between field research and individual composition.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, his position suggests that the highest goal of research into traditional music at this time in history should be to stimulate original creations - paper-based musical composition by Africans.

A number of composers have grappled with 'folk' heritages of various sorts, among them Liszt, Dvorak, Moussorgsky, Kodály, Mahler, Vaughan-Williams, Berio and Britten. So what I have described as Bartókian, which also lies at the heart of the challenges for composing African art music, is indeed widespread, some would even say normal. There is, moreover, a sub-tradition marked by the appropriation of not just any folk music but African music specifically. Because 'African music' in this economy is always already folk music, it becomes a site of distant authenticity to which Euro-American composers can turn for musical and spiritual renewal. American minimalist Steve Reich's encounter with African music is a case in point. Reich studied Ghanaian drumming and made ample use of polyrhythmic textures including African bell patterns in numerous compositions.<sup>9</sup> Critics are divided on the significance of this aspect of his achievement. On the positive side are those who see in such a turn to others' music a way of rejuvenating an exhausted, if not dying,

6. For a valuable recent bibliography, see Sadoh, 2010, p. 485-502. A list of works up to 1992 is included in Euba, 1993.

7. Euba, 1999, p. 10.

8. On creative ethnomusicology, see Euba, 1989, p. 121-123. For one application, see Omojola, 2009.

9. Steve Reich describes his visit to Ghana in 2002 in Reich, 2002, p. 55-61.

Western tradition. Such critics sense a dissolution of boundaries and an expansion of the soundscape resulting from the new proximity of previously distant musical territories and creative strategies. On the negative side are, first, those who cannot abide the ineradicable asymmetries of power entailed in such appropriation of third-world music by first-world composers and, second, those who, at a purely aesthetic level, sense in the outcome of such encounters an inorganic collage of sound worlds starkly different from the more normative postmodern pastiche, play and quotation.

Ultimately, history will judge Reich's appropriation, but for now we can benefit from the aural light that his experimentation has shed on the nature of African bell patterns. To my ear, the function of time lines (in particular, the so-called 'standard pattern' consisting of seven strokes spread out with maximal evenness across a span of twelve eighth-notes<sup>10</sup>) in works like *Clapping Music*, *Electric Counterpoint*, or *Music for Pieces of Wood* differs radically from their function in Agbadza and Gahu, two of the traditional dances that Reich studied in Ghana, and which he subsequently described using Jones-style transcriptions.<sup>11</sup> Reich's usage does not *sound* African, partly because the environment in which the pattern appears is different. His investment in pulse-based repetition undermines the metrical fixity of Agbadza's and Gahu's periodic cycles. It effectively erases, or at least mutes, the danceable aura normally invoked by their time lines. From an African perspective, Reich's music seems enclosed in quotation marks.

All this jibes with the composer's stated intention to imitate structure rather than sound, procedure and technique rather than material content. The difference can be subtle, but the point remains that by seeking a creative rather than documentary engagement with African sources, Reich has made a significant contribution not only to our understanding of (his) new music but to our awareness of the structure and associations of a specific African rhythmic pattern.

Equally enlightening on the subject of Euro-American appropriations of African music is the case of Ligeti, whose professed fascination with certain African repertoires is well-known. The resulting creative acts reveal a complex, less mimetic relation between source and original art work. In a detailed inquiry into Ligeti's sources, Martin Scherzinger shows that the composer's fascination with Africa runs deeper than what might be casually inferred from the widely-read statement posted as a 'Foreword' to the English translation of Arom's *magnum opus*, *African Polyphony and Polyrhythm* (1991).<sup>12</sup> Telling inscriptions in the margins of the composer's sketches suggest a curiosity about Zimbabwean mbira music, Ugandan amandinda xylophone repertory, and

10. For a detailed treatment of the standard pattern, see Agawu, 2006, p. 1-46.

11. Reich, 2002, p. 60-62.

12. See Scherzinger, 2002, p. 227-262 and Ligeti, 1991.

Ghanaian Gyil xylophone, among many others. A broad range of music from Central, Eastern and Southern Africa, has also been studied extensively, thanks to the ethnographic and analytical writings of Arom and Kubik. Whether one senses a gap of similar magnitude between intention and realization (as in the case of Reich), or whether Ligeti's more abstract mode of appropriation ultimately erases any real traces of Africa from his music, thus aligning compositional credo with actual achievement, will require more discussion than is possible here. Ligeti's encounter with various African repertoires helps clarify the nature of multiplicity and simultaneity, and in the process conveys some of the compositional potential of African materials. He helps us to look to the future, to see possibilities that lie hidden within 'ordinary' elements.

Ligeti and Reich engaged African traditional music. In recent decades, however, 'African music' as a construction has been indexed through an astonishing variety of urban popular music: Afrobeat, Bikutsi, Highlife, Hiplife, Juju, Mbalax, Makossa, Mbaqanqa, Soukous, Taarab, and others too numerous to mention. Erstwhile charges that this music is derivative or beholden to mimicry are nowadays easily refuted, at least programmatically, and despite ongoing questions of motivation and power in the production of popular music—whose notion of hybridity legitimizes a given repertoire?—the phenomenal presence of its collective repertoires, like that of traditional music, puts art music to shame.

Significantly, scholarship on popular music does not automatically focus on what traditional music scholars would call its structural elements. Popular music is cited for its open quality, hence its potential to forge unities across boundaries. There are no equivalents in African popular music studies of the transcriptions *in extenso* and detailed technical discussion of rhythm, melody and polyphony found, for example, in A. M. Jones', Arom's or Gilbert Rouget's writings on traditional music.<sup>13</sup> Instead are consumer reactions, discussions of technological enablers and, perhaps most importantly, interpretations of meaning guided by culture and politics and indexed not so much through sound but through words. Words embody the genre's very worldiness. Popular music seizes a cosmopolitan audience, transcends ethnic, regional, and even national boundaries, and recontextualizes the ritual and intellectual bases of traditional music by rendering them, in effect, marginal to the overall effect of a given performance. Unlike ethnic-bound traditional music, this is surely one reason why broadcasting it to an ethnically diverse African population severely challenges producers who have to appeal to regional or local radio audiences, thus limiting the genre's reach. Popular music invites the listener/

13. Jones, 1959 ; Rouet, 1996.

dancer through its groove and harmonic conventionality to an enjoyable encounter that fulfills expectations.

Unlike African traditional music, popular music has not yet become a significant source of ideas and procedures for composers of art music. There is a certain affinity between traditional music and art music that does not exist between popular music and art music. And so, although popular and art music stand as reciprocal responses to Europe, although they are both urban phenomena, and although the 'charge' of hybridity could be leveled against them equally, they are also radically different in attracting different clienteles and enlisting different sources of creativity. The fact that part of the potential audience for Nyaho's anthology has been siphoned off by devotees of the less elitist popular music further explains why its publication did not make headlines.

In terms of the anthology itself, *Piano Music of Africa and the African Diaspora* has a strongly symbolic value. It acknowledges a range of African creativity in the written rather than the aural/oral sphere. It provides students of the piano with a hitherto marginalized repertory that includes works by Egyptian composers Halim El-Dabh, Riad Abdel-Gawad and Gamal Abdel-Rahim; Nigerian composers Akin Euba, Christian Onyeji and Joshua Uzoigwe; Ghanaian composers Gyimah Labi, J. H. Kwabena Nketia and Robert Kwami; South African composers Martin Scherzinger, Bongani Ndodana-Breen and Isak Roux; Sudanese composer Ali Osman; Congolese composer Bangambula Vindu; and African-British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, not to mention composers of the African diaspora located in Britain, Jamaica, Cuba, Canada and the United States. Piano recital programs may now be so diversified as to place an El-Dabh next to Chopin, a Labi next to Bartók, and an Uzoigwe next to Ligeti.

An anthology of new music should impress us in precisely that way: it should be new. By 'new' I do not only mean merely unprecedented; it must also possess a certain cutting-edge quality. As the first ever published anthology of this kind on this scale, this anthology meets the former criterion. How it negotiates the second criterion is a little more complicated. Certainly, all the music collected here dates from the twentieth century and most of it is by living composers. But to determine whether expectations regarding autonomy and subjectivity, for example, are met, demands a larger context for analysis by reviewing earlier efforts going back to the nineteenth century. We would also need to review previous scholarly accounts, starting with Olabode Omojola's 1995 pioneering study,<sup>14</sup> Akin Euba's reflections on the tradition as participant as well as observer,<sup>15</sup> and essays by, among others, Martin Scherzinger, Omojola, Joshua Uzoigwe, Godwin Sadoh, Paul Konye and George Dor.<sup>16</sup> Since

14. Omojola, 1995.

15. See in particular Euba, 1989.

16. See Scherzinger, 2004, p. 584-613; Omojola, 1994, p. 533-543; Uzoigwe, 1992; Sadoh, 2004, p. 633-661; Konye, 2007; Dor, 2005, p. 441-475.

it is obviously not possible to undertake that larger exercise within this essay, I will close by briefly addressing the question of a composer's heritage, and then remark on a few salient features of music included in Nyaho's anthology by two composer-scholars, Nketia and Uzoigwe.

The African composer's heritage is typically multiple rather than singular. Influences come from outside and inside, from Europe and Africa. But while a composer's upbringing may include exposure to various sorts of traditional and popular music, the moment of writing or the moment in which the compositional faculty is exercised is often decisively shaped by an aspect of European practice. Crucial in this respect is the challenge of constructing a tonal horizon, for it appears that the choice for many composers is between easy acceptance of a European tonal resource (including common-practice tonality, chromaticism, modality or, in a few experimental cases, twelve-tone technique) and a(n impossible) resisting of that resource, complete with the ideological baggage it carries.

Many composers' first exposure to notated music is in the form of protestant hymns or short pieces by European composers from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many have accepted the limits set by the kinds of cadence and phraseology prescribed by the hymn. This monumental influence is not confined to the domain of music but includes religion and formal education as well. We might even go so far as to say that the language of the hymn was part of the cultural capital that postcolonial subjects strove to acquire.

Had the protestant hegemony been offset by exposure to, say, twentieth-century music, including that of the European avant-garde (a tradition which, by definition, lies at a certain cutting edge), this tonal heritage would have taken a different form. A familiarity with so-called World Music would most certainly have affected the tonal imagination of composers. Claims about a new globalized musical economy may offer hope of equal access to the world's store of music in the future, but those who occupy the margins know better than to order their lives according to the promise of a dream. For now, we must contend with the fact that a largely protestant tonal legacy continues to dominate the musical consciousness of many budding composers.

The other side of the African composer's heritage comprises the African legacy in all its magnificent diversity. 'Africa' has to be understood in the broadest possible terms, and its influence may include actual materials, procedures, and performance practices. Acquiring the elements of this heritage would seem to follow a natural path for composers born into the tradition, but the process proves to be more complex. For some composers, the process of acquisition comes later in life when, quite self-consciously, they turn to the



systematic study of traditional music in reaction to a lopsided educational system that rewards knowledge of Schumann and Brahms but not knowledge of Akan funeral dirges and Yoruba Dùndún drumming. There is, moreover, no easy formula for determining the ultimate shape that indigenous influences take within an individual composer's psyche. Depending upon the intensity and integrity of the exposure, the composer may acquire a groove-oriented metrical attitude, a store of modal melodies, a syllabic approach to word-setting, a network of distinctly shaped and timbrally specific rhythms (including time lines), and modes of simultaneous expression that preserve a heterogeneous sound ideal.

One task for future scholars of African art music will be to reconstruct the sonic backdrop to individual creative acts. Uzoigwe's study of the music and philosophy of Akin Euba and Omojola's of Fela Sowande could serve as models to reveal the complex and contradictory backgrounds of African composers, and sharpen our perception of the challenges involved in developing a distinctly postcolonial creative voice.<sup>17</sup>

Consider the example of Kwabena Nketia. Although better known as an ethnomusicologist, Nketia has been immensely active as a composer. During his student days at Akropong, he studied the piano and the harmonium and was exposed to hymns and simple classics by Mozart, Mendelssohn, Beethoven, and others. He also encountered an emerging choral style in the music of Ephraim Amu. Earlier, growing up in Mampong-Ashanti, he was already quite steeped in the traditions of his village, including a magnificent dirge-singing tradition one of whose leading exponents was none other than Nketia's own grandmother. Later, as a student of linguistics in London in the 1940s, Nketia soaked up other influences in the English capital, ranging from European high art music through jazz to music from other parts of Africa. Meanwhile, his love for languages and his linguistic training had deepened his sensitivity to the contours and rhythms of speech, preparing his expertise in the setting of texts and, paradoxically perhaps, his interest in composing instrumental or non-texted music.<sup>18</sup>

What 'came out' in the way of autonomous, original composition was a diverse output, some of it conventional in nature (like the choral songs influenced by Amu), some of it experimental (like the 'Bolga Sonata' for violin and piano of 1958, or the 'Cow Lane Sextet' from 1959). Along the way, Nketia helped to stabilize certain genres (like the art song), enrich the repertoire of African pianism, and, more generally, show the vast potential in the composition of pure instrumental music for various ensembles. I often hear in Nketia's music a fresh melodic flavor that I associate with Akan music.<sup>19</sup> This

17. See Uzoigwe, 1992 and Omojola, 2009.

18. Nketia tells his own story in Nketia, 2004.

19. A good place to study the melodic style of Akan music is Nketia, 1963. Of related interest is Ampene, 2004.

immediately stamps his work with a certain authentic flavor. The seams of phrase construction are sometimes exposed, and the tonal resource, which originates in hymns and simple classics, is often taken at face value, although his output includes experimental works that gnaw at the tonal limits enshrined in his models, or inflect that tonal sense with a delicate modality that may well have its origins in indigenous music. A metric-rhythmic home is also often taken as given, while the energy in the rhythmic realm is concentrated in a speech-like mode of enunciation.

Nyaho's anthology includes two of Nketia's compositions. One, "Builsa Work Song," composed in 1968, is a charming "recreation" (the composer's word) of an indigenous work song from among the Builsa people. The other is "Volta Fantasy," a bold work in the key of A minor that makes central use of the standard pattern in an otherwise fragmented texture. "Builsa Work Song" begins with a snappy iambic rhythm that, together with its long-short retrograde companion, generates a dance groove through repetition. The large-scale form consists of a three-fold presentation of the main tune framed by an exclamatory beginning that returns as an ending (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1** Kwabena Nketia, "Builsa Work Song", bars 40-54 (Nyaho, 2009, p. 29)





In contrast, trajectories of musical thought are relatively modest, often spread over two or three bars. The main melody is always present, its tail echoed within each presentation. Most subtle is the distribution of rhetorical weight so that closure is achieved not in the last bar of a phrase but in the penultimate bar (the last of the first eight-bar phrase, for example, is silent). The origins of this cadential mannerism might be traced to any number of ‘traditional’ vocal genres, including the very dirges that the composer absorbed as a young man. Terminal sonorities include bare octaves, thirdless triads, and dissonant trichords. Even though the work’s B-centricity is never in doubt, B is made to reckon occasionally with an interfering G-sharp.

We may fruitfully compare Nketia’s language to that of Joshua Uzoigwe, two of whose pieces, ‘Ukom’ and ‘Egwu Amala,’ are included in this anthology. Based on an Igbo women’s funeral repertory, ‘Ukom’ is a rhythmically aggressive piece, minimalist in its pitch vocabulary (all 182 bars of this 12/8 piece use only the white notes of an A-pentatonic scale), and enlivened by snippets of traditional melody (Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2** Joshua Uzoigwe, “Ukom” from *Talking Drums*, bars 1-13 (Nyaho, 2009, p. 157)

**47. Ukom**  
From *Talking Drums*

JOSHUA UZOIGWE (NIGERIA)  
(1946–2005)

Intense and driving ♩ = 112

The musical score for "Ukom" is presented in four systems. The first system (bars 1-3) shows a piano part with a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, marked *mf*. An optional slit drum part is shown below. The second system (bars 4-6) continues the piano part with a *p* dynamic marking. The third system (bars 7-9) includes a *mf sempre* marking. The fourth system (bars 10-13) concludes the piece. The tempo is marked as 112 beats per minute.

The composition’s generative rhythm is a restless iambic figure that contributes considerable momentum. Something of a dance feel is heard throughout, but the composer’s voice is never far away.

In ‘Egwu Amala,’ by contrast, Uzoigwe uses a more complex pitch language in which pentatonic elements interact with more complex chromatic material (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3** Joshua Uzoigwe, “Egwu Amala” from *Talking Drums*, bars 1-6 (Nyaho, 2009, p. 260)

**58. Egwu Amala**  
From *Talking Drums*

JOSHUA UZOIGWE (NIGERIA)  
(1946–2005)

The musical score is written for piano in 19/8 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 152. The piece begins with a piano (*p*) introduction. The first system shows the treble and bass staves. The second system, starting at bar 3, features a mezzo-forte (*mf*) section with a key signature change to D major (indicated by two sharps). The third system, starting at bar 5, returns to piano (*p*). The bass line is consistently active with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the treble line has more complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs.

The 19/8 time signature may seem a bit fanciful at first, a ‘paper meter’ perhaps, were it not for the fact that the actual Igbo dance from which the composition derives is, according to the composer’s ethnographic studies, also in the same meter. Hearing successive groups of 19 may well be a challenge for many listeners, but it need not be a stumbling block in this case because a recurring Call-and-Response gesture confers a larger, rondo-like shape on the piece as a whole. There is an evident compositional labor here which suggests a degree of compositional autonomy far in excess of anything we observed in the ‘Builsa Worksong.’ This difference may reflect a generational difference (Nketia was born in 1921, Uzoigwe in 1946), it may also represent two different approaches to subjectivity in the composing of African art music.

The contrast between creating a communal space for others to join in, on the one hand, and making the community sit up and listen, on the other, may well represent one of the enduring challenges facing the African composer. In various poetic guises, this dichotomy, which may be figured as a form of ‘I-centered’ doing versus a ‘We-centered’ expression, has haunted many an African composer. The ubiquity of dance gestures, for example, is a sign of victory for communality and unanimity. The same values are inscribed in the practice

of hymn singing, thanks to its simple tunes, modest tonal trajectories and regular phraseology, not to mention textual messages laden with assurances and promises of a better life after death. And yet there are indications that some composers are willing either to leave their communities of origin behind, or establish a different set of terms on which they relate to their brethren. If we must compare, we might say that the contents of *Piano Music of Africa and the African Diaspora* seem generally tame when compared with avant-garde works by Cage, Boulez, Stockhausen or Lachenmann. But the consistently dissonant ambience of Euba's 'Igbá Kerin—Àwon Abàmi Eye' (Supernatural Birds) (Figure 4) and 'Igbá Kinní—Akèrègbè Baba Emu' (The Gourd Master of the Palm Wine), the rhythmical play and expanded instrumental resources required to perform Ali Osman's 'Afro Arab Blues' (the performer is enjoined to "say 'es' and snap [his or her] fingers" throughout) (Figure 5), the discontinuities, improvisatory freedom and occasional stillness cultivated in Bongani Ndodana-Breen's 'Flowers in Sand,' and the rhythmic drive and superimposed chords that animate Gyimah Labi's 'The Lotus' (Figure 6) suggest that it may not be too long before the two traditions become indistinguishable.

**FIGURE 4** Akin Euba, "Igbá Kerin – Àwon Abàmi Eye (Supernatural Birds)" from *Four Pictures from Oyo Calabashes*, bars 1-9 (Nyaho, 2009, p. 73)

**27. Igbá Kerin – Àwon Abàmi Eye**  
(*Supernatural Birds*)

From *Four Pictures from Oyo Calabashes* AKIN EUBA (NIGERIA)  
(b. 1935)

Rhythmical ♩ = 132

FIGURE 5 Ali Osman, “Afro Arab Blues”, bars 1-3 (Nyaho, 2009, p. 243)

**56. Afro Arab Blues**  
بلوز أفرو - عربي

ALI OSMAN (SUDAN)  
(b. 1958)

*Allegro* ♩ = 150

The musical score for "Afro Arab Blues" is written for piano in 10/8 time. It begins with a treble staff and a bass staff. The tempo is marked "Allegro" with a quarter note equal to 150 beats per minute. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The first system shows the initial chords and melody. The second system, marked with a '2', introduces triplets in the treble staff. The third system, marked with a '3', continues the melodic and harmonic development. The piece is marked 'Allegro' with a tempo of 150 beats per minute.

FIGURE 6 Gyimah Labi, “The Lotus”, bars 200-206 (Nyaho, 2009, p. 202)

The musical score for "The Lotus" is written for piano in 8/8 time. It consists of two systems. The first system starts at bar 200 and the second at bar 203. The piece is marked "fff" (fortissimo). The score features complex chordal textures and melodic lines in both the treble and bass staves. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

It is to William Chapman Nyaho's credit that he has hastened the coming moment in which our art music worlds submit to a different mode of internal differentiation. In bringing together previously scattered works, he has made possible a more focused discussion of African art music. In its richness and diversity, the anthology serves as a salutary reminder that we may have defined the purview of 'African music' rather too narrowly. Art music makes a bold incursion into the territory of on-paper creation — a mode previously denied by traditional and popular music practices. Like other creative artists negotiating the challenges of modernity, African art music composers can place the results of their efforts in a wider pool of creativity even as they explore what, alas, is the most elusive language of all.

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