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Exploration of Indigenous African Musical Values in Goliyatie and Davioi Zu Zevi Tukui Songs of Walter Komla Blege

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Abstract

Walter Komla Blege, a Ghanaian, sought self-identity. This search affected his work as an educator, author, dramatist, politician, and composer. As an African art musician, he focused on traditional African dance vein. His mentor, Nicholas Zinzendorf Nayo's approach failed him. He needed his own style. This paper analyzes two of his numerous songs to define African Art Music by identifying indigenous musical idioms in them. The study showcases excerpts from these choral anthems to determine his text, chord progression, cadence, scale, instrumental accompaniments, voice ranges, texture, and other African Art forms. Purposive sampling was used to locate the respondent and the two compositions from his library at Kpedze. An interview with the respondent produced his biography. This paper establishes Walter Komla Blege's works as paramount definition of African Art Music, worthy of emulation by modern African Art composers. Instead of the pulpit, his music preached the gospel the African way.

Keywords: Dance genre; Komla Blege; Asafo; Gbolo; Goliatie; Davidi; Kpedze

Introduction

In a combined position of Jones and his, Ekueme (1980) rebutted the notion that "the African is utterly unconscious of organized theory behind his music. He makes his music quite spontaneously, and it is with interest and the delight of discovery that the more educated African will listen to a demonstration of the basic principles, which underlie his musical practice". Sharing in their feelings as above, stated that "This paper comes to confirm that whatever Annan has put in his composition, Mobo Dawur, (I will tell it to the world), has consciously been written recognizing and applying formal principles in theory and composition" [1]. Even though he described himself as a "Rebel" for his deliberate failure to apply the Western rules of theory and composition in many of his works, Walter Komla Blege had a format he followed in composing his songs, which by themselves become rules and principles of theory and composition of music. Agbenyega observed that "profile and works of Western and a few African musical exponents like G.F. Handel, J.S. Bach, Johann Brahms, E. Amu, and J.H.K. Nketia respectively are published online [2]. But there are no or little records of some of the prominent personalities especially in Africa who equally contributed so well to the development of their societies in terms of their musical works yet, are veiled from the music loving world. One of such personalities was Walter Komla Blege." It therefore becomes my topmost priority to make everything about Walter Komla Blege known to the world. This qualitative paper in support of the earlier work, is set out to achieve this revered aim of mine. This paper draws from the theory of Jacobson (2011) which opined that "in studying art music composer, these things must be discussed: the approach used by the person, his importance, historical context, his biography and works." This is the more reason the profile of the respondent is featured in this issue as well as the analysis of the two songs: Goliatie and Davidi Zu Zevi Tukui. The paper utilized purposive sampling to arrive at the respondent and the two selected pieces picked from the composer's own library at Kpedze, his hometown. The paper is presented in three sections. The first section provided a brief profile of Walter Komla Blege. The second section in a systematic manner provided an analysis of Goliatie and Davidi Zu Zevi Tukui anthems. The analysis looked at Scale used in the composition, Melodic Organization, Voice Ranges, Harmony, Rhythm, Texture, Form, Compositional Techniques, Dynamics,

Text, and use of African Art Form. The paper gathered data from Papa Walter Komla Blege through an intensive interview I conducted for him in 2014 when I was an M. Phil student.

A Brief Profile of Walter Komla Blege

Walter Komla Blege was born on 23rd December, 1931 to Fritz Atigri Kwami Blege of Kpedze and Wilhelmina Dzathor of Alavanyo. His father sent him to stay with his maternal grandparents to enable him to attend school. This was due to the fact that his father had no formal education whilst the grandfather: Jacob Dzathor was a retired teacher who knew the right way to go as far as matters of formal education were concerned. The maternal grandfather's house was just separated from his father's house by Kokuto's (mistakenly captured in Agbenyega, (2022) as Mineto's house) house yet, he dared not visit his parents at will. The "talk true cane"; a special cane bought from Germany, was the security guard that with nerve wracking, guarded grandpa Dzathor's home. This adoption Djedje and Carter (1989; p.3) cited in (Agbenyega; 2022) likened to the childhood days of Prof. J.H.K. Nketia saying: (Agbenyega, 2022)

As a Christian, Kwabena Nketia's grandparents who brought him up have

Not permitted him to participate in performances of traditional music, which

The Church was regarded as primitive and pagan. However, the continued adherence of his mother and other relatives to traditional customs and ways of life provided for him a broad range of musical practices and styles in Akan life.

In a like manner, Walter Komla Blege was not allowed by his Christian parents, grandparents, uncles, school and the Church to witness a performance of traditional dance; not even at the market square where Alavanyo Tata sung Gabaɖa songs to gather coins from interested listeners on market days. Walter Komla Blege's first wife; Rose Gbesemete, a royal from the Shianti family of Kpedze pathetically died at Takoradi during the labour of their first child. He later married Rejoice Awuah from Peki. In all, he had six children namely Mawuena (the providence of God), Senyo (God is good), Wolase (the creator responded), Akofa (the heart is at peace), Edem (He redeemed me), Yayra (Blessing). Walter Komla Blege, by all accounts, is a political animal with a deep concern for his own identity and the destiny of his country. As a student in the last year of his Sixth Form Course, he witnessed and shared in his nation's excitement and hope, which came with the attainment of Independence on 6th March 1957. In 1968, Papa Walter Komla Blege as a postgraduate student met Prof. Gerry Caplan whose lectures at the University of Toronto Canada changed his outlook from that of a conservative to that of a liberalist. He had accepted the offer to serve his country when he was appointed Deputy Secretary (Minister) of Education and Culture in the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) government. The appointment followed the 31st December Revolution led by Flt. Lt. J.J. Rawlings. This opportunity enabled him the responsibility to establish new Centres of National Culture in all districts across our country; Ghana. He was also responsible for the Book Development Project of the Ministry, the celebration of special national occasions including Independence Day and the Annual Celebration of the 31st December Revolution. Walter Komla Blege also held responsibility for the Cuban Programme, which trained hundreds of Ghanaian professionals and technical personnel in Cuban institutions.

In 1994, he went back to Winneba to serve at the University of Education for the second time; this time as a lecturer in the Social Studies Department. His first service at Winneba was when he was appointed the Director to the erstwhile National Academy of Music (NAM), which now transformed into the Department of Music Education and Theatre Arts of the University of Education, Winneba housed on the Central Campus. He ended his long career with his appointment as the founding President of the Evangelical Presbyterian University College, which he established in very difficult and dire circumstances. Walter Komla Blege had an amazing gift of music. In all his life, he put his musical talents at the disposal of his Church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The high point of his musical service was the establishment of DUMEDEFƆ, the Ambassador Choir of the EP Church, which he led on two occasions to Germany on evangelistic missions. For the second German trip, he composed the two-hour long Opera Kristo to tell the European Missionary story not only in music and drama but in the way Africans would tell it Blege [3]. Virtually, the whole life of Walter Komla Blege is dominated by one thing: his search for identity. The changing scenes, which kept flashing his mind were the flashbacks of; as a child watching musical performances at the village square, as a school boy arguing why the Kpexo (stone structure in the mountains north of Kpedze) is not counted among the seven wonders of the world; as a student wondering why his people's rich history should be captured in books by historians; as a project manager being resentful with the World Bank for sending a white consultant to do a job a Ghanaian could do without or with little supervision; and as a Christian wondering why European Missionaries should insist that Africans should not worship as Africans in Christian churches in Ghana. Has he found what he had been searching for all his life?

Goliyatie (Goliath)

This principally, is the story of Goliath told the African way. The piece is in E-Flat major and in the time with thirty-four (34) bars. It is ternary in form (i.e., ABA) and the texts are in Eʋe language. The scale type used is diatonic. The technique of Call-and-Response is employed. Another device, which is extensively used in this music, is Appellation. Once again, Blege composed this music in Asafo (a Ghanaian war dance) dance vein to bring home

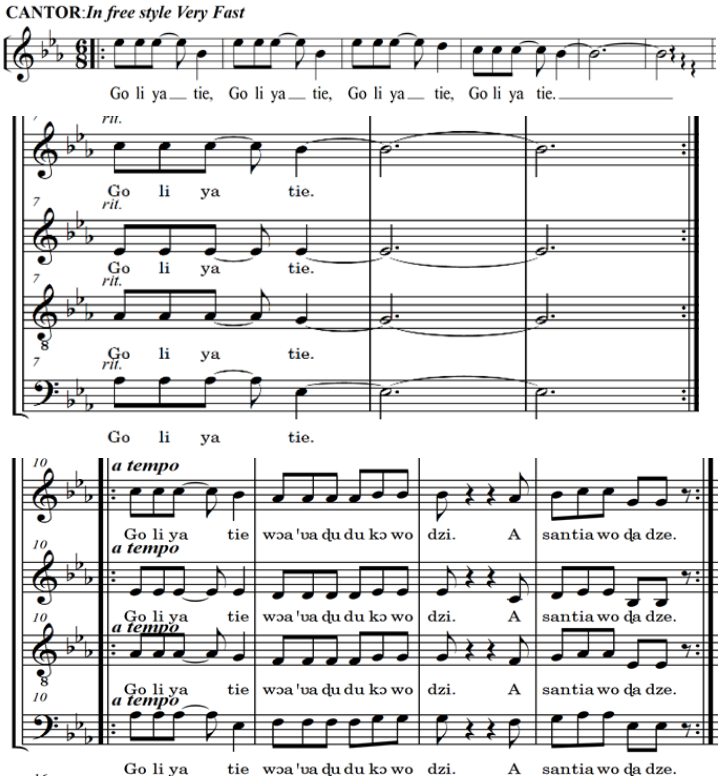
the message and performance in a thrilling manner. The medium is vocal and instrumental. The instruments that are used as accompaniments are purely African namely Ladzo kpe (i.e., Animal Horn), Gadodo (e) (i.e., double bell), and ʊukpo (i.e., State drum). The music begins with a call by a cantor from bar one in a free style with very fast (i.e., allegro) movement, ending with glissando (spoken-S) in bar six. The response which made use of plagal cadence (i.e., IV-I) occurs with chorus in ritardando from bar seven to nine. This action is repeated twice. The pictures labelled 'i and ii' below exemplifies this postulation (Figures 1,2). Bar ten to thirteen is also repeated twice. In it, the chorus celebrates Goliath as a Hero with the chord progressions of IV-I-vii^{o}b-Ib-ii-iii-IV-I. Actions and mood in this frame portray this greatness of Goliath. The picture labelled 'iii' below proves the claim, and this marks the closure of the first section (i.e., A') (Figure 3). In the second section (i.e., section B), the composer again employed the technique of Call-and-Response. In doing this, Walter Komla Blege displayed his deep knowledge of how men of valour are celebrated in African culture. He therefore deployed the skill of Appellation to bestow heroism on Goliath. This act greatly draws home the piece to Africa in an artistic manner. In Africa, this normally happens in the courts of traditional leaders like Chiefs, Headmen, Fetish Priests, and in palm wine drinking sports where men who made certain achievements in life or made special names for themselves in the society gathered to sip palm wine. Just like praise songs, appellation is used to count the exploits of personalities who excelled in the various fields of their human endeavours. It is equally a technique employed in Africa to bestow praise on title holders or the powerful in society. This exactly is what Walter Komla Blege proverbially used to paint the greatness of Goliath. The excerpt below is showing evidence (Figure 4).

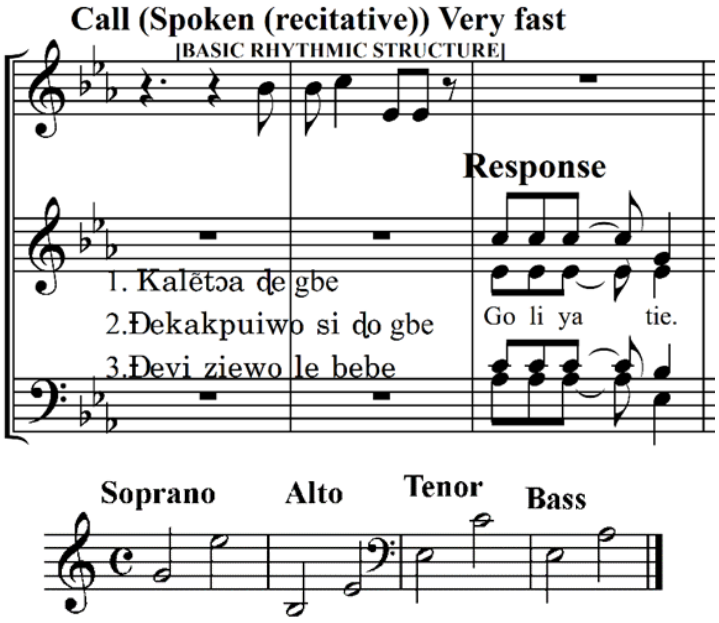
CALL	**RESPONSE**
Kalɛtɔa ɖe gbe (Warrior commanded)	Goliyatie
Ðekpakpuiwo si ɖo gbe (Young men fled into the bush)	Goliyatie
Ðevi ziɛwo le bebe (Children hid in pigeonholes)	Goliyatie
Fia-kpukpuɔwo ɖɛ kpɔ (Elders entered into caucus)	Goliyatie
Kalɛtɔa ɖe gbe (Warrior commanded)	Goliyatie
Dukɔwo zu a*ƒ*edo (Nations became desolate)	Goliyatie
Eŋui-fu ɖo to (Goose pimples absorbed the bod)	Goliyatie
Gbetɔvi ŋu 'fifia (Human sweat)	Goliyatie
Yɔ atsyia*ƒ*u gbagba (Over ran into the sea)	Goliyatie
Mele bɔbɔe o lo (It is not easy at all)	Goliyatie
Me nye 'gbemigbe enye 'gbe o (Those days are incomparable now)	Goliyatie
Egbea dzi tɔ zi (The battlefield is chaotic)	Goliyatie
Vɔvɔli zu bibi (Shadow turns into monster)	Goliyatie
Ebe ye ŋkɔ enye Goliyati (Hail Goliat)	Goliyatie
Ebe ye heteklolo! (Hail Heteklolo)	Goliyatie
Ebe ye ŋkɔ enye Goliyati (Hail Goliat)	Goliyatie
Ebe ye heteklolo! (Hail Heteklolo)	Goliyatie
Nake ɖeka nɔ dzome bi nu! (A single faggot cooked the whole mea)	Goliyatie
Ebe ye ŋkɔ enye Goliyati (Hail Goliat)	Goliyatie
Wohee mɛhɛ o (He's unshakable)	Goliyatie
Wohee le kpe dzi mɛhɛ o (Dragged on rocks but remain resolute)	Goliyatie
Wohee le hliha dzi mɛhɛ o (Unmovable even on metamorphic rocks)	Goliyatie
Wohee l'ati ŋu mɛhɛ o (It's unmovable on tree)	Goliyatie
Okiti kiti	Goliyatie
Goliyatie	Goliyatie
Goliyatie	Goliyatie
Goliyatie	Goliyatie

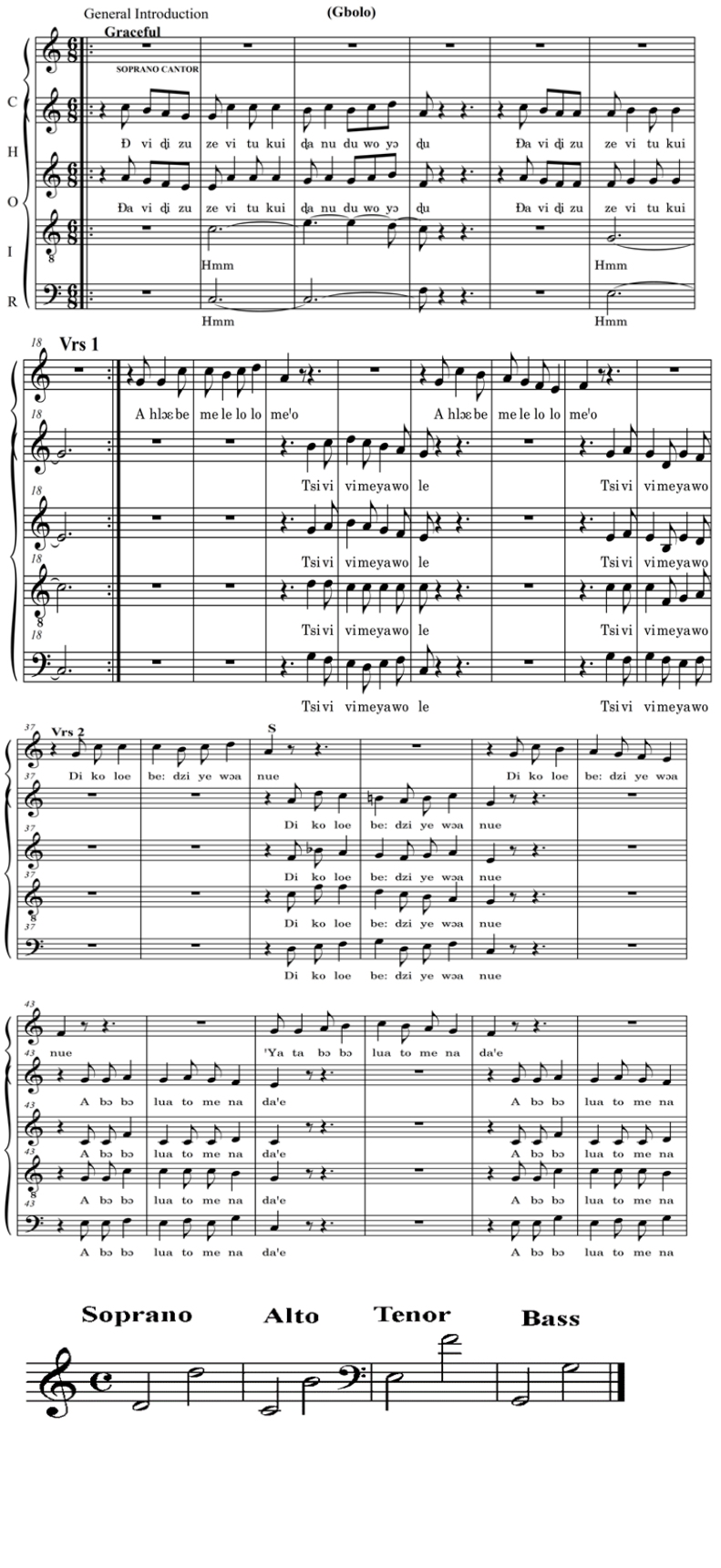
After the appellations, section **A** is repeated to end the piece.

According to Walter Komla Blege, the Goliyatie and Davidi Zu Zevi Tukui music marked the beginning of his attempt to write an opera in 1978. However, he could not succeed because of his failure to follow his compositional principles where the lyrics are composed first before setting them to sound. This biblical story based on 1st Samuel 17: 1-54, told in African context would have not been comprehensible to Africans for that matter Ghanaians typically the Voltareans and more appropriately, the Ʊedome people where Walter Komla Blege came from, without the use of Call-and-Response and the art of appellation set to Asafo dance (Kaleʊu). Proverbially, Goliath is used to represent Eʋe (Ewe)

people. The Asante people are known for their greatness in war or battlefield. However, they could not withstand the Eʋe people when they fought each other on a war field, hence the text 'Asiantiewo da dzɛ', (Asante people deceived themselves). The end of the piece is to be performed slowly (i.e., moderato) with women hitting their hands against their leaps to hoot at the Asante people.







Voice ranges of the parts in Goliyatie music are displayed below

Structure of the Goliyatie song: Ternary
A 1-13
B 14- (This section features the appellation in Call-And-Response form)
A 1-13
(i.e., ABA)

In the Goliyatie song, Walter Komla Blege displayed the following vocal possibilities. Soprano moves from G to E in the interval of sixth (6th), alto from B to E which is the interval of forth (4th), tenor from E to C which also displayed the interval of sixth (6th), and bass singing from E to A in the interval of forth (4th). In the picture, one can clearly observe that the parts are paired in terms of intervallic relationship. Alto and bass are singing in the ranges of forth while soprano and tenor are also singing in the ranges of sixth. This symbolically, is an art that displayed the battle between David and Goliath with Eʋe people representing David while the Asante people represented the giant Goliath (Figure 5).

Davidi Zu Zevi Tukui

Like 'Goliatie', Papa Walter Komla Blege again re-wrote the story of David as found in the bible (i.e., 1 Samuel chapter 17 verse 1-54) to be more meaningful to Africans. Metaphorically, he used this story to explain that out of 'smaller things come greater ones. The use of infinitesimal substances in this music lends credence to the aforementioned. This is confirmed in the following words thus: Davidi (i.e., David), Ahloe (i.e., fox), Dikoloe (i.e., a small species of mouse), Xose (i.e., faith), Logoku (i.e., Mustard seed). Papa Walter Komla Blege said the answers he gives to the following questions he normally asks himself, are the results of his art works thus: If Eʋe are to sing this song,

1. Which dance will they set it to?
2. What type of instrument will they play on it?
3. What type of people will play the instruments?
4. What type of song will they want to sing to accompany the dance?

Set to Gbolo Dance, 'Davidi Zu Zevi Tukui' has the time signature $\frac{6}{8}$ and the key signature is C-major. It is to be performed with Soprano Cantor against a choir or chorus (i.e., S.A.T.B) in a graceful manner. The song is made of 89 bars and with 4 verses. Axatse (i.e., enmeshed gourd rattles) are the instruments used to accompany it and are played by women only. The harmony is done mainly in the intervals of 3rds. Texts are in Eʋedome language. The music begins in bar one with a crotchet rest. Then Soprano and Alto open the sound with Davidi zu zevi tukui da nu duwo yoo du… and are joined in bar two by Tenor and Bass with the nonsense syllable 'Hmm' that is used to express certain feeling either of worry or misery. Find below is an extract for perusal (Figure 6). This, which is an overture to the song, ends in bar 18. In this frame, we are informed that little David cooked for a whole nation (i.e., duwo yoo) to feed on. This allegorically is said to mean how David (i.e., the Eʋe people) laid down his life, saved, and redeemed the fame of his nation by facing and killing the giant warrior, Goliath (figuratively used to mean Asante worriors). After a quarter rest, the Soprano cantor made a call from bar 19 to 21. The choir/chorus responded from that same bar 21 to 23. This continues to bar 36 to end the first verse on a perfect Cadence using the dominant 7th chord resolved to the tonic chord (i.e., V^7-I). Here also, we are told that the proverbial Fox said "is not by size rather by might" (Ahloe be mele lolo me'o. Tsivivi me ya wo le.). This justifies the claim of people of old that "when the bell of bravery rings, size is not considered". The use of Perfect Cadence (i.e., V^7-I) dominates the piece. Papa Walter Komla Blege once again employed Call-And-Response as a device to write the four verses. A peek of the piece clearly shows that the soprano cantor always calls and the choir/chorus responds from verse 1 through to the end of verse four. The excerpt below lends credence to the forgone (Figure 7).

Verse two opens with the texts 'Dikoloe be, dzi ye woa nue'. On top of the note that carries the text 'nue', is the letter: 'S' (i.e., spoken, used to imply glissando). Dikoloe being a small type of mouse is used to represent how tiny David appears before Goliath but had he killed. He figuratively used Abobo lua to me na dae (which translates to mean: it takes heart for a snail to remove wax from the ear of snake) to mean that it takes valour to do what David did. Look at the excerpt below for proof of claim (Figure 8). The piece is both monophonic and homophonic in texture, due to the blend of Cantor and choir with the choir maintaining same rhythmic patterns and words in the number of appearances made in the piece. At the end of verse four, performers are to go back to verse 3 then back to the overture where the music finally ended. The instruction given on the score is incomplete. It cannot lead to correct interpretation of the music as Papa Walter Komla Blege truly wanted. Listening to Dumedefo; the Ambassador Choir of the EP Church performing this piece bears out the true performance mode. There is an addition of castanet and slit bell (i.e., Akogɛ and bobooboge) to the axatse (Figure 9).

Voice Ranges

Soprano sing in the interval of octave that is from D to D, alto from C to B which is the interval of seventh (7th), tenor from E to F which also displayed the interval of nine (9th), and bass singing from G to G that is in octave (8th).

Structure of the song: Ternary
A Bar 1-18
B Bar 19-71
A Bar 1-18
(i.e., ABA)

During my interview with him, Papa Walter Kɔmla Blege observed that songs in African traditional dance vein are usually not long but very repetitive. So, when he composed songs and set them whether entirely or partly to any traditional dance style, he made sure they are not long but very repetitive to carry the true resemblance of a particular traditional African music. In his Ma'u Sitsoƒe, the portion set to Gbolo dance lilt was very short with several repetition of: Agbe nɔnɔ ya gbe wò nye (Life is like a weed). The text written in the Ewe language is as below.

Agbe nɔnɔ ya
gbe wo nye
gbe wo nye
gbe wo nye
gbe wo nye
Etc.

In the Goliyatie (Goliat), the repetition is:

Goliyatie
Goliyatie
Goliyatie
Goliyatie
Goliyatie

Then in Davidi, the repetition of: David is like a little pot that cooked to feed a whole nation. This is seen written in Ewe language below:

Daviɖi zu zevi tukui ɖanu duwo yɔɔ ɖu
Daviɖi zu zevi tukui ɖanu duwo yɔɔ ɖu
Daviɖi zu zevi tukui ɖanu duwo yɔɔ ɖu
Daviɖi zu zevi tukui ɖanu duwo yɔɔ ɖu,
Duwo yɔɔ ɖu

The following questions become obvious that:

1. When Africans say they are going to perform their music, what exactly do they go to do?
2. What had Papa Walter Komla Blege understood about the music of his people that made it imperative for him to necessarily set his music always to a dance in African vein?

Has this piece provided the answers for these questions?

Doing the analysis of Blege's works, this paper found that the works of Blege define music in the Context of Africa as Drumming, Singing and dancing; all wrapped in the same piece of artwork. The paper recommended that anybody who plans to write music in an African vein must necessarily exhibit an idiom of Africa; especially in a traditional dance vein. This is what exactly must put the piece of work in the frame of African Art Music. More research will indicate the extent of differences that may exist in the MRI treatment of MPA between solo performers and ensemble performers [4,5]. This statement becomes imperative to the validity of the finding of the paper as more research is needed to confirm the findings of this paper.

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