

THE FIRST AMERICAN MUSIC STUDY GROUP IN GHANA:
AN UNOFFICIAL REPORT

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This June the University of California at Berkeley offered a four-week extension course entitled "Africa: its music and related arts". One week was spent on the Berkeley campus and three weeks in Africa. Enrollment was allowed for just the first week, as well as for the full course. Well over one hundred attended the Berkeley sessions, and thirty-two went on to Africa.

A few of the students brought to their work a specialisation in music, anthropology, politics or some other field. The great majority, however, were more generally oriented, including the intellectually curious and the chronic traveller. Many were home-room teachers from the school systems of the state, in which there already exists an African Studies programme and a deepening concern over the race problem in America. In fact, four of the students who went on to Africa were supported by the State of California for the purpose of preparing a syllabus for use in the school system.

The lack of focus inevitable in such a group seems to have been anticipated by the two men who put the Berkeley part of the programme together, Professor Fred Warren, Chairman of the Department of Music at Sonoma State College, Berkeley, and Professor Willard Rhodes, Director of the Center for Studies in Ethnomusicology at Columbia University. The lectures were all of an introductory nature, and related only randomly to one another in the interest of immersion rather than progression. An impressive group of scholars contributed to this first week of the programme, including Daniel Crowley from the Davis campus of the University, William Basom of the Lowie Museum at Berkeley, Joseph Greenberg from Stanford, Alan Merriam of Indiana, Klaus Wachsmann of the Los Angeles campus, and Willard Rhodes.

For those concerned with understanding the music of Africa the most meaningful and rewarding part of the week at Berkeley was the instruction in Ewe drumming and dancing by Mr. Kwashie Afado Ladzekpo, master drummer from south-eastern Ghana presently on the Music Faculty of Columbia University. His five sessions culminated in a passable demonstration performance by some forty of the students enrolled in the course. Perhaps as impressive as his teaching, was his own high regard for African culture and the African citizen, an attitude which transformed the class from tourists into students.

Mr. Ladzekpo's presence was in anticipation of the latter part of the course, all but a few days of which were under the auspices of the Institute for African Studies at the University of Ghana outside Accra. Professor J. K. Nketia, Head of the School of Music and Dance there and Director of the Institute, had a full programme of study prepared, including workshops in dance and the playing of African instruments, twenty lectures on African music by himself and Professor B. A. Aning, and ten lectures on related arts, including literature (both oral and written), art, and drama. There were also evening programmes given by dancing groups from various Ghanaian culture areas.

With one exception the University instruction was given by Ghanaians. The mornings were given over to lectures, the afternoons to practical work in dance and instrumental music. The faculty was uniformly of the highest quality, and included Professor Ireli (literature), Mrs. E. Sutherland (theatre), Professor Bame (theatre), Mr. Scott Kennedy (theatre), Professor A. K. Quarcoo (art) and Mr. A. M. Opoku (dance) as well as Professors Nketia and Aning. The study group was unanimous in its feeling that no presentation by people standing outside the Ghanaian culture could come close to conveying what the Ghanaians themselves presented. The case was particularly striking in art, where the visual expression is inextricably bound to a strong and particular verbal tradition and social value system.

The diffuse nature of the Berkeley group lessened the effectiveness of the afternoon workshops, for which there were made available a full drum ensemble in both Ewe and Akan styles; a master xylophonist from the northwest area of the country where that instrument is found; instruction in the end-blown flute, and the help of a stunning troupe of young dancers who have already toured Europe, and hopefully will be brought to America soon. It is in the field of dance that the serious study of Ghanaian music by Ghanaians has had its first success, probably because the dance was never part of European music instruction as imposed by Britain prior to Ghanaian independence. In the area of song and instrumental music, on the other hand, only foreigners work at the wealth of African skills. African students prefer Chopin, Schubert, Bach and Mozart. Needless to say, equal injustice is done to both cultures under this arrangement.

It must also be reported that this part of the programme suffered the same generalizing pressure that effected the content of the week in Berkeley. Among the thirty-two students there were again both those with specialized interest and those quite unprepared for the study of African music in any depth. Nonetheless, the Institute proved to have excellent resources for the programme it had undertaken, and it was the general feeling that these two weeks should be expanded in both the workshop area and in lecture offerings.

There is an added incentive to organizing further study groups of this type, which is that the more the African witnesses the interest we have in his music and the respect we have for his artistry and skill, the more inclined he may be to turn to the serious study of what his own people have to offer.

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