



Inclusive Growth in Ghanaian Art Music: Challenging Definitions and Bridging Cultural Inequalities

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the inclusive growth of Ghanaian art music, arguing for a redefinition of the genre that moves beyond elitist framings tied to formal academic training and Western stylistic codes. Drawing on Kubik's theory of change and continuity and the concept of cultural inclusion, the study explored how Ghanaian composers and performers create works that reflect hybridity, interculturalism, and accessibility. Data was gathered through interviews with composers and performers, analysis of selected works, and observation of performance practices. The findings demonstrate that both formally and informally trained composers contribute meaningfully to Ghanaian art music, employing strategies such as melodic, rhythmic, textual, and timbral integration. The paper reframed Euba's categorisation of African art music, arguing for a content-focused, flexible approach that privileges intercultural synthesis over composer identity alone. It also identified the emergence of *neo-Ghanaian art music*, characterised by performance innovation, stylistic borrowing, and performer agency. Policy and pedagogical implications were discussed, including curriculum reform, community-based initiatives, and expanded recognition frameworks. The paper concludes that Ghanaian art music is sustained through inclusive participation and creative adaptation, offering a pathway for bridging cultural inequalities and ensuring the genre's relevance and sustainability.

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INTRODUCTION

Art music is one of the three broad musical traditions in Ghana, alongside traditional and popular music. Historically, it has been associated with formal Western classical training, institutional performance spaces such as churches and concert halls, and audiences often perceived as elite.¹ This framing has reinforced the notion that art music belongs primarily to formally trained composers and performers, in contrast to the oral traditions that underpin popular and traditional music.

In contemporary Ghana, however, this view is increasingly inadequate. The practice of art music now involves a growing number of composers, performers, and music directors who have acquired their skills through informal pathways – mentorship, private tuition, church rehearsal

¹ J. A. Amuah, "The Use of Traditional Music Elements in Contemporary Ghanaian Choral Music: Perspectives from Selected Works of George Worlasi Dor, Nicholas Kofi Badu and Newlove Annan" (University of Ghana, 2012); Misonu-Amu, "Stylistic and Textual Sources of a Contemporary Ghanaian Art Musician (A Case Study: Dr. Ephraim Amu)" (University of Ghana, 1988).

participation, and community-based learning.² Their works display technical competence, cultural resonance, and social relevance, challenging the assumption that formal education is the sole route to compositional legitimacy.

This paper argues that the evolving practice of Ghanaian art music represents a paradigmatic shift that calls for a redefinition of the genre. Using Kubik's theory of change and continuity alongside concepts of cultural inclusion and epistemic equity, we propose a framework for understanding Ghanaian art music through the lens of inclusive growth.³ By this, this study refers to the broadening of participation, recognition, and creative authority across formal and informal practitioners, diverse performance spaces, and hybrid compositional approaches. The study identifies the emergence of what we term *neo-Ghanaian art music* – a form characterised by stylistic hybridity, intercultural engagement, and performative innovation – and argues that this development offers a pathway for bridging cultural inequalities and ensuring the sustainability of the genre.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design, combining semi-structured interviews, score analysis, and participant observation. A purposive sampling approach was used to select participants actively engaged in Ghanaian art music practice. The final sample consisted of 10 participants: four composers, three choral directors, and three performers. Both formally trained and informally trained practitioners were included to reflect the study's emphasis on diverse pathways of musical knowledge and participation. Selection was based on demonstrable involvement in composing, directing, or performing art music within choral and ensemble contexts.

Data collection occurred between 2020 and 2022. Semi-structured interviews were conducted either in person or online, focusing on training backgrounds, compositional approaches, performance practice, and perspectives on the evolving identity of Ghanaian art music. With consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Field observations were conducted in Accra within church and community-based choral rehearsal and performance settings over the same period. Observational notes were taken on interpretive decisions, rehearsal interactions, instrumentation, and presentation approaches.

For analysis, interview transcripts and observational notes were coded using an inductive thematic approach. Initial codes – such as hybridity, performer agency, informal learning, and intercultural synthesis – were refined through iterative comparison to develop broader thematic categories. Score analysis complemented the qualitative data by examining melodic contour, harmonic strategy, rhythmic organisation, timbral resources, and text–melody relationships. Triangulating interview, observational, and score-based insights strengthened the interpretive robustness of the findings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in Kubik's theory of change and continuity, which views African musical traditions as dynamic systems that evolve through cultural dialogue and adaptation while preserving core elements of identity.⁴ This perspective allows us to understand Ghanaian art music not as a static elite tradition but as a living practice that negotiates between innovation and heritage.

To this, the study adds the lens of cultural inclusion, which interrogates how institutional frameworks, formal education, and elite performance cultures have historically mediated access to art music. The concept of cultural inclusion, widely used in cultural studies and education,⁵ is here applied to the field of Ghanaian art music as a critical lens for examining who participates in, defines, and benefits from the genre. This application extends current discourse on decolonising musicology by

² S. K. Afful, "Generation of Inspiration and Aspiration in Ghanaian Choral Music Composition: Alfred Entsua-Mensah and John Gershon Koomson" (University of Ghana, 2017); Amuah, "The Use of Traditional Music Elements in Contemporary Ghanaian Choral Music: Perspectives from Selected Works of George Worlasi Dor, Nicholas Kofi Badu and Newlove Annan."

³ G Kubik, "The Stability and Change of African Music Traditions," *The World of Music* 28, no. 1 (1987): 44–69.

⁴ Kubik, "The Stability and Change of African Music Traditions."

⁵ B. S. Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (Routledge, 2014).

foregrounding informal training pathways and community-based practices as legitimate contributors to Ghana's musical heritage.

The privileging of academic training as a marker of legitimacy has marginalised informally trained composers and performers, perpetuating what Santos calls “epistemologies of ignorance,” where certain forms of knowledge and practice are rendered invisible within dominant narratives.⁶ Combining these perspectives enables a more expansive analytical stance. Continuity explains the persistence of church-based platforms, traditional instrumentation, and notated composition; change accounts for the diversification of composers, incorporation of popular idioms, and democratisation of performance spaces. Together, they frame inclusive growth as both a cultural and epistemic project: expanding who can create, perform, and be recognised within Ghanaian art music, while ensuring that these expansions remain grounded in cultural authenticity.

This theoretical positioning provides the foundation for the paper's central argument: that redefining Ghanaian art music along inclusive lines is critical for sustaining its relevance, bridging cultural inequalities, and aligning it with broader national goals of equity and participation.

DISCUSSION

This section examines the evolving definitions, practices, and sociocultural positioning of Ghanaian art music in relation to issues of inclusion, hybridity, and performance innovation. The discussion draws together insights from the interviews, score analysis, and field observations to highlight how both formally and informally trained practitioners contribute to the genre. The sub-sections that follow explore historical definitions, contemporary compositional strategies, intercultural engagement, performer agency, and emerging performance contexts.

Rethinking Art Music in Ghana: Tradition and Transformation

Art music in Ghana is undergoing a process of redefinition. Once tightly bound to formal institutions and Western classical structures, its current practice reveals a more diverse and inclusive reality. This section traces the historical framing of art music in Ghana, explores informal pathways of training and participation, and highlights stylistic changes that challenge long-standing boundaries.

Historical Definitions and Their Limits

Ghanaian music scholarship has often reflected Eurocentric frameworks that define art music as composed, written, and analytically complex music, performed by trained musicians within elite institutions.⁷ This framing places strong emphasis on notation, harmonic structure, and formal music education. It has also tended to exclude musicians and ensembles who, though lacking academic credentials, contribute richly to the creation and performance of what many experience as serious, contemplative music.

Informal Pathways and Expanding Participation

Findings from interviews and fieldwork conducted for this study confirm that many contemporary Ghanaian art music practitioners develop their skills through informal means. One composer explained, “I learnt harmony from my choirmaster's blackboard, not from a conservatoire”. Others described their training through consistent church participation, private mentorship, and repeated exposure to rehearsal processes. We have also provided compositional guidance to peers and fellow musicians – some of whom had no formal music education. These experiences affirm the vitality and legitimacy of community-based music education and challenge assumptions that formal training is the only pathway to musical competence.

⁶ Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*.

⁷ Afful, “Generation of Inspiration and Aspiration in Ghanaian Choral Music Composition: Alfred Entsua-Mensah and John Gershon Koomson”; Misonu-Amu, “Stylistic and Textual Sources of a Contemporary Ghanaian Art Musician (A Case Study: Dr. Ephraim Amu).”

Stylistic Hybridisation in Composition and Performance

Analysis of selected choral works and performance practices demonstrates how Ghanaian composers and performers blend indigenous elements with Western musical forms. Works by composers such as Mensah Essilfie, Asare Bediako, and Nicholas Kofi Badu employ local scales, tonal inflexions, and rhythmic gestures within SATB voicing and Western harmonic progressions. At events such as *Symphonic Gospel Meets Orchestra*, we observed the use of traditional percussion, indigenous dance gestures, and flexible staging practices alongside classical instrumentation.⁸ These hybrid features reflect not only creative innovation but also a broader cultural reality: Ghanaian art music today is both intercultural and evolving.⁹ Some of these works also incorporate significant elements of Ghanaian traditional music – a subject we explore more fully in the following section on African art music.

Redefining Art Music for Contemporary Ghana

In view of these developments, this study proposes the following working definition:

Art music in Ghana today refers to composed and structured musical practices grounded in Western classical principles, performed in both traditional and evolving performance contexts.

This redefinition acknowledges the genre's foundational structure while recognising the expanded spectrum of performance settings now shaping its identity. By focusing on musical characteristics rather than performer profiles, it avoids prescriptive boundaries and reflects the practice as it exists today. It offers an objective framework that supports broader criteria for scholarly analysis and cultural recognition.

Implications for Research and Education

A broader understanding of art music has practical implications. For researchers, it calls for engagement with oral traditions, rehearsal processes, and undocumented performances as legitimate sources of knowledge. For educators, it presents the opportunity to incorporate informal learning models and community expertise into formal curricula. For cultural policy and funding bodies, it expands the notion of excellence to include ensembles and composers working outside elite settings but contributing significantly to Ghana's musical heritage.

African Art Music and Its Inclusive Potential

The concept of African art music emerged from efforts by African composers to articulate cultural identity through composed music that draws on both indigenous and Western classical traditions. In Ghana, the genre has been shaped by pioneers such as Ephraim Amu, J. H. Kwabena Nketia, and N. Z. Nayo, whose works exemplify the integration of African melodic, rhythmic, and textual elements within Western compositional forms.¹⁰

Historical Definitions and Limitations

Similar to the case of art music, African art music has frequently been defined with reference to formal training, with scholarly accounts privileging academic pedigree as a primary indicator. Annan (2008), for example, describes it as “written compositions of African composers who have been trained in universities, both home and abroad, and have compositions conceived along the lines of European

⁸ Symphonic Music Ghana, “Symphonic Gospel Meets Orchestra,” <https://www.symphonicmusicgh.com/> (Symphonic Music Ghana, 2021).

⁹ G. W. K. Dor, “Trends and Stylistic Traits in the Art Composition of Ephraim Amu, N. Z. Nayo, and J. H. K. Nketia: A Theoretical Perspective” (University of Ghana, Legon, 1992); E. Boamah, “Stylistic Traits in African Pianism Works of Three Art Music Composers, J. H. Nketia, Aikin Euba, and Gyimah Larbi” (University of Ghana, 2007).

¹⁰ A. Euba, *Modern African Music* (Bayreuth: Iwalwa-Haus, University of Bayreuth, 1993); G. W. K Dor, “Trends and Stylistic Traits in the Art Composition of Ephraim Amu, N. Z. Nayo, and J. H. K. Nketia: A Theoretical Perspective” (University of Ghana, Legon, 1992); Boamah, “Stylistic Traits in African Pianism Works of Three Art Music Composers, J. H. Nketia, Aikin Euba, and Gyimah Larbi.”

music but which often employ a considerable degree of African musical element.”¹¹ While this definition recognises the intercultural basis of the genre, its emphasis on institutional training reflects a narrow framing that excludes many contemporary practitioners. As discussed in the preceding section, Ghanaian art music today is shaped by musicians from a wide range of educational and experiential backgrounds. What distinguishes African art music, therefore, is not the composer’s credentials but the intentional integration of indigenous African musical materials within composed forms.

Contemporary Practice and Informal Voices

Drawing from the experiences of the researchers as composers and analysts, they have encountered and guided musicians whose compositions clearly align with the aesthetic and structural features of African art music, despite their lack of formal training. These works frequently incorporate Ghanaian tonal idioms, African textual themes, and indigenous rhythmic structures into Western-style choral and instrumental writing. In interviews, composers expressed the desire to convey African identity through these intercultural techniques. One respondent noted, “I use the drum patterns I grew up with, but I write them into four-part harmony, like the anthems we used to sing in church”. These approaches reflect deliberate artistic choices grounded in cultural knowledge and creative experimentation.

Towards an Inclusive Definition of African Art Music

In light of this, the following definition is proposed:

African art music refers to composed musical works that integrate African indigenous musical resources with principles of Western art music, framed through an intentional intercultural approach that reflects both cultural identity and structured composition.

This definition centres the genre’s aesthetic orientation and creative method, rather than the academic status of its practitioners. It also accommodates a broader range of compositional voices, reflecting the lived realities of contemporary African musical practice.

The inclusive potential of African art music lies in its capacity to serve as a vehicle for cultural expression, interpretation, and innovation. It affirms both continuity and transformation by enabling composers to draw from tradition while pursuing new artistic directions. As the genre continues to evolve in Ghana and beyond, adopting a more inclusive understanding will be crucial to capturing its complexity, accessibility, and socio-cultural relevance.

Revisiting Akin Euba’s Categorisation – A Critical Perspective

Euba’s fourfold categorisation remains a seminal framework for analysing African art music, mapping the degrees of integration between African and Western musical resources.¹² While analytically useful, the typology presents conceptual tensions, particularly Categories 1 and 4, which define African art music either by composer identity (regardless of African content) or by exclusive use of African idioms without Western influence. In the Ghanaian context, these extremes are less helpful for understanding current practice, where intercultural synthesis rather than identity alone is central to defining the genre.¹³ More productive are Categories 2 and 3, which capture works that borrow African themes, scales, and rhythms, or create hybrid idioms integrating African and Western elements. However, as Dor cautions, early efforts at indigenisation often relied on literal text translations of Western hymns with little engagement with African musical logic.¹⁴ Genuine African art music must therefore move

¹¹ J. F. Annan, “Structural Analysis of Nine Contemporary African Arts Songs of J. H. K. Nketia” (University of Ghana, 2008),11.

¹² Euba, *Modern African Music*.

¹³ Dor, “Trends and Stylistic Traits in the Art Composition of Ephraim Amu, N. Z. Nayo, and J. H. K. Nketia: A Theoretical Perspective,” 1992; Boamah, “Stylistic Traits in African Pianism Works of Three Art Music Composers, J. H. Nketia, Aikin Euba, and Gyimah Larbi.”

¹⁴ Dor, “Trends and Stylistic Traits in the Art Composition of Ephraim Amu, N. Z. Nayo, and J. H. K. Nketia: A Theoretical Perspective,” 1992.

beyond language substitution to include speech-derived rhythms, tonal contour, and oral-literary devices that embed music in its cultural context.¹⁵ This reframing allows a more inclusive approach, recognising intercultural intentionality and deeper engagement with indigenous resources as the basis for classifying African art music.

Resources and Strategies for Inclusive African Art Music

Building on the discussion of categorisation, it is necessary to highlight the actual resources and strategies that enable composers to move beyond rigid frameworks and cultivate a more inclusive practice. As argued in the preceding section, African art music attains cultural legitimacy not merely through classification but through deliberate engagement with indigenous resources. The strategies outlined here are not exhaustive, but they illustrate how Ghanaian art music draws vitality from both traditional and Western traditions through melodic and harmonic resources, rhythmic and structural resources, textual and expressive resources, and timbral resources, affirming the intercultural essence of the genre.

Melodic and Harmonic Resources

One central resource lies in melodic frameworks derived from Ghanaian traditions. Pentatonic and heptatonic modes, tonal language inflexions, and responsorial phrasing provide fertile material for composers such as Ephraim Amu, J. H. Nketia, and Kenn Kafui. Nketia notes the close relationship between tonal languages and melodic contour,¹⁶ while Dor and Boamah emphasise the cultural logic of asymmetrical phrasing and motivic development.¹⁷

Harmonisation strategies reinforce these melodic resources by combining parallel motion, modal inflexions, and adapted Western tonal progressions. In this way, composers create harmonic textures that reflect both indigenous logics and European techniques, demonstrating continuity through adaptation.¹⁸

Rhythmic and Structural Resources

Rhythm is one of the most distinctive features of Ghanaian art music. Dance-derived patterns, speech rhythm, and cyclical repetition serve as compositional engines, shaping texture and cultural identity.¹⁹ While Western choral idioms such as binary, ternary, and strophic forms have influenced certain works, the rhythmic organisation of Ghanaian compositions remains firmly rooted in indigenous temporal sensibilities.

Structurally, composers draw on principles aligned with language and performance practice. Recitative-like declamation mirrors tonal speech, and the *Ebibidwom* style of the Mfantse people – marked by responsorial exchange, strophic variation, and extemporization – offers a culturally resonant template. Exclamatory gestures, though mainly expressive, help articulate sections, while strategies such as call-and-response and additive development,²⁰ show how traditional logics are re-imagined in composed works.

¹⁵ J. H Nketia, *African Music in Ghana* (USA: Northwestern University Press, 1963); J. H Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1974); B. Alsop, “Brief Overview of African Rhythms,” 2022, <https://globalmusictheory.com/brief-overview-of-african-rhythms/>.

¹⁶ Nketia, *African Music in Ghana*; Nketia, *The Music of Africa*.

¹⁷ Dor, “Trends and Stylistic Traits in the Art Composition of Ephraim Amu, N. Z. Nayo, and J. H. K. Nketia: A Theoretical Perspective,” 1992; Boamah, “Stylistic Traits in African Pianism Works of Three Art Music Composers, J. H. Nketia, Aikin Euba, and Gyimah Larbi.”

¹⁸ Nketia, *African Music in Ghana*; Dor, “Trends and Stylistic Traits in the Art Composition of Ephraim Amu, N. Z. Nayo, and J. H. K. Nketia: A Theoretical Perspective,” 1992.

¹⁹ A. M. Jones, *Studies in African Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959); Dor, “Trends and Stylistic Traits in the Art Composition of Ephraim Amu, N. Z. Nayo, and J. H. K. Nketia: A Theoretical Perspective,” 1992.

²⁰ Nketia, *African Music in Ghana*; K. Kafui, “Generative Process in African Art Music Composition: The Use of Traditional African Elements” (University of Ghana, 2002).

Textual and Expressive Resources

As noted earlier, indigenisation cannot be restricted to the mere use of African languages in otherwise Westernised compositions – even when these are original works by African composers. Genuine intercultural engagement requires a deeper integration of textual and oral resources as compositional material. Ghanaian composers increasingly move beyond simple language choice to explore the tonal and rhythmic properties of local languages, allowing text and melody to align organically.²¹ Speech rhythm becomes a generative device, shaping melodic contour, phrase length, and formal design.

Oral-literary resources such as proverbs, metaphors, and storytelling techniques further enrich choral texts with cultural memory and semantic depth.²² Expressive features – vocables, ululation, and responsorial exchanges – function as structural markers, heightening performative energy and evoking communal soundscapes.²³ These elements recontextualise oral traditions within the discipline of notated art music, enabling compositions to retain cultural intimacy while addressing diverse audiences. By mobilising these textual and expressive resources, Ghanaian art music embodies a form of indigenisation that is structurally grounded, culturally resonant, and contributes to the inclusive growth of the genre.

Timbral Resources

A further strategy involves instrumental and vocal timbres. The incorporation of traditional instruments such as the *atenteben* (bamboo flute), *axatse* (rattle), or *atumpan* (Akan talking drum) alongside Western choral and orchestral forces reflects intentional timbral fusion. Even within vocal writing, composers explore colouristic contrasts between speech-derived declamation and Western *bel canto* technique - a technique characterised by smooth, sustained tone, even timbre across registers, and lyrical expressivity. These timbral resources deepen the intercultural aesthetic of Ghanaian art music and extend its expressive possibilities.

Towards Inclusive Practice

Taken together, these resources and strategies affirm that African art music is not defined by the academic profile of its composers but by the creative integration of cultural knowledge into structured musical works. They demonstrate that inclusivity in Ghanaian art music is not an abstract concept but a lived compositional reality, grounded in indigenous heritage yet open to intercultural dialogue.

Neo-Ghanaian Art Music – Cultural Innovation and Social Relevance

Beyond redefining art and African art music, Ghanaian composers and performers are actively shaping what may be termed a neo-Ghanaian art music – a contemporary manifestation of the genre that challenges inherited conventions through creative experimentation and intercultural engagement. This section explores how cultural innovation, performance transformation, and aesthetic pluralism are shaping a resilient, accessible, and socially relevant form of Ghanaian art music.

Defining Neo-Ghanaian Art Music

The term *neo-Ghanaian art music* refers to a body of creative work that retains the structural foundations of Western art music while embracing stylistic borrowing from indigenous traditions and popular genres, and reimagining performance contexts. Unlike earlier approaches that confined art music to formal concert halls or liturgical settings, this emerging practice foregrounds experimentation, intercultural dialogue, and performer innovation. As observed by Dor, stylistic borrowing has long

²¹ Nketia, *African Music in Ghana*; Nketia, *The Music of Africa*.

²² Alsup, “Brief Overview of African Rhythms.”

²³ A. Pizà, *Listening to the World: A Brief Survey of World Music* (New York: The City University of New York, 2023); J. E. Jacobs, *Ululation in Levantine Society: The Cultural Reproduction of an Affective Vocalization* (University of Pennsylvania ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2008); E. L. Sikhosana, “A Critical Study of the Contemporary Practice of Ululation (Ukukikiza) and Its Current Social and Cultural Values among the Zulus” (University of Zululand, 2002).

been a part of Ghana's evolving musical ethos; however, today's practitioners do so in ways that reflect audience preferences, communal values, and generational identity.²⁴

Platforms such as *Afro Classical Nights*, hosted by Choral Music Ghana, deliberately relocate performances to informal venues, thereby broadening access and attracting new audiences. Similarly, ensembles like Harmonious Chorale Ghana integrate guitars, percussion, choreography, and even elements of drama into choral presentations, blurring distinctions between art, popular, and traditional performance practices.

These developments signal more than aesthetic diversification. They embody inclusive growth, as the genre becomes accessible to wider publics, empowers performers as creative agents, and creates space for new forms of cultural participation. Neo-Ghanaian art music thus represents a living, adaptive practice that negotiates between heritage and innovation, offering a pathway towards the sustainability and cultural relevance of Ghana's art music tradition.

Transforming Performance Platforms

One defining feature of neo-Ghanaian art music is the reimagining of performance spaces and settings. Platforms such as *Afro Classical Nights*, hosted by Choral Music Ghana, deliberately relocate art music from formal concert halls and churches to more informal venues, such as the lounge of the Ghana Club. This shift reflects a deliberate effort to broaden audiences and reframe performance conventions, positioning art music as accessible and socially embedded rather than restricted to elite or liturgical contexts.



Figure 1: A promotional flyer of Afro Classical Nights
Source: Choral Music Ghana

²⁴ Dor, "Trends and Stylistic Traits in the Art Composition of Ephraim Amu, N. Z. Nayo, and J. H. K. Nketia: A Theoretical Perspective," 1992.

In other contexts, choirs such as Harmonious Chorale Ghana incorporate guitars, drum set, traditional instruments, choreographed movement, and even elements of acting or drama into their concerts, blending art music with performance practices associated with popular and indigenous genres. Such performances exemplify what Young and Brunk describe as *stylistic appropriation* – a deliberate adaptation of elements from local culture into classical frameworks, not for mimicry or novelty, but for authentic expression and resonance with contemporary audiences.²⁵ These developments highlight the growing diversification of Ghanaian art music performance, setting the stage for the tensions explored in the case study that follows. Together, these developments democratise access to art music, breaking down class-based and institutional barriers, diversifying performance practice, and contributing to the genre’s inclusive growth.



Figure 2: Harmonious Chorale Ghana combining acting with choral singing
Source: Facebook, Harmonious Chorale Ghana

Case Study: Reinterpreting Kenn Kafui

The tensions of this transformation are evident in the performance history of Kenn Kafui’s *Mida Akpe Na Mawu* (Give Thanks to God), which has been reinterpreted in ways that challenge its originally strict classical conception. Kafui initially resisted the use of drums, dance, and highlife styling in the performance of this work, concerned that such adaptations would compromise the integrity of his original structure. However, subsequent performances that incorporated these alternative approaches generated enthusiastic audience reception, suggesting a shift in the aesthetic expectations of Ghanaian choral music consumers. Such performative reinterpretation often involves improvised harmonies, altered instrumentation, or added percussion – decisions made not by the composer but by performers in response to social context. Such reinterpretations reveal how inclusive growth operates at the level of performance, where audience engagement and performer creativity become central to sustaining the relevance of canonical works.

Adaptive Resilience and Cultural Sustainability

Such recontextualisation highlights the adaptive resilience of Ghanaian art music, where performance practices evolve to maintain relevance while negotiating tensions between classical purism and popular appeal. The juxtaposition of Western structural forms with indigenous or popular presentation techniques affirms a broader understanding of cultural sustainability. While Kubik once described art music in Africa as rigid, the evolving practices observed contest today that assertion, revealing instead

²⁵ J. O. Young and C. G. Brunk, *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation* (New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009).

a genre in a state of evolution and deeply responsive to changing artistic, spiritual, and social realities.²⁶ This adaptive capacity ensures that art music remains open to diverse contributors and contexts, aligning with a vision of cultural sustainability grounded in inclusivity.

Performers' Agency and Shifting Authority

These developments also signal a redefinition of creative authority, as performers increasingly assume an active role in shaping the final artistic product, blurring the lines between performance and composition. In many neo-Ghanaian contexts, the authority of the composer gives way to a collaborative ethos where performers contribute interpretive decisions that alter musical meaning. This calls for a renewed scholarly focus on performance as composition, and on how performers' agency contributes to the evolving identity of Ghanaian art music. By recognising performers as co-creators, neo-Ghanaian art music redistributes creative authority and promotes a more participatory model of musical production – a key dimension of inclusive growth.

Reception, Tensions, and Generational Perspectives

The reception of neo-Ghanaian art music reveals a generational divide: while younger performers and audiences embrace hybridity and intercultural engagement, older practitioners remain cautious, fearing dilution of compositional rigour or loss of cultural authenticity. Euba interprets such developments within the broader frame of interculturalism, identifying African art music as a site where global and local influences meet.²⁷ Yet, as he notes, this intercultural ethos can be dismissed by traditionalists as derivative or non-serious. The same tensions are visible in Ghana today, where the negotiation between innovation and tradition reflects deeper debates about authority, authenticity, and artistic value. These intergenerational negotiations highlight that inclusivity is not merely a matter of access but also of aesthetic negotiation, as different cohorts reshape the genre's values and expressive priorities.

Continuity through Creative Evolution

Taken together, these practices suggest that neo-Ghanaian art music is not a departure from tradition but its creative evolution. It enables composers and performers to articulate contemporary identities, engage modern audiences, and sustain the genre through adaptive innovation. This evolution exemplifies inclusive growth, as it redistributes creative authority, broadens participation, and repositions art music as socially responsive and culturally relevant in twenty-first-century Ghana.

Policy and Practice Implications

The inclusive redefinition of Ghanaian art music outlined in this paper calls for a fundamental shift in cultural policy, music education, and institutional practice. As demonstrated, composers from both formal and informal educational backgrounds contribute meaningfully to the genre. Yet many existing systems of funding, education, and professional recognition do not fully reflect or support this diversity. This section outlines ways in which policy and practice might respond to the evolving landscape, thereby promoting equitable participation and sustainable cultural development.

Music Education Reform

Formal institutions such as universities and music schools remain crucial to compositional development, but curricula must better reflect the cultural and pedagogical realities of Ghana. Speech rhythm, indigenous tonal systems, and local proverbs could be incorporated into composition tasks, validating community-based knowledge and encouraging intercultural experimentation. Partnerships with churches, community ensembles, and master practitioners can bridge formal and informal learning pathways. Such reforms would not only enhance musical competence but also broaden access, thereby advancing the inclusive growth of the art music sector.

²⁶ Kubik, "The Stability and Change of African Music Traditions."

²⁷ Euba, *Modern African Music*.

Supporting Community-Based Music Initiatives

Community-based initiatives are vital sites of creativity and mentorship, especially for informally trained composers. Policy frameworks could provide targeted support for workshops, intergenerational mentorship programmes, and collaborative composer-performer residencies. Agencies such as the National Commission on Culture and the Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA) could allocate grants for projects that integrate traditional resources and local participation, democratising access to professional growth and promoting cultural continuity.

The Role of Churches

Churches remain among the most powerful platforms for music-making in Ghana and can function as incubators for compositional talent. By commissioning original works, funding training initiatives, and embracing stylistic diversity, churches can support both heritage preservation and innovation. Partnerships between churches and schools could formalise pathways for young musicians, bridging informal training with structured education and nurturing the next generation of composers and performers.

Criteria for Excellence and Recognition

Current systems of recognition – such as grant awards, national competitions, and music festivals – often privilege Western-style complexity, notated scores, or academic affiliation. These criteria could be re-examined to include additional metrics such as cultural authenticity, community impact, and innovation in hybridity. Introducing award categories for orally composed works, community-based ensembles, or intercultural experimentation would acknowledge a wider range of contributions, reinforcing an inclusive understanding of excellence.

Aligning with National Development Goals

Investment in Ghanaian art music should be aligned with national objectives such as youth empowerment, job creation, and cultural resilience. Supporting a thriving, inclusive art music sector can strengthen community cohesion, create employment opportunities in composition and performance, and project Ghanaian cultural identity both locally and internationally. In this way, inclusive growth in art music becomes a contributor to the country's broader social and economic development.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the evolving landscape of art music in Ghana, arguing for a redefinition that is more inclusive, culturally grounded, and reflective of current practice. Drawing on Kubik's theory of change and continuity and the concept of cultural inclusion, we have challenged prevailing definitions that tie compositional legitimacy to formal academic training or Eurocentric aesthetic codes. Instead, we have proposed definitions of both art music and African art music that emphasise musical characteristics, intercultural intentionality, and broad participation.

Through analysis of selected scores, interviews with composers and performers, and observations of performance practices, the study has shown that both formally and informally trained practitioners contribute meaningfully to the field. Their works display technical skill, cultural resonance, and expressive depth – whether transmitted through notation, oral practice, or hybrid methods. The identification of *neo-Ghanaian art music* as a contemporary phenomenon further underscores the genre's dynamism, particularly in relation to performance innovation, stylistic borrowing, performer agency, and audience engagement.

By condensing and reframing Euba's categorisation, we have argued for a flexible, content-focused approach to classification – one that privileges intercultural synthesis over composer identity alone. Our discussion of melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, structural, textual, expressive, and timbral strategies has shown that inclusivity is not an abstract concept but a lived compositional reality, grounded in indigenous heritage yet open to creative dialogue with global musical forms.

The policy and practice recommendations outlined in this paper point to concrete ways of embedding inclusive growth in the structures that sustain Ghanaian art music. These include reforming curricula to incorporate oral and community-based knowledge systems, supporting grassroots initiatives, broadening recognition frameworks, and aligning music development with national goals such as youth empowerment and cultural resilience.

Ultimately, this study affirms Ghanaian art music as a living, adaptive tradition whose continuity depends not on rigidity but on thoughtful innovation and equitable participation. By rethinking how the genre is defined, taught, performed, and supported, Ghana can nurture an art music practice that bridges cultural inequalities, affirms identity, and contributes to the nation's social and artistic development in the twenty-first century.

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