



## MUSIK DER JAHRHUNDERTE

First International Student Conference „Global Interplay“, Accra, 19-21 January 2006

On January 19-21, Accra hosted the first conference of the Global Interplay project, part of the World New Music Festival 2006 in Stuttgart. The University of Ghana, Legon, is home of the School of Performing Arts and the Institute of African Studies where the conference took place. The Institute was founded in 1965 by Kwabana Nketia, the renowned musicologist and composer, who in his keynote address spoke of his encounters with Henry Cowell and György Ligeti in the 1950s and 60s and the ongoing search for the contemporary among younger composers today. There are different modernities, says Nketia, composers must not necessarily follow the steps of their western counterparts, ahead lies a big challenge that has yet to be tackled, but one can only proceed step by step: African composers must still do their homework, study traditional music and discover the ways of new composition techniques. In a following concert at the Goethe-Institut of Accra, listeners were confronted with different types of contemporary music in Ghana: There were Nketia's piano pieces played by Mawuyrami Akoto, the Seperewa-player Osei Korankye, Kakrabalobi giving a virtuoso performance on the Lobi (Balaphone) and, last not least, the Achimota School Choir performing works of their director Kenn Kafui.

The next morning, after an introductory remark of Ralf Alexander Kohler on the Global Interplay project, Willie Anku, head of the School of Performing Arts, gave a remarkable insight into "What goes on in a masterdrummer's mind". Drawing circular diagrams, making the audience go along with phrases like "She wants to eat some bread", through which drummers learn to memorize rhythmic patterns, Anku aptly demonstrated the functioning of a traditional drum ensemble. Contrary to what foreign observers tend to assume, there is little room for spontaneity, everything is very precise and ordered, as was also stressed by Zabana Kongo in his following lecture on "Form in African music".

After that, it was students' turn. In the afternoon, Senyo Adzei analyzed Nketia's "Sankudwum", Sanku- referring to string instruments and in this case to the piano. Todd Tarantino of the New York group presented an historical overview over "Rhythm as structure", referring to the overlapping of long rhythmic cycles in the works of Elliott Carter and others. Though the subject as such would seem somehow related to African music, one could feel from the reaction of listeners and the incredulous questions after, that the proceedings Tarantino described were in reality quite far away from the concerns of Ghanaian composers.

The same can be said of the "African influences in the works of György Ligeti and Steve Reich" that Tom Rojo Poller from Berlin gave a lecture about on Saturday morning. Ligeti has studied African drumming, Reich has even been to Ghana, at the actual place where the conference was held. Still what both of them incorporated in their work, would be judged by Ghanaian experts as a free, incorrect adaptation, in the case of Ligeti, or as lacking the truly essential features of African music, in the case of Reich.



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Poller's lecture was followed by those of Grada Kilomba and Dietrich Heissenbüttel. Kilomba, a psychiatrist from São Tomé - Príncipe living in Berlin, spoke of colonialism and the necessity for "black" people to speak for themselves. I have tried to present some recent trends in contemporary African visual art, focussing on artists and groups that work on the spot, outdoors, with participation of the local population, also presenting self-organized places and events that provide a room for an exchange between artists from different African countries and beyond.

The afternoon was filled with practical demonstrations. Playing the oud, Wael Sami gave an excellent insight into the intricacies of the maqam system, making the audience sing along with quartertones and showing the differences of intonation in the music of Turkey, Egypt and Algeria. Likewise, without having been able to carry her instrument with her, Liu Kun made evident with the help audio and video samples the differences of intonation and playing technique in traditional music for the Guzheng of different provinces of China.

The evening ended with another concert of piano and choir music, followed on the next day by an excursion to the Wli waterfall in the Volta region, next to the border of Togo. Ghanaian students and guests made the long journey on the bus seem short by singing and playing the drums, showcasing in every sense of the term the recreational aspect of their music.

The Accra conference was excellent in that it gave a first-hand insight into the different musical practice, esthetics, and theory of the music of Ghana, Egypt and China, thereby also correcting many often repeated false assumptions. The detailed analysis of the works of Ligeti, Carter, and Reich, among others, further made evident that, interesting as the works as such may be, they have also grown out of precise historical circumstances like a critique of the lacking attention given to rhythm in serialistic music or a revolt against the established ways of composing in the post-68-period that are no longer the concern of the younger generation of composers today.

What was missing, though, was an attempt to go one step further and probe new ways of composing and intercultural exchange. None of the students was offered the opportunity to present their own work, neither were any more recent trends in new music reflected. But reflection can only come from knowledge. None of the visitors did probably have any knowledge of the art music of Ghana in advance, and the post-war new music of Europe and America still seemed an adventure for Ghanaian students. As Prof. Nketia had wisely said: there is still much work to be done. And it can not be all done in the course of three days.

Dietrich Heißenbüttel