



# Ethnodoxological Reflection on the Choral Arrangement 'Zamina Mina Yeako Aba': The Arranger's Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

This article examined the choral arrangement *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba* from an ethnodoxological perspective, drawing on an original music video, *Zamina Mina Waka Waka*, by the *Zangalewa* Band from Cameroon. Positioned as a composer, The researcher contextualized the choral arrangement against the historical and migration-related background of the Makossa ensemble. The study offered valuable insights into the choral arrangement of *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba* by exploring its linguistic and cultural origins. This article employed ethnomusicological and ethnodoxological approaches to scrutinize the choral arrangement, specifically focusing on the latter and exploring its cultural and spiritual aspects. This study examined the choral arrangement within its cultural setting, considering elements such as performance practices, compositional devices, cultural perspectives, and conversations with native Cameroonians and Ghanaians. Ethnodoxology, an interdisciplinary field, examines how various cultures articulate their worship through artistic mediums, particularly music in this instance. The article argued for fuller inclusion of *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba* and similar choral arrangements in global Christian worship and highlighted their inherent biblical themes. The significance of these arrangements extends beyond their musical qualities and highlights their role in preserving cultural heritage, promoting unity, and contributing to the broader landscape of global Christian music. This study showed how the seamless fusion of Western and African musical elements creates a synergistic effect. Through ethnodoxological insights into the choral arrangement, it reveals the deep connection between spirituality, tradition, and music in cross-cultural music-making.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Harmonious Chorale, an internationally acclaimed choir from Ghana, delivered a compelling rendition of the choral arrangement *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba*. Their performance displayed the unscored dimensions of the music and brought to the forefront implicit elements relevant to migration and the artistic nuances inherent in the song. Another spectacular performance was by the Ikamva Music Ensemble at the Youngblood Gallery in Cape Town during 2023 ISCM's World Music Days.<sup>1</sup> The use of whistles, glissandos, a military marching choreography, and the subtle stamping of the singers' feet gave depth and meaning to the music and underscored the importance of performance practice in presenting traditional music in African choral art music.<sup>2</sup> Exploring

<sup>1</sup> World New Music Days, "ISCM South Africa 2023 Festival Booklet," <http://www.worldnewmusicdays.africa/festival-booklet2.html>, 2023. The 2023 World New Music Days, the annual festival by the International Society for Contemporary Music, took place in South Africa from November 24 to December 3, marking its centenary and first-ever African edition, hosted by NewMusicSA

<sup>2</sup> Harmonious Chorale, "Zamina Mina Yeako Abao - Military Cadence Arrangement by George Mensah Essilfie Performed by The Harmonious Chorale," <https://youtu.be/Ols30CB2WHg?si=8R7QlgXBtR8Buv-E>, 2020.

the choral arrangement, *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba* begins by examining the infectious phrase *Zamina Mina* and its profound impact on various cultural landscapes. *Zamina Mina* originated in Cameroon and has profoundly influenced Ghana's musical landscape, transcending geographical boundaries.

This discussion examines the complex cultural elements incorporated into *Zamina Mina Waka Waka* by the *Zangalewa* group, formerly known as the Golden Sounds Band, and examines the connections that transcend borders. In this article, the expression *Zamina Mina* is used interchangeably with the title of the choral arrangement, *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba*, depending on the context, referring to either the expression or the choral arrangement. Additionally, *Zamina Mina Waka Waka* specifically references the *Zangalewa* Band song. Despite the possible changes to the original melody during migration, the basic essence of the *Zamina Mina Waka Waka* song remains unchanged. Its widespread use in Ghana, from military cadences to work songs to spirited cheerleading anthems at school sporting events, illustrates its resilience, adaptability, versatility, and vibrancy. The enduring spirit of *Makossa*, deeply rooted in Cameroonian culture, is reflected in the rhythmic performances of Ghanaian fishermen as they haul their nets ashore, giving the movement a special and invigorating energy. As an arranger, I was inspired by this timeless musical spirit when creating the choral arrangement, *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba*. Its adaptation for Christian worship aims to convey the triumph of Christ. Rooted in *Makossa*'s vibrant energy, the arrangement seeks to resonate with listeners, inspiring them to embrace Christ's victory for salvation.

## METHODOLOGY

This study combines ethnomusicology and ethnodoxology, emphasizing the latter, and adopts a reflective, participatory approach. It analyzes the choral arrangement in its cultural context, considering performance practice, personal experiences, cultural insights, and conversations with local Cameroonians and Ghanaians. The approach focuses on communicating faith, tradition, and spirituality in global Christian worship while honoring different cultural expressions. Ethnodoxology is a newer subfield within ethnomusicology. Brian Schrag defines Ethnodoxology as “a theological and anthropological framework guiding all cultures to worship God using their unique artistic expressions. The term derives from two biblical Greek words: ‘ethno’ from ethne (peoples) and ‘doxology’ from doxos (glory or praise).”<sup>3</sup> The official definition by the Global Ethnodoxology Network (GEN) states that “Ethnodoxology is the interdisciplinary study of how Christians in every culture engage with God and the world through their own artistic expressions.”<sup>4</sup>

Scholars from various disciplines, such as ethnomusicology, anthropology, and theology, utilize ethnodoxological approaches to examine the intersection of culture, music, and spirituality, aiming to understand and appreciate diverse worship practices and musical traditions within different cultural contexts. Resources like “Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook (over a hundred contributors)”<sup>5</sup> and “Creating Local Arts Together”<sup>6</sup> offer practical guidance for incorporating ethnodoxological principles into worship planning. These works emphasize adapting worship to resonate with local communities worldwide while embracing cultural diversity. In “The Worship Architect” by Constance Cherry, an ethnodoxological approach is employed, highlighting its role in enhancing the study of diverse worship forms and content within Christian worship worldwide.<sup>7</sup> Cherry observes that Ethnodoxology is increasingly gaining recognition as a reputable discipline that fosters the global examination of various cultures' worship practices and expressions within Christian worship. She underscores the rising interest in exploring worship forms and content from diverse cultural backgrounds.<sup>8</sup>

While the choral arrangement *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba* could initially be placed within ethnomusicological research, this article argues that it represents a compelling topic for ethnodoxological analysis. Unlike the scientific study of music from different cultures often found in ethnomusicology, ethnodoxology focuses on understanding and promoting different artistic expressions in worship contexts. McKerrell suggests a novel approach in ethnomusicology involving improvisation to understand traditional

<sup>3</sup> Brian Schrag and Robin P. Harris, “Ethnodoxology - Worship and Mission for the Global Church,” *Mission Frontiers - A Magazine of the U.S. Center for World Mission*, Issue 36.5, October 2014.

<sup>4</sup> World of Worship, “Global Ethnodoxology Network (GEN),” <https://www.worldofworship.org/about/>.

<sup>5</sup> James R. Krabill et al., *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Brian Schrag and James Krabill, *Creating Local Arts Together: A Manual to Help Communities to Reach Their Kingdom Goals* (Littleton, USA: William Carey Publishing, n.d.).

<sup>7</sup> Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids, USA: Baker Academic, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services*.

music and as a research tool to create new musical forms. This method can be applied to existing musical traditions or adapted to new ones, offering interdisciplinary research collaboration opportunities.<sup>9</sup> Based on McKerrell's innovative use of improvisation as a research tool, this study analyzes the improvisational elements in *Zamina Mina's* choral arrangement and enriches our understanding of Indigenous musical expressions in worship services.

This analysis integrates ethnodoxological perspectives to recognize the dual role of African choral art music in religious expression and cultural preservation. Through an interdisciplinary approach, it seeks to deepen understanding of these relationships for academic discourse and practical applications in music and worship. Additionally, it highlights the potential of choral arrangements to enrich global worship while preserving cultural heritage, promoting a more inclusive and diverse musical landscape aligned with ethnodoxological principles.

### ***Zamina Mina* Choral Arrangement - An Ethnodoxological Exploration on Music Adaptation and Worship**

Shakira, a Columbian pop star, adapted the popular song *Zamina Mina Waka Waka* by *Zangalewa* into an Afropop version and named it *Waka Waka This Time for Africa*. Shakira's adaptation served as the official anthem for the 2010 FIFA World Cup and was performed during the opening ceremony. It also represented a transformation encapsulating the vibrant spirit of the original while integrating her distinctive pop style.<sup>10</sup> The catchphrase *Waka Waka* became a unifying chant during the World Cup, resonating globally and epitomizing the dynamic fusion of African influences with mainstream pop. The song's popularity transcended cultural boundaries and symbolized unity, celebration, and hope.

The transformation of *Zamina Mina* sheds light on musical adaptation for Christian choral worship. The seamless integration of improvised elements reflects the influence of migration. The application of ethnomusicology, particularly in this study, is crucial to understanding cultural phenomena and musical development across genres. McKerrell proposes an innovative and unexplored path in ethnomusicology by using improvisation to understand existing oral or acoustically transmitted musical traditions and as a research technique to create entirely new musical structures. This innovation could occur in the original cultural context or by integrating improvisational elements into a particular musical tradition.<sup>11</sup> In this case, the choral arrangement can honor the song's origins through improvisation and introduce innovative elements while retaining its essence and original flavor. Performers can experiment with improvisations to add unique qualities to the arrangement and adapt it to choral contexts.

From an ethnodoxological perspective, the researcher examined the recontextualization process with a focus on choral adaptations as channels for religious and cultural expression. *Zamina Mina's* adaptation for the choral service demonstrates the resilience of African musical traditions by incorporating improvisation while preserving their core. This transformation exemplifies the fusion of cultural and religious elements and enhances artistic expression in Christian worship.

### **The Rise and Influence of 'Zamina Mina Waka Waka' in Makossa Music and Beyond**

In 1986, the *Makossa* ensemble *Zangalewa* (also known as Golden Sounds) from Cameroon achieved significant success with their single *Zamina Waka Waka*, making it a chart-topping hit. It must be noted that the group's original name was Golden Sounds, which changed to *Zangalewa* after the song became a hit. Within the realm of *Makossa* music, a genre originating from Cameroon, *Zamina Waka Waka* garnered widespread popularity.<sup>12</sup>

The song's extensive reinterpretation and adaptation by numerous artists and groups within and outside the *Makossa* genre have contributed significantly to its widespread popularity. John Collins has described *Makossa* as a fusion of traditional Cameroonian highlife and Soul music, which bears similarities to the local highlife style in Cameroon.<sup>13</sup> This blending of elements has significantly contributed to the song's broad appeal and diverse interpretation. The term *Makossa* is derived from "contortion" or "sway." Eliminating the *ma*

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<sup>9</sup> Simon McKerrell, "Towards Practice Research in Ethnomusicology," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 31, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 10–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17411912.2021.1964374>.

<sup>10</sup> Fergal, "Shakira Zamina Waka Waka," <https://Shakiraworld.Com/Shakira-Zamina-Waka-Waka/>. (Shakira World (blog), May 9, 2023).

<sup>11</sup> McKerrell, "Towards Practice Research in Ethnomusicology."

<sup>12</sup> Afropop Worldwide, "Afropop Worldwide | Anatomy of A Song: 'Zangalewa' From African Protest into Multiplatinum Pop," <https://afropop.org/articles/anatomy-of-a-song-zangalewa-from-african-protest-into-multiplatinum-pop>.

<sup>13</sup> John Collins, "The Early History of West African Highlife Music," *Popular Music* 8, no. 3 (October 11, 1989): 221–30, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143000003524>.

component results in *kossa*, frequently employed by singers to prompt dancers to intensify their movements and encourage musicians to play with greater vigor.<sup>14</sup> It is not an irony then that *Makossa*, known for its lively rhythms and danceable tunes, is the genre the popular song *Zamina Mina Waka Waka* uses. Various artists and bands have given this track their unique touch and have enriched its appeal in different styles.

### **Cross-Cultural Influences: Makossa Migration and Musical Exchange**

The migration of certain pioneering *Makossa* musicians to France presented an initial chance for *Makossa* to extend its reach beyond Cameroon's borders, allowing it to exert influence and be shaped by musical styles from other regions.<sup>15</sup> The migration of African *Makossa* pioneers to France significantly influenced the Cameroonian *Makossa* genre thereby promoting musical exchanges with different cultures and expanding its reach beyond its origins. This bidirectional cultural exchange enriched *Makossa's* musical landscape, as musicians were exposed to various musical traditions, instruments, rhythms, and artistic approaches. This phenomenon illustrates the essence of cross-cultural music-making, where musical expressions interact and influence each other. Migration and international musical exchange contribute to the diversity and development of music and shape its growth and global appeal. The *Makossa* Migration illustrates how cultural interactions drive musical innovation and provides a basis for exploring the *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba* choral arrangement in the context of cross-cultural music-making.

### **Artistic Commentary on Colonialism**

The original music video for the song *Zamina Mina Waka Waka* by the Cameroonian group *Zangalewa* strategically featured military clothing from the British colonial period.<sup>16</sup> The clothing was intentionally overstuffed to highlight the physical features of the soldiers. This conscious choice of clothing is a form of artistic commentary and satire and provides valuable insight into colonialism's historical and socio-political impact. The group aimed to highlight power dynamics, cultural oppression, and the ongoing influence of colonial rule through the skillful imitation of British soldiers through costume. This artistic expression boldly affirmed their identity, provided a platform for the discourse on historical experiences, and demonstrated the resilience and impact of their cultural heritage. In this context, costumes emerge as a nuanced but powerful commentary that reflects the complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Below is an image of the *Zangalewa* group in their costume.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 1: Zangalewa/Golden Sounds in costumes.

### **Unveiling the Linguistic Symbolism and Musical Synthesis in Zangalewa's 'Zamina Mina Waka Waka'**

The song is written in the Fang Language. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, speakers of the Fang language are renowned as highly skilled warriors and proficient hunters in their regional context. This linguistic background infuses the song with a martial quality that aligns with historical perceptions of Fang language

<sup>14</sup> "Transatlantic Cultures.," <https://transatlantic-cultures.org/en/pdf/record/makossa>.

<sup>15</sup> Francis B Nyamnjoh and Jude Fokwang, "Entertaining Repression: Music and Politics in Postcolonial Cameroon," *African Affairs* 104, no. 415 (2005): 251–74.

<sup>16</sup> "Zamina Waka Waka, Time for Africa Original Version," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpHQA6eCOY>, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> "Afropop Worldwide | Anatomy of A Song."

speakers as adept warriors and hunters in their area.<sup>18</sup> *Zamina Mina Waka Waka*, the *Zangalewa* Band's original song, embodies a militant appeal. This outstanding paradigm significantly influenced the structural and thematic essence of the *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba* choral arrangement.

Although the Ghanaian and Cameroonian groups' renditions of *Zamina Mina* differ greatly in the melody, they share the phrase, *Zamina Mina*. Following exchanges with a few individuals from Cameroon, the exact origin of the expression *Zamina Mina* remains unclear, with several hints pointing towards a blend of Duala and French influences. This hypothesis is consistent with Cameroon's historical background of dual colonization and linguistic diversity, making it a plausible explanation for the phrase's genesis. However, further research is required to verify this theory. *Zamina Mina* is sometimes associated with connotations such as "come!" or "do it!" reminiscent of commands issued by colonizers to African soldiers.

The following words are featured prominently in the *Zangalewa* Band's original song. Some of the song's lyrics are on the web.<sup>19</sup> To confirm the interpretations, the researcher consulted my Cameroonian acquaintances, and they offered almost identical probable translations for the song's main lyrics sung by the *Zangalewa* group.

***Tsaminamina*** means "come."

***Waka Waka*** means "do it," as in "complete the task."

***Waka*** means "walk while working" in pidgin.

***Zambo*** means "wait."

***Wana*** means "It is mine."

***Tsaminamina Zangalewa*** means "Where are you from?"

A plausible interpretation of the *Zamina* song, considering its symbols, lyrics, and performance, paints a picture of the colonial period in Cameroon. The song's lyrics convey a subtle form of rebellion, signifying the defiance of African soldiers against their colonial oppressors. The call of "*Tsaminamina*" reflected a demand for the soldiers to work, enduring the tough conditions of colonial labor. Behind this façade of submission lay a covert unity in which the rhythm of *Waka Waka* became a form of mockery, a secret way for soldiers to express their frustrations and dreams of freedom. *Tsaminamina Zangalewa* was a hidden question, making fun of the colonizers' ignorance of the soldiers' desires for independence. The word "*Wana*," asserting "it is mine," became a quiet statement of empowerment, a way to reclaim their identity despite being treated as possessions. *Zambo* encouraged patience and fostered a collective resilience that would eventually lead to the struggle for independence. The song predicted a future in which Cameroonians' true voices and dreams would rise above colonialism's oppressive melodies.

Following its release in 1986, the song gained widespread popularity and was adopted by the Ghanaian military camps as a military cadence. This was made possible by soldiers who had taken part in U.N. peacekeeping missions in Africa and who brought the song with them. Their improvised interpretations of the song differed from the rendition by the *Zangalewa Makossa* group. *The Zamina Mina* choral arrangement incorporates two expressions from the Twi language, which is spoken in Ghana. *Yeako aba*, which means "We Have Returned," is included as a military cadence and serves as another memorable expression within the song.

Furthermore, the arrangement includes *Nkunimdie nkoa*, which translates to 'victory all the way.' These expressions reflect the heroes' triumphant return and highlight their bravery and resilience. The versatility of *Zamina Mina* in Ghana is evident as it is applicable in different contexts. It is important to note that the song was adapted to specific occasions or activities through improvisation, thus giving rise to distinctive renditions tailored to specific events or activities. The lively call and response make it ideal as a song for promoting camaraderie in a group. The version used in this arrangement was based on the singing of a group of fishermen in the Central Region of Ghana, West Africa, who pulled their nets from the sea to the shore. The song facilitated the synchronized action of the group in pulling the net.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Britannica, "Fang | Central African, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon | Britannica," in <https://www.Britannica.Com/Topic/Fang-People.>, n.d.

<sup>19</sup> "Zamina Mina (Zangalewa) - The Art and Popular Culture Encyclopedia," <https://www.artandpopularculture.com/Zangalewa>.

<sup>20</sup> Natty Dadzie, "Fishermen Singing and Pulling Their Nets. Cape Coast, Ghana," <https://youtu.be/OeEuvmAJOUG?Si=VqoNbHAvRddsL7z.>, 2018.

The image shows a musical score for two cantors. It consists of two systems. Each system has a vocal line for the first cantor and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "n - ku - nim - die nkoa. O!", "Za - mi - na, mi - na, ya kaa - bao.", and "Ya kaa - bao!". The piano accompaniment features parallel harmonies over a static bass note.

Figure 2: Twi Expressions sung by two cantors.

The two Twi expressions captured in the choral arrangement are sung by the two cantors leading the military cadence, with *Nkunimdie nkoa* and *Yeako Aba* signifying a victorious moment. (Fig. 2)

Parallel harmonies are heard over a static bass note at the song's beginning. (Fig. 3) Parallel harmonies in which several voices move at parallel intervals are a common feature of African choral music (e.g., thirds or fifths). The distinct harmony of African choral music can be enhanced by these parallel intervals, producing a rich, full sound. Kazadi Wa Makuna states, “Voices singing the same words at different intervals result in parallel harmony, which is very common in African vocal tradition.”<sup>21</sup>

The image shows a musical score for "Zamina Mina (Come) (Ya ko Aba) We have returned". It includes a Tenor & Baritone Duet line and a Chorus line. The lyrics are: "Za - mi - na, mi - na, ya kaa - bao.". The score includes a pronunciation guide, optional percussion accompaniment, and a tempo marking of "Lively/with energy/power". It also features a tempo marking of "♩ = ca 118". The score is arranged by George Mensah Essilfie in 2019.

Figure 3: Parallel harmonies over static bass (Mm 1 - 8), Call and response (Mm 9....)

The *Zamina Mina* Arrangement exemplifies a blend of African and Western musical elements, reflecting its cross-cultural appeal. The composition achieves a cohesive and balanced sound by strategically

<sup>21</sup> Kazadi wa Mukuna, “Creative Practice in African Music: New Perspectives in the Scrutiny of Africanisms in Diaspora,” *Black Music Research Journal* 17, no. 2 (1997): 239–50.



merging traditional African musical components with Western influences. The arrangement remains true to African musical practices while adding authenticity and cultural depth by incorporating call-and-response techniques, various African languages, and nonsense syllables (Measures 21–26) to enhance the rhythms. (Fig. 4)

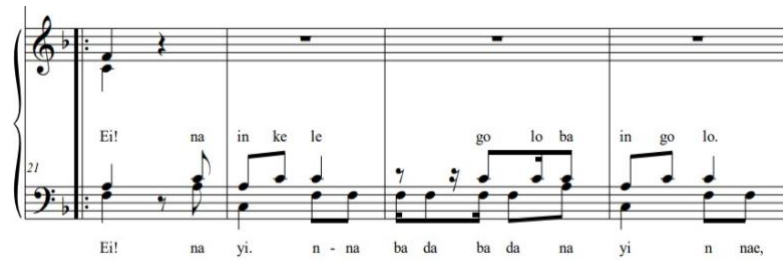


Figure 4: Nonsense syllables to enhance rhythm.

Using African drums and percussion as accompaniment (Fig. 5) and integrating Western elements such as harmonies and optional keyboard accompaniment emphasizes the song's roots in African and Western musical traditions.

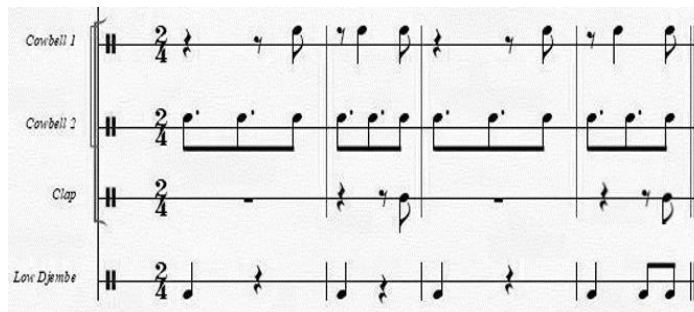


Figure 5: Percussion as accompaniment.

### Zamina Mina Choral Arrangement: Bridging Military Cadence Essence and Cultural Preservation

Travis Salley offers a fundamental characterization of the military cadence, describing it as a responsive work song performed by military personnel in coordinated movement in uniform. The primary goal of cadences is to ensure that soldiers maintain a synchronized pace set by the cadence caller, thereby promoting consistency and preventing step overlap, and in effect presenting a cohesive front. This practice, known as close-order drill, comprises a structured marching ceremony that nurtures and displays group unity and adherence to discipline. Cadences are an integral part of a broader process that aims to transition individuals from civilian life to military personnel who are well-prepared for combat and capable of navigating the rigorous aspects of military life.<sup>22</sup>

In Ghana, it is common for the military to march through the barracks as part of their daily training. Military cadence is a rhythmic chant or song performed by soldiers during marching or running exercises to maintain a steady pace, boost morale, instill discipline, and strengthen troop unity and cohesion. This cadence often includes call-and-response patterns in which one member takes the lead, and the group responds.<sup>23</sup> This creates a lively and synchronized rhythm that supports physical exertion and maintains motivation during military training or exercise.

According to LoConto et al., American Military Cadences predominantly exhibit six distinctive characteristics commonly found in African songs. These characteristics, encompassing elements such as “call and response, focus on the voice, percussion backbeat to create energy, functionality in nature, focus on the

<sup>22</sup> Travis G. Salley, “Sound-off! An Introduction to the Study of American Military Marching Cadences” (2015).

<sup>23</sup> Greta E. Marlatt, “Research Guides: Military Music & Sounds: Military Cadences & Chants,” <https://libguides.nps.edu/militarymusic/cadences>.

experiences of daily living, and oral history,<sup>24</sup> align with the daily musical traditions of West Africa and Griot storytelling. They further underscored the following points:

The slave songs in North America were a continuation of musical traditions from West Africa and Griots. They retained elements such as call and response, emphasis on voice, and a percussion backbeat to infuse energy, primarily serving functional purposes for monotonous and laborious tasks. These songs centered on daily life, portraying work, hardships, and aspirations akin to West African songs. However, unlike West African songs, slave songs do not convey oral history extensively. This can be attributed to the diverse origins of slaves in various African cultural groups, each with distinct and sometimes conflicting histories.<sup>25</sup>

It becomes evident that the essence of military cadences, as described by LoConto et al., is skillfully incorporated into the musical fabric of the piece. The call-and-response pattern, where one voice initiates a musical phrase and is answered by a collective response, mirrors the structure of military cadences often observed during marches. This establishes a rhythmic dialogue, fostering a sense of unity and collective participation within the musical performance, a fundamental aspect of military cadences.

Furthermore, the performance of the song also pays significant attention to the quality and emphasis of the vocal delivery, aligning with the focus on the voice as highlighted in the characteristics of military cadences. The vocal elements in the arrangement, including two cantors leading simultaneously, lively shouts, and the glissando effect, contribute to the energetic and dynamic nature of the song, echoing the vibrant and expressive quality of military cadences in the African context.

### **Zamina Mina Choral Arrangement: A Reflection on the Asafo Traditional Musical Genre**

Incorporating a rhythmic percussion backbeat in the choral arrangement, possibly with drums or other percussive instruments, adds a layer of energy and momentum to the music, akin to the role of percussion in military cadences. This rhythmic foundation ensures a steady pace and instills a sense of discipline and cohesion among the performers, enhancing the overall impact of the performance.

The lyrical and percussive elements of the *Zamina Mina* choral arrangement serve as a musical expression and a source of inspiration within the community. This situation is similar to that of Asafo, a centuries-old warrior organization across Akan societies in Ghana. Its origin lies in the fight and defense of the community. This organization uses musical expressions, particularly song lyrics and drum lyrics, as effective tools to convey the historical context and celebrate the essence of society.<sup>26</sup> These elements enrich the musical experience and highlight the cultural and historical connections to military cadences and their broader significance within the African musical heritage.

### **Preserving African Military Cadences: The Role of Choral Arrangements**

Folk songs and military cadences rooted in oral traditions have limited access worldwide. Choral arrangements like *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba* protect these songs from oblivion, preserving their essence and increasing global recognition. Structured globalization and glocalization efforts preserve these songs while integrating them into the choral service, preserving their cultural essence and promoting deep communication between musical traditions.

It is worth noting that arrangers must exercise caution when selecting songs for choral arrangements intended for Christian worship. The appropriateness of lyrics, melodies, and cultural contexts must be carefully considered, and it must be ensured that they are consistent with the values of music for worship. Contextualization is important to maintain cultural authenticity while remaining consistent with the Christian worship ethos. This approach ensures that the choral arrangements resonate with worshipers while maintaining reverence for the worship experience.

### **The Harmonious Chorale's Innovative Performance**

The Harmonious Chorale, an international award-winning choir from Ghana, was the initial group to perform the choral arrangement, *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba*, incorporating whistles and other vocal sounds resembling

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<sup>24</sup> David G. LoConto, Timothy W. Clark, and Patrice N. Ware, "The Diaspora Of West Africa: The Influence Of West African Cultures On 'Jody Calls' In The United States Military," *Sociological Spectrum* 30, no. 1 (December 4, 2009): 90–109, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02732170903340919>.

<sup>25</sup> LoConto, Clark, and Ware, "The Diaspora Of West Africa.."

<sup>26</sup> A. A. Turkson, "Effutu Asafo: Its Organization and Music," *African Music: Journal of the International Library of African Music* 6, no. 2 (1982): 4–16, <https://doi.org/10.21504/amj.v6i2.1113>.



those in military cadences and cheerleading chants at school sporting events.<sup>27</sup> Although not explicitly indicated in the music score, whistles are often integrated into the performance of this choral piece. This deviation from the written music is inspired by the traditional use of whistles in the military, which fulfilled significant functions such as providing auditory cues, facilitating communication and commands, aiding in training, and ensuring uniformity and synchronization.



Figure 6 : Harmonious Chorale, Ghana (First Performance)

Whistles are essential for adding rhythm and a melodic element to military cadences and other related musical contexts.<sup>28</sup> Adding whistles enhances cadence musicality, improving overall sound and rhythmic beat, facilitating synchronized movement among soldiers. Incorporating nonsensical sounds into a military cadence positively impacts soldiers' morale and helps them maintain a sense of rhythm and synchronization during their march (Fig. 6). This strategy was applied to enhance the overall musical experience.

### Scriptural Connotations of the Choral Arrangement, *Zamina Mina Yea Ko Aba*

*Zamina Mina Yeako Aba*, which translates to "We have returned in victory," embodies the spirit of celebration, victory, and praise in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Like the biblical passages that describe victory celebrations with music, worship, and praise, this song reflects the spirit of jubilation and triumph. In the Old Testament, there are reports of celebrations characterized by singing, dancing, and praise after victories or important events. The Song of Deborah in Judges 5 is an example of a song of praise celebrating a victory, and Miriam's song in Exodus 15 is another example of music and dance celebrating a triumphant moment after crossing the Red Sea.

The *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba* choral arrangement embodies a universal expression of praise, appreciation, and gratitude. It reflects the sentiment of the psalmist who joyfully exclaims: "This is the day that the Lord has made; Let us rejoice and be glad" (Psalm 118:24 ESV<sup>29</sup>). This verse serves as a touching reminder of the blessings and opportunities that each new day brings and evokes a feeling of exuberant gratitude and joy. Consequently, the song is significant at various celebratory events within and outside the church context, where gratitude, praise, thanksgiving, and appreciation are at the heart of the song, creating an uplifting backdrop for communal expression.

In the New Testament, joyful celebration and triumph resonate with the spirit of *Zamina Mina Yea ko Aba*. One such example is the account of Paul and Silas in Acts 16:25-26. An earthquake occurred when they were imprisoned and in chains. Through their faith and prayers, their shackles broke and set them free. This event embodies the theme of victory and celebration in the face of adversity, a triumph of faith in challenges.

A similar example is the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:25), where a great feast and celebration symbolize the prodigal son's return, symbolizing a joyful homecoming and family reunion. This narrative encapsulates the joy and triumph of redemption and forgiveness akin to the celebratory essence of *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba*. These biblical narratives underscore the song's alignment with themes of victory, celebration, and resilience of faith, making it a fitting musical reflection of these profound New Testament stories.

<sup>27</sup> Harmonious Chorale, "Zamina Mina Yeako Abao - Military Cadence Arrangement by George Mensah Essilfie Performed by The Harmonious Chorale."

<sup>28</sup> War Whistles, "History of Military Whistles Used in War and Peace Duties Worldwide," <https://www.warwhistles.com/history.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

### **Zamina Mina Choral Arrangement as a Cross-Cultural Musical Innovation**

From Jin-Ah Kim's perspective, "cross-cultural music-making" is a composite term comprising three key elements: "cross-cultural," "music," and "making." The term "cross-cultural" initially gained prominence in certain scientific disciplines around the 1930s, particularly in the United States. Originally, it was employed in empirical studies to compare cultures statistically. However, its usage has evolved, especially since the 1980s, shifting towards signifying interaction and cultural integration.<sup>30</sup>

In line with Kim's insights into Cross-Cultural Music Making, the term emphasizes that music is not a pre-existing static entity but an ongoing creative, production, and performance process encompassing the fusion and amalgamation of diverse cultural elements in musical expression. This dynamic process mirrors music's continuous adaptation and evolution in response to ever-changing contexts and frames of reference.<sup>31</sup>

The transformative journey of *Zamina Mina*'s choral arrangement highlights the fluid nature of music, where cultural boundaries are crossed, and different musical expressions converge. Its worldwide popularity and widespread acceptance by diverse communities underscore its cross-cultural appeal and ability to resonate in diverse cultural contexts. Thus, *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba*'s choral arrangement is a vivid example of how music serves as a medium for cultural exchange and innovation and embodies the principles of cross-cultural music-making elucidated by Jin-Ah Kim.

### **Beyond Boundaries: Uniting Diverse World Traditions in Cross-Cultural Music**

It is imperative to critically emphasize that "cross-cultural" in music transcends a simplistic binary of Western versus non-Western musical cultures. The term encompasses various possibilities, including the fusion of different musical traditions worldwide. The fusion could include Asian vs. African music, Russian vs. Polish music, or any combination of different cultures and regions. This broader perspective challenges any preconceived notion that might limit the understanding of cross-cultural music-making to a specific Western-centric lens. It advocates an appreciation of the vast diversity of musical traditions globally and the potential for rich and innovative collaborations across these diverse traditions.<sup>32</sup> Essentially, intercultural music-making encompasses a variety of combinations and permutations, each contributing to a vibrant web of musical creativity and promoting a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of cultures through music. This understanding is essential to fully appreciating cross-cultural music in dynamic and constantly evolving landscapes.

The choral arrangement *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba* effectively illustrates the essence of cross-cultural music-making by seamlessly combining Cameroonian and Ghanaian musical traditions. This fusion goes beyond simple distinctions between West and non-West and demonstrates the power of music to bridge cultural boundaries and unite people from different backgrounds.

### **A Confluence of Culture, Faith, and Artistry in Choral Worship**

"Oh, sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless His name, Tell of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all the peoples!" (Psalm 96:1-3 ESV). The verse emphasizes singing and worshiping the Lord with a new song involving all people and nations. This encourages creativity and diversity in worship and urges believers to express their adoration for God through various forms of musical expression. In cross-cultural music making, this verse supports incorporating diverse musical styles and traditions into worship to proclaim God's glory among all people. By adopting different forms and styles of music from different cultures, believers can unite in worship, displaying the beauty and diversity of worship. In keeping with the inclusive nature of the service, people of different backgrounds and cultures can come together harmoniously to honor and praise the Lord.

Within the context of Christian choral worship, *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba* assumes a significant role, potentially substituting hymns imbued with militant connotations such as "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus," "Onward Christian Soldiers," "We Are Marching to Zion," and "Soldiers of Christ Arise." These hymns have undergone translation into local languages, aiming to cultivate heart worship. This practice underscores the notion that songs presented in indigenous artistic expressions can enhance inclusivity in worship, aligning with

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<sup>30</sup> Jin-Ah Kim, "Cross-Cultural Music Making: Concepts, Conditions and Perspectives," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 2017, 19–32.

<sup>31</sup> Kim, "Cross-Cultural Music Making: Concepts, Conditions and Perspectives."

<sup>32</sup> Ernest Hung Choong Lim, Georgette S Y Yu, and Rose Martin, "Exploring Musician-Educators' Reflections on a Collaborative Cross-Cultural Music Making Encounter in Singapore," *International Journal of Music Education* 40, no. 3 (2022): 432–44.

the principles outlined in the Nairobi Statement. The Nairobi Statement posits that worship comprehension is profoundly enriched when imbued with elements expressed within one's cultural milieu.<sup>33</sup>

Sanneh and Carpenter argue that cultures worldwide are merging to justify adaptations in contemporary Christianity, challenging the conventions of local worship practices.<sup>34</sup> Brian Schrag views this move as transforming indigenous African communities served by European missionaries in terms of their musical innovation. He argues that the music of foreign cultures has opened the door to various musical inventions. The alien nature of Western-oriented creativity inspired native people and led to several modifications in their music for worship. He cites two examples of these modifications. These are translating foreign music into local languages and incorporating local instruments to accompany a foreign song.<sup>35</sup>

*Zamina Mina Yeako Aba* embodies the key principles of ethnodoxology by intertwining culture, faith, and creativity. Incorporating African languages respects and preserves the linguistic and cultural heritage, thus enhancing the worship experience with a deeper meaning. Using nonsensical syllables within the choral arrangement aligns with the song's historical context: a collective improvisation by fishermen engaged in physically demanding tasks. This context illuminates how seemingly nonsensical phonetic patterns serve a functional and expressive role within a song, contributing to its authenticity in the cultural milieu.

Participation and collaboration, central to ethnodoxology, promote active engagement within the worship community during the *Zamina Mina, Yeako Aba* performance. Using cantors, choir, percussion, and piano accompaniment reflects the dynamic adaptability inherent in cross-cultural music and allows for greater flexibility in artistic creation.

Furthermore, the process of musical transformation and renewal leads to a dynamic reinterpretation of traditional melodies, harmonies, rhythms, and other musical elements. This process promotes cultural revitalization within the community, breathing new life into its worship traditions and reflecting evolving expressions of faith and identity. *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba's* choral performance uses musical techniques such as call and response, special embellishments such as glissando, and improvised syllables to drive the rhythms forward. These elements convey the song's militant undertones while authentically resonating with the community's cultural ethos. *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba's* choral arrangement represents a convergence of diverse cultural heritage, heartfelt worship, and artistic creativity, indicating its possible integration into the sacred music repertoire and reflecting the rich diversity of worship in biblical traditions. The following are extracts from the hymns "Soldiers of Christ Arise" and "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus":

*From strength to strength, go on, wrestle and fight, and pray.*

*Tread all the pow'rs of darkness down and win the well-fought day.*<sup>36</sup>

*To him that overcometh, a crown of life shall be.*

*He with the King of Glory shall reign eternally.*<sup>37</sup>

The African choral arrangement *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba*, like these victory hymns stated above, expresses Christian victory exemplified by Jesus' victory over sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:54–57). By embracing the victory proclaimed in the choral arrangement, believers can rejoice and unite in faith, and this will promote inclusivity in worship and affirm that Christ's victory brings believers together in praise and worship. Worship services that utilize global choral worship encourage innovation through diverse musical traditions while honoring cultural origins. Consequently, Christian choral composers and arrangers are encouraged to embrace musical diversity that promotes a vibrant worship experience incorporating cultural voices with devotion and creativity.

## The Global Impact of Choral Arrangements on Traditional Songs

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<sup>33</sup> Kirk E. Miller, "The Relationship Between Worship and Culture (the Nairobi Statement),"

<https://kirkmillerblog.com/2014/02/24/the-relationship-between-worship-and-culture-the-nairobi-statement/>, February 14, 2014.

<sup>34</sup> Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter, *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> Brian Schrag with Robin. Harris, "Ethnodoxology: Facilitating Local Arts Expressions for Kingdom Purposes,"

<https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/ethnodoxology-article.>, n.d.

<sup>36</sup> "Soldiers of Christ, Arise | Hymnary.Org.," [https://hymnary.org/text/soldiers\\_of\\_christ\\_arise\\_andputyour\\_stro.](https://hymnary.org/text/soldiers_of_christ_arise_andputyour_stro.)

<sup>37</sup> "'Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus | Hymnary.Org.'," [https://hymnary.org/text/stand\\_up\\_stand\\_up\\_for\\_jesus\\_duffield.](https://hymnary.org/text/stand_up_stand_up_for_jesus_duffield.), n.d.

Combining ethnodoxological perspectives with targeted efforts to globalize and glocalize traditional genres such as folk songs and African military cadences represents a promising path to preserving and enhancing these valuable cultural expressions. By including them in worship and broader cultural discourses, their cultural significance is respected and this promotes a greater connection to their heritage.

The conscious distribution and adaptation of indigenous songs enable them to go beyond their regional origins and provide lasting insights into the connection between faith, customs, and music. This gives the songs immense value as a crucial addition to a diverse global musical culture connecting people with different backgrounds and experiences. *Zamina Mina's* choral arrangement strategically preserves the song's traditional roots while ensuring its relevance in contemporary contexts. It forges a connection between cultural heritage and the ever-evolving global choral worship landscape by combining musical instruments and elements spanning various cultural backgrounds. This enriching process imbues worldwide choral worship with the original song's rhythms and cultural significance and serves as a vehicle for cultural exchange, bringing different musical traditions together in seamless harmony.

In essence, *Zamina Mina's* choral arrangement is a potent symbol of cultural diversity and unity, highlighting how traditional songs can seamlessly integrate into a broader global musical repertoire and elevate the richness of global choral worship. By ensuring the continued relevance of traditional songs through choral arrangements, composers and arrangers interested in cross-cultural music-making preserve cultural heritage and promote a deeper appreciation and understanding of diverse musical traditions. This paves the way for a more inclusive and rich global musical landscape for choral worship, bringing together diverse voices and traditions to create a web of musical expression that resonates with audiences worldwide.

### **Advancing African Christian Choral Music: Challenges, Solutions, and Collective Advocacy**

As an African composer interested in Christian choral music, I have pinpointed key areas to advance our musical tradition. A major challenge lies in the lack of networking opportunities, hindering collaboration among composers and arrangers across Africa and its diaspora, which limits our artistic growth and threatens the preservation of our cultural heritage. However, there are viable solutions. Building a comprehensive network for African choral musicians can promote collaboration and resource sharing and enrich our musical diversity. Removing systemic barriers such as limited financial and educational resources is critical to supporting the next generation of composers and arrangers.

Globalization and glocalization of Christian choral music are essential. While the globalization of music has brought both positive and negative effects to traditional African music, the process of music glocalization has played a crucial role in balancing these influences, preserving cultural authenticity, and fostering creativity within the African Christian music scene.<sup>38</sup> Creating dedicated platforms and events can boost international presence that fosters a greater appreciation for cross-cultural music. Moreover, advocating for increased funding and recognition from governmental arts agencies is vital to sustaining our rich musical heritage.

Collaborating, preserving cultural roots, and fostering artistic growth can propel African Christian choral music into a new era of vitality and innovation. Achieving these goals requires collective efforts from academia, the church, musicians, governmental agencies, cultural organizations, philanthropic foundations, and other stakeholders committed to advancing musical heritages.

### **CONCLUSION**

Akin Euba emphasizes that African composers should primarily create music for Africans and people of African descent, their main audience, to connect effectively. This approach addresses the problem of marginalization of African composers. They must establish themselves within Africa and its diaspora communities to gain global recognition and influence.<sup>39</sup> African composers' approaches vary depending on their skills and goals, with some targeting local communities while others seek broader global recognition. Despite this variety, African music has the potential to resonate with a diverse international audience. Traditional choral songs arranged for Christian worship often contain profound spiritual themes and messages that promote a deeper connection with God and each other. Integrating diverse musical traditions into global worship exemplifies the richness and unity of our shared spiritual journey. Choral arrangements such as *Zamina Mina Yeako Aba* have the potential to tell of the victory of Jesus Christ while embodying cultural diversity and reflecting the rich and broad spectrum of Christian worship.

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<sup>38</sup> George Mensah Essilfie, "Indigenous Genres on Digital Keyboards: Vitalizing Choral Worship in the Methodist Church Ghana," 89. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/4655/>, 2023.

<sup>39</sup> Akin Euba, "Text Setting in African Composition," *Research in African Literatures* 32, no. 2 (2001): 119–32.

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## Additional Resources

### Videos

- Original Zangalewa Waka Waka*. 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdrEisrvY7g>.
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### Audio

- Fishermen singing and pulling nets*. 2018. Cape Coast, Ghana: By courtesy of Natty Dadzie. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jVn5tnqdiDIZqSIbGiUDEuRlxadVprSc/view?usp=sharing>.
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## ABOUT AUTHOR

Dr. George Mensah Essilfie follows an intercultural approach in his musical compositions, seamlessly combining influences from his stays in Africa, the Caribbean, Great Britain, and the USA. Drawing inspiration from these diverse experiences, GME explores the fusion of elements that define art music and traditional Ghanaian music. His compositions are evidence of the harmonious interplay of global and local musical traditions. GME's innovative work reflects a commitment to creating a unique musical language that transcends geographical boundaries. With this cross-cultural musical journey, GME enriches the global soundscape, offering compositions that resonate universally while celebrating the living heritage of Ghanaian music. Dr. George Mensah Essilfie has degrees in Music Education from Ghana, an MA in Church Music from Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University, OH, an MMus in Composition, and a Graduate Certificate in Eurhythmics from the University of Kentucky, and a Doctorate in Worship Studies – Ethnomusicology from Liberty University, VA. Expertise includes cross-cultural music-making innovations and worship contextualization.