

Today we hear authentic music from Ghana, West Africa led by my mentor, Master Drummer, Sowah Mensah. Sowah Mensah is an ethnomusicologist, composer, and performer. He is the Director of African Music at Macalester College and the Director of the African Music Ensembles at Macalester and the University of Minnesota. During the summers, Sowah teaches African music and dance at workshops across the country. He presents clinics, lectures, workshops and residencies at many colleges, elementary and secondary schools, churches and music organizations across the United States and abroad.

### **Bawa**

The gyl (xylophone) is the primary instrument of the Dagara, Lobi and Sisala peoples of the Upper West Region of Ghana. The instrument is made with a wooden frame and wooden keys. Under each key is a calabash gourd resonator. Each gourd resonator is tuned to the same pitch as the key under which it suspends. A gourd may have a number of holes drilled into it. These can then be covered by spider nest membranes that look like white patches on the gourd resonators. This creates a buzzing sound when the keys are stuck.

Gyil music is heard in many occasions such as weddings, festivals and funerals as well as everyday settings such as church services. Performances often feature one or two gyil, but larger ensembles may include additional gyil players along with singers, dancers, and drummers.

**Salabi Ye** is a children's song of the Tabon Ga of Southern Ghana. The Tabon are returnees from Brazil to the Accra area of Ghana from about 1836. They were welcomed as guests by the Ga and over the years have been fully integrated into Ga society. **Salabi Ye** is sung to make children feel better, especially when they are cranky. It can also be used as a lullaby. The language of the song is Ga but the words are mostly nonsense syllables.

**Sii Sii Sii** is an original composition that was first commissioned for choir and band in 2004. The language of the song is *twi* (from Ghana) and the lyrics come from an Akan children's choosing game recitation that is similar to the counting rhyme "eeny, meeny, miny, mo" in English. When children play the *sii sii sii* game, the participants sit next to each other with legs stretched out, and the caller taps each foot according to the rhythm of the recitation. The foot that is tapped on the last syllable of the song is "out" and removed from the game. Depending on how much time there is to play, the child who wins or gets selected could be either the first one or the last one to get both legs out.

### **Sowah's Drum Sequence**

This sequence is a series of musical events that Sowah has woven together to enable students to learn the basic fundamentals of Ghanaian music. The Sequence has four movements: Follow Your Leader, Boboobo, Question and Answer, and Gota.

**Follow Your Leader** is an exercise that helps players maintain their focus by watching the leader throughout the movement. It teaches the players that as long as they watch the hands of their leader and imitate the hand movements, they are able to copy the leader's phrases, even if they think they are not musical.

**Boboobo** is a choreographed community dance from the Northern Ewe of Ghana and Togo. Boboobo is frequently performed in many churches and schools in Southern Ghana. Today you will hear Sowah's arrangement of this popular genre.

**Question and Answer** encourages players to be creative. It also re-emphasizes the concentration and focus practiced in the Follow Your Leader movement. Each answer will be repeated by the player. Later it will be copied by all the players in the group before the next player's turn. As they share in the answers of others, they also begin to realize the varieties of approaches that one could use in an answer. The ability to listen to a question played on the drum and create an answer to it develops confidence in the players.

**Gota** is a dance from the Southern Ewe of Ghana. It is performed on social and festive occasions, a partner dance for young people that combines choreographed movements and improvisation. Traditionally, the dance is led by a lead drummer who starts by calling the other instrumentalists to play and then calls the first pair of dancers to come up. Once they are on the floor, the lead drummer plays a roll which is an invitation to the couple to begin their improvisation. After some time, the lead drummer asks the couple and other instrumentalists to freeze, which marks the end of the first dance improvisation. This pattern continues with new couples until the final freeze.

### **Adenkum**

A significant aspect of traditional African societies is that economic, political, agricultural, and other groups are organized not only around their shared interests and goals, but also as musical organizations. For example, a hunter's association or a women's social club will each have its own music and, in some cases, its own instruments as an integral part of the organization's activities. Thus there is *Abong*, the music of a women's secret society of

the Oron people of Nigeria; *Adika* and *Adam*, the music of fisherfolk and farmers, respectively, of the *Ga* of Ghana; *Ebre*, a women's musical type of the Ibibio of Southeastern Nigeria; and *Nnwomkoro* and *Adenkum*, both women's musical genres of the Akan of Ghana. The names refer to both the organization itself as well as its particular music.

*Adenkum* groups perform at events that involve or affect members of the organization and may also be invited to perform on other occasions by those who enjoy the music. Places they perform include festivals, funerals, and other social gatherings. The themes of the songs cut across everyday life and help to regulate social society, dealing with love, death, relationships, and gender issues.

In addition to the music of the gourds, you will hear four songs. **Osee Yeii** is a slow introductory chant. All the words are nonsense syllables. Chants like these are intended to make the group feel "as one" as they hold long notes together and hear each other's voices in their own.

**Anowa** (a young girl but a boy's name could be used instead) has gotten herself in trouble because she talks too much. She is also referred to in the song as *anoma*, a bird. It is believed that birds talk all the time, so if someone is referred to as a bird, it means that person is very talkative. This is a song that is intended to advise young people to listen more and talk less, since they will learn more when they listen - especially to adults. It also advises that when people talk too much, they end up saying something that gets them into trouble.

**Me Bo Wo Din A** is very romantic. "If I call your name many times, do not be angry at me. Sweetheart, I call your name because I like your name." This is an expression of affection towards a lover or some other person.

**See ne so mmae da** is a song that is used to ridicule people who may be doing something (and it can be anything) that most onlookers believe makes a fool of that person. It is especially appropriate for people who feel very full of themselves. This verse is about somebody who is coming from the village into the city. After tying a string around their wrist, the person says he or she is wearing a wrist watch.