



TRIBUTE BY

THE INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES AND THE SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS KWABENA NKETIA: A VISIONARY PIONEER IN SCHOLARLY LEADERSHIP

Path-breaking Scholar-

You were born an only child, filled with wisdom.

You were born with a discerning, generous personality.

That is why you have trained and mentored people the world over

in African- centred scholarship.

For us at the Institute of African Studies,
the institution of higher learning with an enviable
reputation in the study of Africa,

School of Performing Arts

The school of advanced studies in performance
which learners and nobility alike approach with
eagerness

we know we stand on your shoulders!

Emeritus Professor Kwabena Nketia,

You have opened the way,

You have given us the capital with which to work

Go in peace,

for you have laid a firm and impressive foundation

Okyerɛkyerɛni-kwankyerɛfo

Yɛwoo wo bakorɔ nyansafo

Yɛwoo wo kanhwɛfoɔ a adɔɛ wɔ wo mu

Nti na wode wo nyansa de Abibirem nimdee

Atete mma apetepe Wiase amansan nyinaa so

Institute of African Studies:

Suapɔn a yeagyɛ din wɔ Abibiman adesua mu

School of Performing Arts

Agoro ne `yekyerɛmu suap`n

A asuafo` ne abrempon nyinaa ara de ahopopo`

hwehwɛ yɛn akyiri akwan.

Yɛnim sɛ yɛgyina w'abatire so.

Obenfopɔn Kwabena Nketia

Woabue kwan

Woahyɛ yɛn dwetire

Kɔ asomdwoɛ mu ɛfiri sɛ w'akyiri ayɛ fɛfɛfɛ

Early Influences

By the time J.H. Kwabena Nketia was invited to move from the Archeology Department of the University of Ghana to the Institute of African Studies in 1961, he had had the opportunity to undertake a considerable amount of field work pursuing Ghanaian and Akan music in particular within its cultural setting. He was set on the path of establishing African music (ethnomusicology) as a field in Ghanaian academia. This was made possible by the foresight of Dr. Kofi Abrefa Busia in the Sociology Department who saw the link between the study of culture and the arts, with the study of society.

Three major elements of Nketia's experience as a scholar and nationalist were to stand him in exceptional stead to take on a leadership role in the Institute of African Studies. The first was his commitment to field work as a researcher. For him, fieldwork was to be approached with a sense of both rigour and delighted discovery. The second was his meticulous documentation of his findings and his scholarship which often involved offering alternative perspectives to the prevailing dominant discourse in academia. Thirdly, he was already working within an interdisciplinary paradigm, bringing together fields such as music, linguistics and anthropology. This was to become one of the defining features of programmes at the Institute. Nketia was an educator and remained preoccupied with issues of methodology throughout his career. Additionally, he was in touch both with custodians of the indigenous cultures as well as national authorities. In this regard Professor Nketia always remembered the sheer depth of critical thought demonstrated by his grandmothers. He was therefore involved in establishing a supra-ethnic culture aimed at realising unity in diversity. With this particular constellation of experiences, and the recognition he was beginning to attract, Nketia was set

to steer the Institute and the School of Music and Drama later known as the School of Performing Arts.

J.H Kwabena Nketia as Director of the Institute of African Studies: The Challenge

Starting his administrative career at the Institute as Deputy Director in 1961, Nketia was assigned the particular mandate of establishing a music and drama unit. He was confirmed as Director of the Institute of African Studies in 1965, concurrently holding the position of Director of the School of Music and Drama whose programmes had by then been developed enough to warrant a semi-independent status.

It must have been plain to Nketia that, alien as it may have been to conventions in the academy, the Institute's praxis should embody an unequivocal commitment to the centrality of creative expressions of culture in African life. The tongues that coined the disparaging rubric 'Dondology' to represent the efforts to bring African performance into mainstream academia were soon stilled as the Institute of African Studies and its School of Music and Drama began to attract streams of students from across the world.

Under J. H. Kwabena Nketia's leadership, the University was assisted by the Institute to recognize in Ghanaian heritage and creativity, a sense of identity and vast, unexplored fields of enquiry which were to add exponentially to knowledge production about Ghana and Africa. Additionally, the ceremonial life of the university, whose uniqueness is greatly admired, has many features which display Ghanaian iconography and expressions. Indeed, Professor Nketia was directly responsible for conceptualizing many of these features including the University of Ghana Anthem, of which he is the proud composer.

Under his leadership the Institute had a diversified staffing base, and extended its influence by absorbing or collaborating with initiatives outside of academia as part of its extension work. The University of Ghana Drama Studio and the Manhyia Archives (housing the private archives of the Asantehene) in Kumasi are prime examples.

A highly successful collaboration between the government's Institute of Arts and Culture and The Institute of African Studies of the University of Ghana created the Ghana Dance Ensemble in 1962. From its inception, the Ensemble was to be Ghana's flagship for the professional, world-wide promotion of the music and dance heritage of Ghana, undergirded by solid field work and experimental research.

The School of Performing Arts: A Dream Come True

Professor Nketia's accomplishments as educator, administrator, writer and a repository of African traditional knowledge bodies and values were crucial assets for bringing in African performing arts into the realms of the academy. As first director of the School of Music and Drama, he made sure that knowledge transmission was understood as the art of cultivating the moral, emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions of developing an individual, a group or a nation. He also demonstrated with many musical compositions how this holistic education could be achieved by drawing on cultural forms such as music, dance and dramatic fusion.

With a strong team of performing arts practitioners and scholars, the School of Music and Drama under the directorship of Prof. Kwabena Nketia began to engage in experimental productions and works with African arts as the focus. These laid a firm foundation on which the current Creative Industry in Ghana relies on for its materials and tools.

Within a few years of taking on the mantle of Director of the Institute African Studies, Nketia received tempting offers leave the Institute of African Studies and settle in other institutions. Offers included full professorships on a negotiated salary, regular sabbaticals, etc. Correspondence with these institutions clearly portray Prof Nketia's anxiety to see to it that programmes initiated would become properly established under his watch. This resulted in fairly complex arrangements to ensure that he could spend the time required in Ghana to provide consistent leadership in research, teaching, mentoring and institution-building.

In the meantime, the Institute had developed a healthy interdisciplinary programme of work in linguistics, history, social anthropology, development studies, literature and music.

Over the years for example, Professor Nketia made regular contributions to the literary magazine, *Okyeame* with essays such as translations of pieces from the oral tradition as well as creative works in Twi which brought the Ghana Writers Association into close association with the Institute. The Institute's journal, *The Research Review* (now known as the *Contemporary Journal of African Studies*) and its associated Occasional Paper Series reflect Nketia's influence and contributions. The School of Music and Drama was evolving into a fully-fledged independent institution, now School of Performing Arts.

Professor Nketia retired from the Institute of African Studies as Director in 1979. He was however appointed Professor Emeritus and maintained an active scholarly engagement, working on his compositions and papers. Most importantly, he made himself available for consultations and responding to a very heavy demand on his time by scholars and artistes from around the world.

Legacies of Professor J.H.Kwabena Nketia.

Thorsen (2004:201) partly attributes 'interdisciplinary studies emerging with the growth of Institutes of Music and Music Research all over the African continent' to J.H. Kwabena Nketia's initiatives in Ghana.

It is beyond the scope of this brief tribute to list the entire oeuvre of Professor Nketia which consists of more than 200 journal articles, books and monographs, but a few land-mark titles exemplify the knowledge production in which he was involved:

Drumming in Akan Communities,

The Music of Africa, and *Ethnomusicology and Africa Music Modes of Inquiry and Interpretation*. His works in Akan must also be highlighted as a contribution to building the literature necessary for scholarship in Ghanaian languages. Anthologies of traditional poetry such as *Ayan*, *Amoma*, *Ab'fodwom* as well as his own creative work such as *Anwonsɛm* and *Akwansosɛm* bi.

Together his works set the standard for framing the scholarly output of the Institute of African Studies and the School of Performing Arts.

Nketia was not one to walk away from epistemological controversies. In response to disparaging remarks about the 'authenticity' of the Ghana Dance Ensemble, Nketia stated that the objective of the Ensemble's work 'was not to present an anthropological specimen; it was to create art.' Nketia comments on the view of a particular anthropologist by saying 'That was the old way thinking about it, sentimental perhaps.' Nketia insists '... the dances acquire another meaning in the context in which it is being performed. And for us the national meaning is extremely important.' (Schauert in Ampene et al. 586). This line of argument clearly sets up the parting of ways between the Eurocentric external gaze and an African-centred position on knowledge production about Africa.

The Institute and School's programmes under Professor Nketia attracted students and scholars from around the world. It is significant that after retirement from a long stint at universities abroad, Professor Nketia resettled at the University of Ghana by creating the International Centre for African Music and Dance.

We at the Institute of African Studies have sought to express our indebtedness to Professor Emeritus Joseph Hanson Kwabena Nketia in a number of ways. One of which we are very proud was to present to him a festschrift titled *Discourses in African Musicology*, based on papers presented at a two-day international conference held in the 'Kwabena Nketia Conference Room' at the Institute in September, 2011 on the theme "The Life and Works of Emeritus Professor J.H. Kwabena Nketia".

Additionally, through the vibrant creativity of the School of Performing Arts and its alumni your initiative reverberates throughout the world with the chants of their final farewell.

Professor J.H. Kwabena Nketia

Da yie, Da yie, Da yie!