

The Cornerstone of African Music and Dance

by

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Abstract: In 1964, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law. This Act mandated courses on Black and Minority studies be included in the curriculum of schools throughout the nation. Before departments of African or Black Studies could be built and sufficient Black scholars with earned doctoral degrees to chair these departments were a reality, the political wrecking arm called '*Benign Neglect*' by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, was launched to purposely retard the growth of the field of African music and dance. It has been more than half a century since African music and dance became part of the curriculum throughout the nation. Benign Neglect has attacked all avenues in the area of African music and dance.

As the first person to teach African music and dance in Brooklyn College and as the creator of Greenotation system, I have written copious articles on this area of specialization. Needless to say that this field of study remains largely an oral tradition whereupon no comprehensive thesis or dissertations can be written, Therefore, it continues to be lost upon the death of its holders. I feel there are a number of facts that have not reached the classroom or textbooks This article will concentrate on some of the important elements of African music and dance that are not commonly known, such as the classification of African music found on the continent, categories of African dance, cycle of life activities and events of causation.

Each of these factors will afford the viewer a better comprehension and promote a better understanding of African music and dances found on the continent and in remnants of the Diaspora.

Keywords/concepts: African music/dance, Greenotation, Labanotation, Pitman Stenography, music classification, events of causation, traditional, neo-traditional, categories of African dance.

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I write about African dance and music on a daily basis. There is so much to say about this subject that it is unclear where to start. I believe that it is best to start by sharing and revealing to you the founding blocks of African music and dance that was revealed to me through the work and research I conducted in the bush, fields throughout Africa.

The pursuing is what I gleaned from African artists in the bush, colleges and universities that was passed to me. I have used it in my teachings throughout my career and it has proven successful to my students and to other Africans who I shared this information with. In essence it establishes the foundation of African music and dance that can be used throughout the continent and all can participate in regardless of the language they speak. In this manner it provides a level paving ground for the continent that gives rise to a universal comprehension of African music and dance.

To begin with, dance, as we know it, is defined as movement to music. In Africa, movement to music has been defined as a spontaneous emanation of the people.¹

Professor Albert Mawere Opoku, who shaped and molded African movements (dance) so it could be taught in a classroom setting,² refers to dance as part of the culture of people. I learned during my research that a specific word for dance does not exist in a number of African languages. Therefore the definition and words that define dance as movement to music are from the language of the colonizers. These words are ‘dance, danse’ and ‘ballet’ being rooted in English and French languages.

Consequently a word for music that defines music as sound expressed through the elements of melody and harmony does not exist in a number of African languages. African music is more than sound. It is sound that is based upon the spoken language of the people. African music is inseparable from its dance. The instruments of an African ensemble actually communicate to the dancer what movements to perform. The sounds of African instruments are voiced in the language of the ethnic group. Therefore, it is difficult for one ethnic group to completely understand the language of neighboring groups even though they enjoy the sounds, merely, because they do not speak the language. .

African Descendant Quest

As a student of African music and dance as well as being the creator of Greenotation, a system for writing music of percussion instruments; a choreographer, and a certified teacher of Labanotation, I have conducted research in African music and dance for over 45 years. During the course of time, I state that although more people are studying African music and dance, we still do not have a curriculum that leads to a masters or doctoral degree in this area; nor do we have our own institutions that specialize in all aspects of the African genres. We were part of an elite group of African descendants mostly musicians and dancers who were devoted to recapturing the music and dance culture that was stolen from us during slavery.

It appears that matters are spiraling out of control in this area of concentration, wherein anxious students and practitioners are ignoring the governing rules and regulations. Perhaps they do not know that there are rules and regulations that govern the music and dances of Africa. According to G Niangoran-Bouah, in his book *Introduction a la Drummologie*³, African music is a total package that includes all aspects of the life of man, including his history, genealogy, language, religion, politics, philosophy, art, tools, and all artifacts that define him as man.

Many African countries gained their independence during the sixties. In the early seventies, Africans rejected the classifications of the colonizers and began to classify things for themselves. It was during this period that the classification of African music emerged. Akin Euba, a Nigerian of the Yoruba ethnic group, authored it. In 1970 Akin Euba wrote an article *Music adapts to a Changed World*⁴, which was published in Africa Report. Viewing this accounting, I questioned where was the counterpart that defined African dance, which is an inseparable part of the music. Not being able to find a comparable definition for African dance, I viewed the writings of Keita Fodeba, and had long conversations with Maurice Sonar Senghor, Africa's first theater director as well as being the creator of the National Ballet of Senegal.

I also had discussions with Albert Mawere Opoku, the creator the National Dance Ensemble of Ghana, as well as being the first person to shape and mold African dance so it could be taught in a classroom setting. There were a number of other cultural informants that I consulted. My final decision was to use the definitions of Akin Euba and create a parallel definition for African dance. I entitled it “*Categories of African Dance*.”⁵

It is unfortunate that dance was separated from the music before Africans began classifying their culture for themselves. This created music and dance as separate entities whereas dance is an inseparable part of the music. In fact there are no dances in Africa that are performed without some form of music be it handclaps, simple rattles, the voice, to orchestras of various percussion instruments.

In defining the music found on the continent of Africa, Akin Euba lists five types of music. Only two of these categories were defined as African. The balance with the prefix “Western or Westernized” is musical forms commonly found in western societies and imported into Africa. Classic music, for lack of a better word was also European music that was imported into Africa. Therefore I have defined the categories of African dance as below.

Categories of African Dance

Traditional African Dance: This is the oldest and most widespread form of African movement performed to music. There is an inseparable relationship between the dance and the music. The music to these dances is rooted in drum languages, which are replicas of the spoken languages of the people. There are basically two separate categories of dances within the traditional category. Those dances that are associated with the cycle of life, such as birth, death, naming ceremonies, initiation, and puberty have fixed routines that each ethnic society possesses.

The other category of dance under the traditional category are those dances that are based on an event or happening that the people participated in and choose to remember wherein they create movement and set it to ⁶the music of their group. Thus these dances are created by an ‘*event of causation*’.⁶ It is important for students of African dance to have a clear understanding of this concept, as this is how African dances come into existence.

One of the most illustrative examples of a dance created by an event of causation is the dance Gahu or Agahu. One day a marching band was preparing to parade when all of a sudden they heard a loud noise from the sky. They looked and shouted Ga-Hu mean air vessel or airplane.

This was the first time they had ever seen an airplane. Therefore they created movement and set it to the music of the group. This is the reason one can still hear horns in the performance of Gahu. Without an event or happening there can be no dance because there would be no subject matter.

Neo-Traditional Dance: This form of dance includes all dances that make use of the elements of traditional dance, but not necessarily in the same context as they were found in the traditional culture. These are traditional dances performed outside the context of social ceremonies. Some are folk operas, auditorium performances, classroom and other forms of entertainment. Therefore when you see the National Dance Company of Senegal or the Guinea Ballet on stage, those dances are Neo-traditional dances as they have been altered to fit the stage. Since they are based on a happening that the people choose to remember, they are pieces of history reenacted through movement, communicated by the musicians and acted out by the dancers.

The balance of the five classifications as defined by Akin Euba, which he defines as non-African are listed in the Categories of African dance with the following definitions.

Westernized Popular Dance: Dances in this category have combined movement of African dance with non-African dances, using instruments that are not African, or combining western instruments in the ensemble. In this category one loses the relationship between music and dance since the instruments can no longer instruct the dancer what movements to make. The melodic style is closer to that of western music than African music. This category includes a number of African social dances such as Juju music, Highlife and Senegalese Mbak. In these social orchestras there is a mixture of instruments such as the western guitar, keyboards and horns.

Borrowed Western Dance: Music in this category includes Rap, disco, and Hip-Hop. The dances associated with these forms of music are borrowed from the western world and imported into Africa,

Conservatory Dance: This category of dance includes ballet and modern, which are European forms of movement that are imported into Africa. Be mindful that Africans normally do not dance to melodic music. In all my research, I have not witnessed dances performed to the music of the Kora. Music serves a purpose in Africa, and music of the Kora would more likely be used to assuage tensions.

To recapitulate, dance in Africa is an inseparable part of the music. The music is based upon the spoken language of the people and communicates to the dancer through drum language. African dances are reality based not fantasy based.

Dedicated Practitioners of African Music and Dance

We descendants of Africa were part of a body of dancers and musicians who were devoted to recapturing African music and dance that was stolen from us during slavery. We were always exploring ways to recapture our culture. I was always mesmerized by the sound of the drum. As a female, it was not popular for women to play the drums, and there were no drumming schools where I could study drumming. I was given formal music and dance training in my early childhood. As a musician I would seek ways to write music for the drum. This was an arduous task because printed sources on the art of drumming were virtually non-existent. Music in the schools was basically melodic. In the 'Band' class, the only drum was the set-drum.

As I look back on my high school days, we had a talent festival each year that show the particular talents of each grade level from freshman to senior. In some schools it was called "SING". Naturally I wanted to dance African dance, but some of the movements, particularly those that focused on the pelvic area, could easily be misconstrued as having a sexual orientation. Therefore, I was unable to show my talent of African style dancing.

The Beginning of the Cornerstone

My ambition was to be a dancer on the Broadway stage, but the tenor of the times would truncate those desires. These were the formative years where I would decide what I wanted to have as a career. I reiterate my ambition was to be an accomplished musician and dancer. The school was essentially a school that trained young girls for positions as typists, bookkeepers, file clerks and secretaries. I majored in secretarial studies. One day in the stenography class the teacher made the comment that any sound could be written with the Pitman stenography system. She wrote on the board the symbol for the words "May we?" We thought it was English, but the teacher said no it was French "Mais oui"? The symbols expressed the same sound, but in two different languages. I immediately thought to myself, a drum when played makes a sound, so why not write drum sounds?⁷

I picked up my pencil and using the symbol for the word 'drum' in shorthand, which consisted of a "D" stroke with an "R" hook and a "M" stroke. I eliminated the "R" hook, which left the "D" stroke and "M" stroke. I set aside the "M" stroke for the moment. This left me with the "D" stroke. The Pitman system was based on light and dark shadings. The symbols were derived from the circumference of a circle, or the radius of the circle. I therefore had (from a vertical radius) created a "T" and "D" stroke, thus I had created a light and a heavy sound for the drum. I would write three vertical radius strokes, reattach the "M" stroke to a fourth vertical radius. Placing the "M" to the vertical radius meant that I had created a "muted" or 'closed' stroke.

To this I added the symbol for the word “I” or “eye”. This was actually an accent mark that was written in an upright fashion, commonly used in music notation. This symbol represented a sharp slap to the drumhead. Thus the rhythm produced was *Do-do-do-Dum, Chak*. This was a common rhythm I had heard Congo drummers play. In a matter of less than twenty minutes I had the beginnings of a new system that would enable music of African drums to be written on paper.

I would continue to write symbols for additional drum sounds as well as for other instruments found in an African musical ensemble. Some of these instruments were the iron bells, and rattles. The most distinguishing elements of African music are the many different rhythms used in the production of the music and dance. The symbols derived from the Pitman system did not reflect the rhythm. Therefore I had to find a way to express rhythm, which was crucial to having a viable percussion notation system. I experimented with a number of different ways to express rhythm, with each approach being an improvement over the other. The *circle method* wherein I used a circle to represent the drumhead and the position of the hand or stick on the drum was relatively successful. I used the circle method with the music of *Batakoto*, a popular African selection during the fifties and sixties. The circular method was successful with *Batakoto* because it was a simple rhythm in common time with relatively few changes. But this method was not as successful with the selection *Fanga* that had numerous changes. I would continue my search to find a comprehensive way to represent rhythm.

Dance is an inseparable part of the music. In Africa dance does not exist without some form of musical accompaniment. Thus I also had to find a way to include dance in an integrated score. This search became extensive with a number of trials and errors until I learned about a system to write dance movements called Labanotation. Beginning in 1962 Labanotation would be offered as a course in Brooklyn College. Overnight, I became an undergraduate student. As I perused the Labanotation textbook⁸, I saw the heading ‘Breakdown of a Count (Beat)’ that was representative of music in rectangles that could be prolonged or subdivided graphically to reflect the rhythm. Essentially what I had to do was to convert the circles of my system into rectangles. As rectangles, the music symbols could be aligned with the dance symbols in a single integrated score that would reveal both the music and dance as inseparable parts of the whole. From this point I was able to create a complete system wherein music of percussion instruments of Africa can be written, aligned with dance symbols and later reproduced from a print source. Over the course of years, I have written about Greenotation and have given numerous presentations on the subject; therefore, I do not intend to rehash Greenotation in this brief paper.

African Music/Dance Introduction into the Curriculum

As I have persistently stated in my teachings African music and dance was introduced into the curriculum on soft terrain. As an oral tradition it virtually needed to be supported by written documentation. Any course in the curriculum that is unsupported is not considered a valid course because its validity cannot be tested. More important without written documentation, no valid thesis or dissertations can be written. A pedagogical style to teach African dance was never developed for future teachers who were left to flounder in the doldrums of ignorance. Worse yet there were few places on the continent of Africa where one could study African music and dance to avail oneself of this knowledge. To become fluent in this area of expertise would take a prolonged period of time in study or research.

When I began to teach in Brooklyn College in 1969 I had inherited nothing but a classroom with a mirror and a barre. There were no lesson plans, instruments or even a buddy teacher to assist me. I had to start from scratch. Fortunately, for me I had in my arsenal music and dance notation, and had studied African music and dance with Africans who were celebrated in their country as members of the National Dance Ensemble as musicians and dancers.

Decades have passed since the implementation of courses relative to descendants of Africa was introduced in the curriculum. A number of these courses no longer exist because at that time sufficient personnel were not available. Many of the new faculty was employed on adjunct or part time basis. Also there were no departments of African; or Black studies; nor were there holders of doctoral degrees in this area to be in charge of said departments. As the number of qualified teachers and department chairs increased, the common platform and goals that were created and gave impetus to the movement was located in cities that had large Black populations was not communicated on a nationwide basis. The placing of talented non-credential artists into the field also hindered our progress. These artists were not familiar with the goals that we established for ourselves as followers of Asadata Dafora, who was an artist from Sierra Leone who was attributed with being the first person to bring African dance to the States. Therefore they could not communicate these goals to their students.

Because these non-credentialed artists did not know these goals, or the common platform built to insure the growth of these goals, the desired program began to splinter and these artists began to do their own thing. This was sad because there were several conferences held about the situation of African music, in conjunction with the University of Ghana and the International Music Council. In one of these conferences Professor J.H.K. Nketia summarized the recommendations of the conference. I vividly recall that one of the recommendations was to leave no stone unturned to find a way to change African music from an oral tradition into written documents.⁹

Strong reaction to this recommendation gave support to my work through Abdourahmane Diop who was head director of music for the country of Senegal as well as music director of Ecole des Arts in Dakar. Professor Diop viewed my work and declared it was what they as African musicians had been seeking. My work was the key upon which all African music could be converted from oral traditions into written documents. This was in the early seventies. Mr. Diop tried to convince me to remain in Senegal to teach at Ecole Des Arts. I told him that I was studying French and did not feel that my knowledge was sufficient to teach in French at that time. I also was apprehensive when he asked to see the papers of invitation for me to come to Senegal at that time. When he viewed the papers including a cable requesting that I come to Senegal, he remarked that my papers were not official. Official papers would have to be generated from the Minister of Culture.

Realizing that my papers were not official, I asked why the director of the National Ballet of Senegal would make such a request without going through proper channels. He quickly responded- “well, he is a man and you are a woman”. This statement was not flattery but was an *insult* to me as I fought hard for the rights of women. I had also heard tales about how women were treated and that it was unsafe for women to travel throughout Africa. I specifically recall when Katherine Dunham won an award to conduct research in Africa, she was told by her advisor, Melville Herskovits that it was not safe for a woman to travel throughout Africa. Therefore Katherine Dunham went to the Caribbean. From my experiences it is still awkward for women travelling alone doing research in Africa. I highly suggest that women take all precautions while conducting research in Africa and have reliable cultural informants preferably those who are known and considered reliable by the US Embassy. Utilize the Embassy to the fullest extent.

Since that time my system to write African music and align it with dance notation has been the focus of my research throughout Africa from Tanzania to Senegal. I have given numerous presentations throughout Africa, served as a Fulbright scholar to Ivory Coast and the Gambia. I was also a U.S. State Department cultural Specialist where I taught students, performers and artists at the University of Ghana how to write dance on the computer. This program was highly successful as the students notated the movements of the dance TOKOE a puberty dance of the GA people. This was important as there was no history of this dance in the library and the people who taught this dance for years told me that they did not know the exact origin of this dance. Thus Tokoe would be the first notated selection in the archives of Ghanaian music and dance.

In 1962, Ghana was the first nation to offer courses in African dance as part of the curriculum. Numerous conferences have been held on African music at Legon with the participation of the International Music Conference, the University of Ghana and UNESCO. One of these conferences culminated in a list of recommendations prepared by professor J.H. K. Nketia that specifically addressed the issue of finding a solution to converting African music into written documentation.

Choose Wisely

The students involved in the program at Legon were appreciative of the opportunity to learn new things that would promote the growth of African music and dance. A female student revealed that when the announcement was made that a Black American woman was coming to the campus to teach them how to write dance on the computer, the person who made the announcement indicated by the tone of his voice that they should not waste their time.¹⁰ As a woman his tone annoyed her and she made it a point to join the class. She was instrumental in the class and appeared with me on Ghanaian national television. After being in the lecture for fifteen minutes she realized that I indeed had something great to offer the students. Being a woman in a field predominated by males is not an easy task. What I found extremely disturbing about this comment was it occurred more than three decades after I first entered Africa. I recall my early days in Africa when I confronted negative comments and had to convince the holders of these antiquated ideas. When I first approached Mr. Senghor he told me that African music was so complex and varied that he did not believe he could comprehend it.¹¹ He admitted that although he knew his music, he was not a musician. I begged him for a half hour of his time so I could explain the system to him. He agreed. I presented the work to him and he was awestruck at the simplicity of a system that would bring great value to African music throughout the continent. He brought it to the attention of the music director of Senegal, who was elated and only had compliments for the work and me. From that time opportunities blossomed and I was able to give workshops to all the musicians.

Over the course of three decades, I made great strides in the field of African music and dance both in the States and in Africa. Not only did I have courses included in the course of study in several schools in the tri-state area, brought a person from Africa to teach in a prestigious university, but I also taught Greenotation in several colleges in the area. My work was well known and I was a friend to every national dance company that came from Africa to the States. I had served in Ivory Coast and the Gambia as a Fulbright Scholar. Each year I was in Africa conducting research. After more than three decades, I was indeed perturbed by this negative remark made on the campus about my impending appearance on the campus to teach the students how to write dance on the computer was made in 2002. This meant that information about my work had not been communicated to the youth for someone to hold an uninformed opinion about women.

I recall the difficulty I had in presenting my work to Africans in general. When I introduced myself as a dancer, I was received generously. But when I spoke about African music, my reception was not as generous. At times I had to convince African men that I was serious, and that my work had value. In fact my work was a blessing to Africa; a valuable gift that would salvage their music and dance giving them perpetuity and making them viable courses in the curriculum worldwide. The continent of Africa is so vast that it is virtually impossible to have an audience with all artists at one setting. From my experiences, women have made some progress in the U.S. But the concept of women and their place in society lags behind in many parts of the world. I am thankful for the strong male supporters that I have garnered in Africa.

Return to the Goals

I firmly state that if African music and dance is going to move forward, future students and teachers must adopt a common platform wherein growth can occur. We need to go back to the goals that we originally decided upon as African descendants seeking to recapture African music and dance that was lost to us during the middle passage.

As I recollect some of these goals were to have courses in the schools that were relevant to us; to have departments of African/Black Studies; to have courses on African music and dance included in the curriculum throughout the nation.

African music and dance courses must be transferred from oral traditions into written documents. It is my work in Greenotation and Labanotation that provides the platform or the foundation that would enable us to erect a strong edifice for African music and dance, wherein the knowledge of African music and dance could be tested like other subjects.

Also my work would enable comprehensive thesis and dissertations in African music and dance to be written. This would place African music and dance on par with other courses in the curriculum throughout the world.

Viewing this and the research conducted over the course of the last forty- five years, all personnel need to be certified in these new areas of concentration so we will be on the same page.

I have been asked by celebrated Africans to study with me so they can be certified and offer this certification to foreign universities who have no means of assessing their talents as African luminaries. Each year another luminary of African music and dance joins the ranks of ancestors living in heaven. This means that we need to become serious about pursuing the goals originally set forth in the fifties and sixties. The foundation has been laid. It is up to us to reclaim what was taken from us during the middle passage.

The new practitioners of African music and dance both in Africa and the Diaspora, need to respect the foundation and classifications that African elders themselves established to create a universal foundation for African music and dance. This would give a unified platform to African music and dance and the study thereof leading to undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Benign Neglect and Its Effects on Africanism

Permit me to address the issue of benign-neglect, as it is an underlying cause of confusion to the populous. Throughout my years researching African music and dance coupled with my teaching, I have always instructed my students to pay heed and learn while it was present as the powers that be will give with one hand and slowly take back with the other hand.

In 1969 as a direct result of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, courses on African music and dance entered the curriculum of schools across the nation. African music and dance led the list of courses that African descendants desired to have in schools that previously had no courses relevant to the lives of Black people and their experiences as strangers brought to these shores without their consent. We as a body of Black dancers and musicians were devoted to recapturing African music and dance that was stolen from us during slavery. Asadata Dafora, an artist from Sierra Leone, is credited as being the first person to bring African dance to these shores.¹² He began teaching dance around 1929 and garnered a large following of devoted students who were determined to regain our lost culture even though we did not know exactly what country our ancestors came from.

I played a major role in establishing African music and dance in the curriculum of a number of colleges in the tri-state area. In my favor was the fact that I was a trained musician and dancer. My most valuable possession was the fact that I created a system that allowed music of percussion instruments of Africa to be written on paper. I also was trained in Labanotation, a system for writing dance movements. These two skills in my teaching arsenal made me a valuable asset to a number of colleges and universities who would seek me to be a part of their staff. This meant that I would have a laundry list of jobs in different colleges in different locations. These jobs would be on a part time or adjunct basis that was not something I wanted to venture into. Besides my teaching duties as the first person to teach this subject area in Brooklyn College, I was a graduate student seeking advanced degrees in my area of expertise.

I began teaching in Brooklyn College in 1969. It was clear that the courses on African and Black studies were on shaky ground. Above all it became clear that not enough time had been allotted to bring these courses into the curriculum. There were no departments of African studies, nor qualified personnel to be chair of said departments. There were only hastily made institutes of Black Studies. Institutes could not offer courses but had to depend upon outside departments to offer courses on their behalf. Therefore courses on Black Studies became adulterated courses that stressed the ideologies of an outside department and not the intrinsic African values.

Essentially Benign neglect was a policy under President Nixon's administration by Daniel Patrick Moynihan.¹³ This was a policy of noninterference that actually abandoned or ignored situations that would be beneficial to Black policies. The basis of Benign Neglect was that too much attention had been given Black situations. The situation of the Black race was given too much press. It was now time to cease discourse about Black issues. This was supposed to be a cooling off period. In actuality it was the slow abandonment of Black people, their neighborhoods, problems and predominately all Black issues bringing a slow retardation of Black politics that would insure that whatever Blacks tried would be of short duration or not be effective. Benign neglect is a program of subtle disguise designed to deceive the Black populace into believing that they are making great strides when they are not.

Over the course of more than half a century African music/dance has found a home on the west coast, particularly on UCLA campuses. The campuses of UCLA have hosted prominent celebrated artists of African music and dance. Yet we still do not have a department of African music or African dance. Professor Boniface Obichere from Nigeria was a scholar of African History at UCLA.¹⁴ According to his obituary; he served as director of African Studies Center at UCLA from 1972-1978. I do not know of any African who has been chair at UCLA particularly in the field of African music and dance. This is the subtle influence of benign neglect where people gather to study in prestigious universities but do not receive an advanced degree in African music/dance from African artists.

When we look back over the years since courses in African music and dance were placed in the curriculum in and or around 1969, a number of these courses have ceased to exist. I particularly refer to the dance program at Brooklyn College, which was one of the best dance departments within the CUNY complex. They offered ballet; modern, African dance, Labanotation, and the Horton technique taught by Jimmy Truitte a member of Alvin Ailey dance company. By 1973 African dance was phased out. Today Brooklyn College no longer has a dance division at all. This was a direct result of the subtle effects of benign neglect. The Civil Rights Act that paved the way for courses of Black and Minority studies to be included in the curriculum did not have "teeth", or a clear direction.

They came in as courses without a clear distinctive path that would lead to the goals we stressed that it would lead to undergraduate and graduate degrees. Professor Albert Mawere Opoku of Ghana was a visionary who recognized that once audiences viewed African music and dances, their effect would be so intoxicating that the audience would be mesmerized. If these dances were not translated from oral traditions into written traditions they would become adulterated to the point that they would be unrecognizable. People who were not familiar with the relationship of the music to the dance would create their own movements thus the selections would bear the name of the piece, but not the music nor the dance. This is the reason he brought a notator, Odette Blum¹⁵ to the campus to write the dances so they could be preserved. Odette Blum taught Labanotation in the Dance division of the Institute of African Studies from 1966-68. But this program was not continued and when the notator left Ghana, the application of notation to the dances virtually ceased to exist.

As the first person to teach this subject area in Brooklyn College coupled with my work within the CUNY complex as well as in NYU, I felt that bringing in a personality from Africa to teach traditional music and dance laid the foundation or élan to achieve the goals we set back in the fifties and sixties.¹⁶ The program was successful as research projects to various countries in Africa were secured. Unfortunately the African personality did not fully prepare himself for the research project. He did not satisfy the terms of the CUNY agreement he signed and was excluded from further research projects.

Today we are seeing more individual talented artists from Africa coming to the UCLA campus but these artists lack credentials and cannot assist us to achieve the goals we defined back in the fifties and sixties. To be specific these talented African performers cannot supervise doctoral students, which is the main reason for their presence in a program of African music and dance. As African descendants this was our ultimate goal in our search to redeem the music and dance culture that was stripped from us during the middle passage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is my earnest opinion that the only way we can break the pernicious cycle of benign neglect is to *first* recognize *that it does exist* often in subtle ways. We need to make our goals known to Africans so they can assist us to reach these goals. Do not forget that an African drummer is a performer first and teaching is a secondary task.

Africans who do not have a doctoral degree are useless in helping us to achieve our goals, as they cannot supervise doctoral candidates. Therefore, we need to find and install an African, who has a doctoral degree in the field of African music and dance, in a university in the States.

This party must be willing to work with us on notation projects so African music and dance can be written and comprehensive thesis and dissertations can be written. Thus African music and dance can join the ranks of other courses within the curriculum as written documents. In this manner African music and dance can be tested, written and given perpetuity. Most important with Greenotation African music and dance can be logically tested and proven scientifically. Therefore, African music and dance will have been successfully transferred from oral traditions into written documents.

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12. Asadafa Dafora is credited as the first person to bring African dance to the States.
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- 14 Obichere obituary <https://www.h-net.org/~africa/obituaries/obichere.html>
15. Odette Blum taught Labanotation in the Dance Division of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana at Legon 1966-68.
16. Under my influence NYU brought Godwin Agbeli to the campus to teach traditional African music and dance in the spring of 1972.

Appendix

TOKOE

The musical score for TOKOE is presented in a grid format. It features five instruments: Gankogue, Axatse, Kagan, Kidi, and Sogo. The score is divided into three measures, labeled 1, 2, and 3. A 4/4 time signature is indicated at the bottom left. The notation for each instrument is as follows:

- Gankogue:** Represented by a vertical column of rhythmic symbols, including crosses and dots, with a shaded box in measure 1.
- Axatse:** Represented by a vertical column of rhythmic symbols, including crosses and dots, with a shaded box in measure 1.
- Kagan:** Represented by a vertical column of rhythmic symbols, including dots and crosses, with a shaded box in measure 1.
- Kidi:** Represented by a vertical column of rhythmic symbols, including dots and crosses, with a shaded box in measure 1.
- Sogo:** Represented by a vertical column of rhythmic symbols, including dots and crosses, with a shaded box in measure 1.

At the bottom right, there is a detailed rhythmic notation for the Sogo instrument, showing a sequence of rhythmic symbols (crosses, dots, and shaded boxes) across measures 1, 2, and 3.

