

## **LOCAL DIMENSION BAND AND THE CULTURAL REVIVAL IN GHANAIAN POPULAR MUSIC**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The Local Dimension Band is a miscellany of scholarly and traditionally trained musicians with different ethnicities, symbolising cultural convergence. This paper examines the band's concept of music creation within the global development of popular music in Ghana. We also assess the band's instrumental and musical resources elaborating on the artistic and ethnic background of the musicians involved in an attempt to discern the stylistic traits of the band as a contribution to the cultural revival in Ghanaian popular music. Data for this study was collected through documentary search, interviews and audio reviews. Analyses of selected musical compositions of the band show the ratio of a return to sources and modernisation of a musical trend. Subsequently, we conclude that musical nationalism is not opposed to foreign influences; however, it depends on the mode of absorption of the latter, which also justifies music as a subject of instruction. Therefore, we recommend the works of the Local Dimension Band for students, composers and researchers with interest in intercultural, multicultural, syncretic and hybrid music.*

**KEYWORDS:** concept, cultural revival, local dimension band, music creation, popular music

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Shortly after the independence of Ghana in 1957, there was a cultural revival in three phases: the first phase was Kwame Nkrumah's<sup>1</sup> cultural policy in the 1960s, which led to the establishment of the Institute of African Studies, School of Performing Arts, the National Drama Group and the National Dance Ensemble (Collins, 2005). As a result of the policy, the institutions' impact rekindled the African and Ghanaian cultural consciousness in every facet of Ghanaian life, including music and popular music. The impact of this cultural

renaissance evolving into its second phase of development saw the springing up of Ghanaian pop music bands who, engulfed by the soul/rock music wave of the late 1960s, nonetheless fused strong African elements and idioms in their music and repertory. Pop bands in this era include *The Psychedelic Aliens*, *El-Polos*, *The Saints*, *The Super Termites*, and *Magic Aliens*. Another decisive moment in the development of Ghanaian popular music occurred in 1971, under the *rocky concert* and outcome of the *soul-to-soul* show organised in Accra by international popular musicians such as Wilson Pickett, Roberta Flack, the Staple Singers, Carlos Santana, Ike and Tina Turner and others. Popular music in Ghana was also influenced by the emergence of the Nigerian Afrobeat in the 1970s. This influence led to the formation of bands like *Sweet Beans*, *Sweet Talks* and *Pelikans* (Collins, 1996). Also, the impact of Jimi Hendrix/Santana rock guitar playing during the decade brought out the Ghanaian Psychedelic Alien's style, which combined the above rock playing with traditional percussion rhythms (ibid). The Ghanaian Afro-rock band, *Osibisa*, based in London, with its significant influence on the Ghanaian popular music of the 1970s, can be associated with the same trend. Among the subsequent groups that adopted the trend, one will mention bands like *Boombaya*, *Brukutu* and *Sawaaba Sounds*. During the same period, the Ga<sup>2</sup> cultural revival brought out the *Wulomei*<sup>3</sup> group and dozens of other ensembles modelled on its style: the *Blemabii*, *Dzadzɛlɔi*, *Abladei*, *Kudɔlɔi*, *Hedzɔleh* (Collins, 2018; Dampɛy, 1981). The third phase, which was, in reality, a continuation of the previous trends, stretched from 1990 to date, absorbing more significantly influences from tourists. However, this development was made possible by liberalising Ghana's economy, returning to democracy, and making *world music* attainable in Ghana (Collins, 2007). In other words, popular bands and so-called neo-traditional groups like *Goje*, *Hewale*, and Sensational *Wulomei* kept utilising African resources in the *Wulomei*'s perspective characterised by an artistic affirmation of identity born from social, political and economic marginalisation. Thus, *Wulomei*'s experimentation became a model for subsequent neo-traditional groups in Ghana (Webb, 2011). Mustapha Tettey Addy's African Academy of Music and Arts (AAMA) was also an impact, set up in 1988 at *Kokrobite*<sup>4</sup>. It was the first private cultural centre where cultural music was taught with the help of its cultural band called *Royal Obonu Drums*. Other folk or neotraditional groups teaching foreigners privately also followed soon after. Some of these are *Dagbe Drum School* at *Kopeyia* in the Volta Region by Godwin Agbele, a guesthouse and cultural centre by *Kukye Kukye*, *Bamboo Orchestra* at Masomogor in 1994 (Collins, 2005).

We want to admit that there is a growing body of literature on Ghanaian popular music in recent times. This literature growth has undoubtedly enhanced Ghanaian popular music scholarship (Aidoo, 2019; Braddock, 2020; Coffie, 2018, 2019; Collins, 2016, 2018; Owusu-Poku, 2021). Nonetheless, despite the contributions of popular bands to the cultural revival in Ghanaian popular music since the 1970s, studies on Ghanaian popular bands have received less attention in Ghanaian music scholarship. A preliminary investigation of the

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Ghanaian popular music scene reveals a hegemony of Western musical resources on modern popular bands, contrasting to the 1970s. Coffie (2018) contended that highlife music has not been able to break away from the dominance of Western musical influences despite Ghana's diverse indigenous instrumental resources. Notwithstanding, a few modern Ghanaian popular bands such as the *Takashi*, *Bonze Konkoma*, *Wind Afrique* and *Weku Kronkron* have attempted to change the above trend. However, the most successful is the Local Dimension Band; because the Local Dimension Band's instrumental resources are more indigenous than the other bands. In other words, the other bands borrow thematic materials from African sources, but their works are predominantly Western in idiom and instrumentation.

The Local Dimension Band was explicitly selected for this study because of its unique formation, a miscellany of academically and traditionally trained musicians of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Each musician also serves as an ambassador representing and depicting his or her unique ethnic, cultural ideals summing up to represent a Ghanaian-culturally-constituted pop band, wielding elements of music that are very Ghanaian in identity. The band also employs the guitar and a variety of African instruments; for instance, *seperewa* (traditional harp-lute), *gyil* (traditional xylophone), *atenteben* (bamboo flute), *mbira* (lamellophone), *tsonshi* (palm drums) and *gome* (wooden-framed drum) to play a varied musical repertoire. The band's repertoire ranges from the West African guitar band highlife to palm wine music, Afrobeat, Congo Jazz (soukous), Northern Ghanaian Dagaare fusion and other pieces inspired by local traditions such as the *Akan-Adowa*, *Ewe-Agbadza* and *Ga-gome* (Ghanaian traditional drum and dance music).

Against this background, we examine the concept of music creation of the Local Dimension Band within the global development of popular music in Ghana. We also assess the band's instrumental and musical resources elaborating on the artistic and ethnic background of the musicians involved in an attempt to discern the stylistic traits of the band as a contribution to the cultural revival in Ghanaian popular music in modern times. Finally, we want to state that the paucity of literature on modern Ghanaian popular bands and their inner workings as a contribution to cultural revival in Ghanaian popular music is what this study finds its justification. Also, we refer *modern* to the 1990s to the present.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Local Dimension Band case study proceeds much from urban ethnomusicology, acculturation, transculturation, and interculturalism. Also, the theoretical parameters of the band's music and its analyses, which relate to conventional analytical theories, are strongly inspired by Tagg (1982). Schramm (1982) discusses what should be studied in an urban milieu and the concerns about the socio-cultural context. He further suggested a subtle use of the term urban ethnomusicology. There is more than one culture in an urban area, and the

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music of an urban area comprises different styles from different cultures to satisfy the audience. In like manner, the group under investigation is also based in an urban area. The Local Dimension Band, an inter-ethnic group, can be placed within the context of transculturation as defined by (Ortiz, 1995) as a process where a new phenomenon brings out of the converging and merging of cultures. Several scholars have defined acculturation as how individuals change and adapt due to prolonged contact with a new culture (Doucerain, 2019; Juang & Syed, 2019; Ward & Geeraert, 2016). However, for the study, we draw on (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988) concept of acculturation as a system of organisation instead of issues related to cultures or societies. The process of acculturation, in this case, occurs in three phases: *contact*, *conflict* and *adaptation* (depends on the cultural system that is more powerful, superimposing its system on the less powerful). In this study, we focus on the three phases of acculturation related to the instrumentation of the Local Dimension Band. We refer to *contact* as getting in touch with the playing techniques of the Southern and Northern Regions of Ghana. *Conflict* between them deals with disagreement and *adaptation*, which seeks to resolve their techniques in making one acceptable music.

Euba (1993) posited that contemporary *interculturalism* is not limited to neo-African art music but is part of the twentieth-century African experience, including popular music. In an attempt to categorise neo-African art composers, Euba further outlined four categories such as:

1. Composers whose works are predominantly Western in idiom and instrumentation
2. Composers whose works are Western in idiom and instrumentation; but borrow thematic materials from African sources.
3. Composers whose works are equally African and Western
4. Composers whose works are predominantly African in idiom and instrumentation

Considering Euba's categorisation of neo-African art music, which could also apply to African popular music, we place the compositions of the Local Dimension Band within the fourth category in that the compositions are predominantly African in idiom and instrumentation with little reference to Western elements.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Overview of Ghanaian Popular Music*

The development of popular music in Ghana is examined here through the lenses of its connection with the phenomenon under study, in other words, until the 1970s with the occurrence of cultural revival groups to which the Local Dimension ideals can be related. In the 1880s, the British Coastal Military fort brass bands lent their instrumental setting to a local brass band called *adaha*<sup>5</sup>. Dampney (1981) observed that this version of the brass band used indigenous tunes and rhythmic patterns. In the same decade, a further step of indigenisation led to the *Konkoma*<sup>6</sup>. The konkoma represents a poor man's version of the

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adaha by adapting the instrumental setting to more local resources, including vocals and less conventional band percussion settings such as claves, tambourine, and *pati* (a wooden framed drum). This altered or modified version of the *adaha* became popular in the 1930s (Collins, 1994). This formation generated the *borborbor*<sup>7</sup> in the *Ewe*<sup>8</sup> speaking area of the Volta Region around the 1950s (Collins, 2005). The establishment of dance orchestras in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, on the other hand, was an indirect result of access to education by local musicians. The earliest of these ensembles appeared in Ghana in 1914 (Excelsior Dance Orchestra). It was during the 1920s that the dance groups began to orchestrate local melodies whose result was coined into highlife by the poor local people who were denied access of entry to the expensive venues where these groups performed (Akyeampong, 1996; Bender, 1991; Coffie, 2012; Collins, 1985; Emielu, 2009).

To this origin of highlife, one can add the port music of the seamen and fishers, which led to the palm wine guitar music in the 1920s. The guitar band introduced by the Coastal *Fanti*<sup>9</sup> musicians combined the influence of the music and instruments of foreign sailors with local percussion (Collins, 2006; Dampsey, 1981; Kudonu, 2012; Yamson, 2016). The main instrumental settings of the guitar band designed for less prestigious spots than those of dance orchestras during the 1920s include the guitar, banjo, mandolin, accordion, harmonica and local percussion. During the 1930s and 1940s, the guitar gradually replaced the *seperewa*.<sup>10</sup> The Liberian *Krus*<sup>11</sup> sailors and stevedores introduced the guitar to the coast of Ghana and was later sent to the villages by the *Fantis* (Collins, 1994). In the 1950s, the guitar band became full-scale town *dance bands*, introduced by E. K. Nyame. The palm wine guitar band and Western instruments led to the guitar bands. Ghanaian highlife went through two immediate postwar developments. First, pioneered by E. T. Mensah's Tempos, the huge prewar dance orchestras were trimmed down to smaller swing-combo size as observed by Collins (2004). Second, the resulting *dance band highlife* was blended with swing-jazz, calypso and Afro-Cuban percussion (introduced by the Tempos drummer Guy Warren/Kofi Ghanaba). Many bands were influenced by the Tempos, such as the Black Beats, Rhythm Aces, Ramblers, Broadway and Uhuru of Ghana (Coffie, 2012). We want to emphasise that before the 1970s, popular (guitar and dance) bands in Ghana were more Western, which Coffie (2018) earlier posits that the dance band tradition has not been able to break away from the colonising force of Western music.

Kwame Nkrumah's cultural policy of revival added later to the liberalisation of the economy to the influence of soul music, which is Afro-centric, and a return to the roots. Also, the increasing number of tourists visiting Ghana triggered the emergence of local music styles featured by formations like the Ga Wulomei group in the 1970s, with all its musical descendants modelled on its ideals. These ideals are partly represented by an affirmation of traditional identity, survival of tradition in town, change and continuity, and modernisation

(Webb, 2011). Therefore, it is truistic that neo-traditional bands from the 1970s have contributed to the cultural revival in Ghanaian popular music. Recent studies on popular bands in Ghana such as *Hewale Sounds* (Amenyo, 2010), *Wulɔmei* (Webb, 2011) and *Bigshots* (Coffie, 2020) have attempted to construct a historical narrative of the respective bands. However, analysing the band's musical compositions as a contribution to cultural revival in Ghanaian popular music has received less attention in Ghanaian music scholarship. For this reason, we examine the concept of music creation of the Local Dimension Band within the global development of popular music in Ghana. We also assess the band's instrumental and musical resources elaborating on the artistic and ethnic background of the musicians involved in an attempt to discern the stylistic traits of the band as a contribution to the cultural revival in Ghanaian popular music in modern times. The focus on the Local Dimension Band is seeing it as a neo-pacesetter reigniting a dying flame of strong Afro-fusion in the pop music setting of Ghana.

## **METHOD**

In assessing the contribution of the Local Dimension Band to cultural revival in Ghanaian popular music, we employed a case study research design. The case study research design was appropriate for the objectives of this study, which required a close examination of the Local Dimension Band in its real-life context (Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2003). Data for this study was collected through interviews, documentary search, participant observation, audio and video review of the band's compositions and performances. To understand the area of investigation, we conducted a documentary search on the development of Ghanaian popular music concerning cultural revival as a first step. To get insight into the events leading to the band's formation, key members (those who have survived since the band's inception) and past members were sampled purposively for a face-to-face structured interview. The repertoire retained for this study consists of 38 songs gathered from four primary sources: an audiotape, audio CD, DVD and a live performance audio recording. Out of which 13 songs were selected purposively for analysis to discern the stylistic traits of the Local Dimension Band as a contribution to cultural revival in Ghanaian popular music. To do so, music software like Finale was used in the transcription of the band's repertoire. The information gathered was cross-checked from other sources to ensure its cogency.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The presentation of findings and discussion is two-fold; the first is the place of the Local Dimension Band within the cultural context, followed by analyses of selected compositions that represent the band's style.

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### **Formative Years of the Local Dimension Band**

The Local Dimension band was formed in 1996 at the Music Department, University of Ghana, Legon, through a spontaneous encounter of a *seperewa* (traditional harp-lute) and *gyil* (traditional xylophone) player, Aaron Bebe and guitarist, John Collins. The *seperewa* was initially associated with highlife music but was gradually replaced by the guitar during the 1930s and 1940s. The replacement meant that the tunes and the playing techniques used on the *seperewa* were transferred to the guitar (Collins, 2005). In the late 1990s, when popular music studies were introduced in the Department of Music at the University of Ghana, the guitar became one of the instruments taught as practical instruments, aside from the traditional ones. Thus, students could learn different Ghanaian guitar styles created due to the aforementioned transfer. Aaron Bebe explained that a practical session triggered the formation of the Local Dimension Band. Aaron gives an interesting account of the event leading to the formation of the band:

One evening Professor Collins organised students interested in the guitar lessons to launch the guitar teaching or outdoor the guitar at the drama studio. By then, I had learned how to play the *seperewa* and *mbira* (lamellohone) for my pleasure. That evening I was playing my *mbira* on one of the corridors of the Department of Music when I met one of the students who was then preparing for the evening's programme. So, we decided to try something with the guitar and *seperewa*. We were playing together when Professor Collins, who was also preparing for the evening's programme, met us and commented that the two instruments sounded together and that he would want us to perform that night. Unfortunately, we could not perform that night, but I went to his office the following morning with my *seperewa*, and together with his guitar, we made some nice sounds. So, I asked if we could work together, and he agreed. Moreover, that is how it all started.

The band's name used to be *Electric Griot*; because the band was playing Sahelian music, and the Griot is from the Sahelian Area of West Africa. However, the *Electric Griot* was changed to *Local Dimension Palm Wine Band* when the late T.O. Jazz, a renowned Ghanaian highlife guitarist, joined the group in 1999 and subsequently to *Local Dimension Band* in 2009. The name change to *Local Dimension* was dictated by the need for a short and catchy label. John Collins, a co-founder of the band, interestingly recounts how the name *Local Dimension* came about:

We wanted to get a name that could reflect on the music we were performing. We felt that *Electric Griot* did not truly reflect the repertoire we played and, hence, we needed a new identity. Aaron Bebe came up with such names as *Africanado* and *Afro zigzag*, but I thought it might not catch up with the foreigner. They might want to know what it meant, so I suggested that we get an English name, then we would not have to explain everywhere we went. I then came up with *Local* because we are local, and our locale is Ghana.

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*Dimension* was just a *qualifier* Aaron brought up, but it meant that we were doing a local dimension of popular music that was now being lost to contemporary Ghanaians. Moreover, this was palm wine music.

For a moment, one may think that a band with an ideal of employing indigenous instrumental resources would also have an indigenous name; however, John Collins' explanation of the band's name reinforces the band's identity as an African band.

### **The Co-founder members**

Aaron Bebe Sukura comes from the Upper West region of Ghana. He grew up in the Dagaara or Dagati community in the village of Tanchara, where he learnt the *gyil* (xylophone) at a tender age. His subsequent stay in Brong Ahafo and Greater Accra regions of Ghana exposed him to the *seperewa* and the *mbira* instruments. Aaron Bebe also listened to various Ghanaian traditional music when he played with the Pan-African Orchestra and the Hewale sounds in Accra. These experiences helped shape his musical orientation and, subsequently, his compositions. On the other hand, John Collins is a British born who moved to Ghana when his father settled here. He has played with the *Jaguar Jokers* before forming his *Bokoora Band*, among other orchestral experiments. John Collins also learnt the *odonson* guitar style from Kwaa Mensah, palm wine music great. As a Professor in the Department of Music, University of Ghana, Legon, he introduced the study of popular music history in the institution.

### **Membership of the Local Dimension Band**

Until 1998, the band consisted of only three musicians; a *seperewa* player and two guitarists. The next musician to join the group in late 1998 was Mary Agama, a lady drummer introduced by John Collins. There were also two Nigerian adjuncts, Betty and Prince, a singer and a guitarist, respectively. Around the constituted nucleus of musicians, other musicians of the Department of Music, School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana were welcome to play with them depending on the nature of the performance. The newcomers gradually replaced departing students. In 1999, T. O. Jazz joined the band when he was brought to the Department of Music as an artist in residence. T. O. Jazz brought his backing vocalist and friend, Kojo Manu. Attah Baah and Isaac Ackon were also *prenprensiwa* (lamellophone) players. This instrument had been introduced the same year to boost the bass register. Apart from the established members who constantly perform with the band, many instrumentalists from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds have remained beneficial. Among them were Ata-Baah (1998), Nii Okine (2004), Bernard Quashie (2006) and Mark Fish (2007), all from the Greater Accra region, Isaac Ackrong (2000) and Okutu Moses (2007) from the Eastern region, T. O. Jazz and S. K. Oppong (1998) from the Western region, Kofi Dawid (2007) and Mary Agama (1997) from the Volta region, Kojo Manu (1998) and Nana Sebe (1998) from the Ashanti region. The Local Dimension Band was quite flexible with its members such that it made room for *affiliate members*, musicians who are not bonafide members but share in the band's ideals. For instance, Mutala Mohammed, a

*donno* (hourglass drum) drummer and Gideon Agbeko, an *atenteben* (bamboo flute) from the Northern and Volta Region, also brought their culture as affiliate members. It is worth noting that all the musicians who once interacted with the Local Dimension Band brought on board the musical traditions of their regions, making the band's repertoire quite eclectic, which also gives credence to the band as a symbol of cultural convergence. The band used to comprise male and female musicians; however, it presently consists of only male musicians.

### **Repertoire of the Local Dimension Band**

Sahelian songs predominated in the initial repertoire of the band as evoked earlier because of Aaron Bebe's background. However, highlife and Afrobeat were strengthened by two Nigerians, Betty and Prince, John Collins and T.O. Jazz, in 1999. John Collins, enumerating the musical influence of T.O. Jazz on the band repertoire, states:

We became more than just Sahili and Afrobeat music when T.O. Jazz joined us. Our highlife side of the band became stronger, although we still played some Afrobeat. You know T.O. did not just strengthen our highlife side. However, as a result of his travels to Nigerian and Congo, he introduced the eastern Nigerian Ibo<sup>12</sup> highlife style as well as soukous which is synonymous with Congolese.

Aaron Bebe also composed in the *soukous*, *agbadza*, *adowa*, and *reggae* styles, with the support of the new coming talented artists. Beyond the musicians' entry and exiting the band, the composition and the re-arrangement of folk songs are mainly attributed to Aaron and T.O. Jazz. The contribution of the musicians that joined the band resides mostly in the rhythmic section. In addition, they brought in specific grooves from their various ethnic groups to support the existing melodies.

### **Instrumental Resources**

The Local Dimension Band was built around the *seperewa* and the guitar. However, the guitar later became the dominant instrument of the band. In other words, the Local Dimension Band was built on the format of the guitar bands in Ghana. The instrumentation of the Local Dimension band has undergone two different stages. The first stage was from 1996 to 2006. The instruments used were:

- Chordophones: the *seperewa* (indigenous harp-lute) and the guitar
- Idiophones: mbira, balafon and *prenprensiwa*, rattle and castanet
- Membranophones such as the Western drum set, *Tsonshi* (palm drums) and *gome* drums
- Aerophone: harmonica

This instrumental setting alone characterises the multicultural aspect of the Local Dimension Band musical orientation. See the figures below for the indigenous instrumental resources of the band.



*Fig. 1. Gyil (balafon): Image by Kofi Kudonu*



*Fig. 2. Mbira (lamellophone): Image by Kofi Kudonu*



*Fig. 3. Seperewa (harp-lute): Image by Kofi Kudonu*



*Fig. 4. Gome: Image by Kofi Kudonu*



*Fig. 5. Frikiyiwa (Castanet): Image by Kofi Kudonu*



*Fig. 6. Donno (Hour Glass drums): Image by Kofi Kudonu*



Fig. 7. *Tsoyshi* (palm drums): Image by Kofi Kudonu



Fig. 8. *Shakashaka* (Rattle): Image by Kofi Kudonu



Fig. 9. *Prenprensiwa* (lamellophone): Image by Kofi Kudonu

In 2006, the Ga ethnic *gome* (square-like wooden frame drum) was added to the instruments while the drum set and the *prenprensiwa*<sup>13</sup> (lamellophone) were left out before 2006. The *prenprensiwa* was replaced by the *gome* drum because of the *prenprensiwa*'s lack of flexibility regarding transposition. In addition, it can only be used in one key. The bass guitar was added in the second stage of the instrumental resources of the band (2007 to the present). This addition adjusted the instrumental setup to two guitars, one bass guitar, one harmonica, *tsoyshi*<sup>14</sup> (traditional palm drum), *gome*, rattle, castanet, *gyil* (xylophone), two *seperewa* with different tunings and one *mbira* (lamellophone). This addition was not a substantial change in the multicultural orientation of the group. However, it is worth noting that the guitars, the harmonica, the rattle, the castanet, the *gome* and the *tsoyshi* drums serve as supporting instruments for the two *seperewa*, the xylophone and the *mbira* that are played as solo instruments depending on the type of performance. The *prenprensiwa* was used shortly during the time of T.O. Jazz. At the same time, the Western drum set was replaced with the

gome drum to reinforce the palm-wine<sup>15</sup> identity. The gome drum was initially used to substitute the bass line before boosting it with the bass guitar. Last but not least, the voice is one of the instruments featuring in this trans-cultural band since everybody sings while performing. See figures 10 and 11 below for the present instrumental setup of the band.



*Fig. 10. Local Dimension Band in a live performance: Image by Aaron Bebe*



*Fig. 11 Local Dimension Band in a live performance: Image by Aaron Bebe*

### **Major Events that marked the development of the Local Dimension Band**

In November/December 2002, Local Dimension toured for the first time in Germany, Switzerland and France. Performance venues include Birds Eye in Basel (Germany), Moods in Zurich, Satellite Café and Baiser Salé in Paris. In 2003 the band released a CD entitled N'Yong on the French Disques Arion Label. In June 2004, the band performed in the Music Department of the Hanover University, in Germany. In January 2006, the Local Dimension band toured in Belgium and Holland. Main auditoriums consisted of Zuiderpershuis (Antwerp), Korzo (The Hague), Rasa (Utrecht) and the Tropical Museum (Amsterdam).

### **The Band's Repertoire**

About a decade of stay in the environment of the Local Dimension Band has enabled us to get quite familiar with its repertoire that may globally consist of 50 songs whose renewal process is relatively dynamic like other towns' popular musical groups. Some songs are crystallised and granted daily performances, while others are volatile or composed for fleeting occasions (conferences, special days). The repertoire retained for this study consists of 38 musical compositions gathered from four primary sources. See appendix for the band's repertoire.

Although the band embrace nine recurring musical genres (highlife, salsa fused with African idioms, Afrobeat, calypso, reggae, kpanlogo, adowa, rap and agbadza), which denote the eclectic aspect as a result of traditional orientations and the urban exposure, the thematic content of the repertoire remains paradoxically the philosophy mundane of life. As a mirror of a society closely related to the traditional environment, it depicted the incidents and vicissitudes of life (marriage, love, poverty, begging, stealing and corruption) and an appeal to morality and good sense.

### **Analysis of Selected Compositions**

A collection of songs have been chosen from the above repertoire to depict the various musical resources, procedures, techniques and contributions of the Local Dimension Band. Moreover, these pieces have been selected for the differences they might present according to the analytical paradigm below. In other words, several pieces built on the same parameters would be represented by a single model. The 13 pieces selected for analysis are *Bobo Diolasso* and *Gentleman thief* for the Afrobeat genre. For reggae: *God man creation*, and *I am alone*. For highlife: *Nibei* and *On my way*. For salsa: *Every day I give you penny*. For kpanlogo: *Onipa Nnye*. Concerning rap: *Dagaba frafra*. About adowa: *Wobeye papa ye papa*. Regarding Agbadza: *Poogle*. For calypso: *Baby*. Four songs (*Bobo Diolasso*, *God man creation*, *Nibei* and *Poogle*) have been transcribed from the above list. At the same time, the rest of the repertoire lends appropriate elements where needed in the analysis.

### **Analytical Paradigm**

In the present attempt to discern the stylistic traits of the Local Dimension Band as a contribution to the Ghanaian cultural revival initiated since the 1970s, the criteria that informed the analysis of the 13 selected pieces were of two types: musical and textual. The musical parameters included melody construction or musical phrasing, harmony or vertical association of pitches, patterns of pacing or rhythmic structures, large units of structure on form and the arrangement of the instrumental templates into dynamic procedures of orchestration. The textual aspect considers the lyrics' built-up and exegesis and tone-tune relationship. We want to emphasise that Aaron Bebe is the main composer of the band, which brings more unity in the compositional techniques. However, the additional diversity results from the band members' collective arranging of the music. We also used *Nibei*, one of the band's compositions, as a compositional mould to demystify the compositional techniques

and resources of the band. Nibei was purposively selected because it shares similar character traits with several songs, as stated earlier, while at the same time serving as a departure for other songs.

### Nibei as a compositional mould

Like the Mediterranean maqamat, the seperewa player checks his instrument and sets the piece's mood within its modality with running notes in a rubato pace emphasising the main cadences. The other chordophones intermittently punctuate these seperewa's appellations, notably at the cadential points. From now on, Nibei's mood is set, and the cadences within the piece will be of two types only: chord I and ii, as illustrated in example 1 below.



Ex. 1.

*Fa* (4<sup>th</sup> degree) inexistent in the unhemitonic pentatonic. Notice that the melody sticks to an unhemitonic pentatonic scale, as illustrated in example 2 below.



Ex. 2.

At this point, a first cultural clash appears in the Local Dimension's musical style. The harmonic progression that supports the melody contains pitches that are not represented in the mode of the melody (see Ex. 2). This feature characterises many of Aaron's compositions with unhemitonic pentatonic melodies. In the selected repertoire for analysis, the pieces *Baby*, *Wobeye papa ye papa*, *Gyae corruption*, *Dagaba frafa*, *On my way*, *God man creation*, belong to this category. On a middle-ground level of analysis (Schenker, 1980), the above-evoked harmonic progression within the seven pieces would be illustrated by a two-bar oscillation with a harmonic rhythm corresponding to the following model in example 3 below.



Ex. 3.

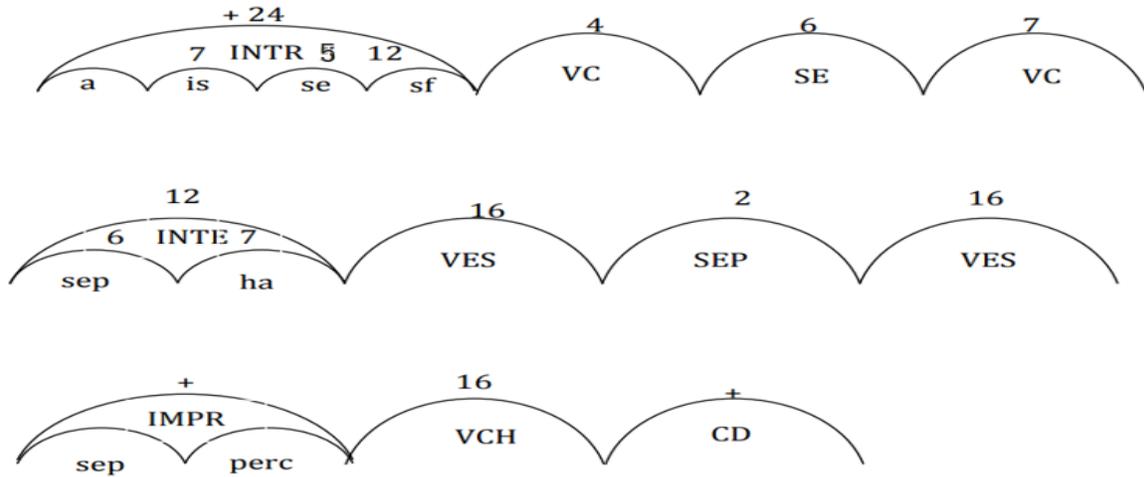
Hereafter, in the case of *Nibei*, the format of the foreground analysis, when the percussion is excluded, is illustrated in example 4 below.

The musical score for Example 4 consists of three staves: Seperewa (top), Gtr. (middle), and Bass (bottom). The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 8/8. The score is divided into four measures. The first measure is marked with a Roman numeral 'I' below the bass staff, and the second measure is marked with 'ii'. The third measure is marked with 'I' and the fourth with 'ii'. A double-headed arrow above the score indicates the generative structure of the first two bars.

Ex. 4.

These 2X2 (four) bars constitute the generative material for the entire form of the piece. The duplication of the first two bars is due to the semantic aspect of the lyrics built on the harmonic progression that ends on perfect cadence every 2 bars, thus excluding the need for a bar to bar analysis. The seperewa proceeds by successive variations of this generative material before repeating the cycle to cover the entire piece. The formal sectioning results from alternating the vocal sections and instrumental interludes (harmonica, seperewa, percussion, etc.). In this respect, the formal structure of Nibei appears as follows:

INTRODUCTION: appellations, instrumental tutti (7 bars), seperewa (5 bars), settling of the foreground (12 bars), VOCAL CHORUS (14 bars), SEPEREWA INTERLUDE (6 bars), VOCAL CHORUS (7 bars), INTERLUDE: seperewa (6 bars), harmonica (7 bars), VERSE (16 bars), SEPEREWA INTERLUDE (2 bars), VERSE (16 bars), unrestricted IMPROVISATION shared by the seperewa and the percussion; VOCAL CHORUS (7 bars), CODA. See example 5 below.



Ex. 5.

The compositional procedures common to the seven musical pieces listed earlier are traditional musical phrasing, oscillating harmonic progressions with recurring perfect cadences, the cumulative formal structures and alternating instrumental templates. Most of these procedures can be found in the traditional Dagaaba *gyil* (xylophone) music, where Aaron was nurtured. The rhythmic dimension to the above procedures also imparts the generic label of the music. Such as (*highlife, salsa, kpanlogo, Afrobeat, agbadza, adowa, rap, reggae and calypso*) by suggesting timelines more than choreographic steps, the development of rhythmic patterns being left to the discretion of the succession of the various percussionists that have patrolled the Local Dimension Band. The song text is usually minimal, telegraphic and throbbing in the choruses. However, the verses' main extemporisation or verbal improvisation around a prayer or a petition occurs. The relationship between the spoken language and the melodic curve is flexible due to the need for conformity to the generative material provided by the *seperewa*.

The six remaining songs of the selected repertoire for analysis are examined in their departure from the compositional mould established in the previous paragraphs. Thus, in *Bobo Diolasso*, the refrain is woven in an antecedent and consequent format. See example 6 below.

Ex. 6.

While the couplet builds from material borrowed from the consequent, see example 7 below.

Ex.7.

No appellation precedes the instrumental introduction, and the main instrument is the gyl. The harmonic cycle consists of a single bar built on the recurrent perfect cadential progression I–I–IV–V. Pitches of the bass lines are imprecise to the benefit of rhythm. In both *Baby* and *Gyae corruption* pieces, the scale in usage is heptatonic. Instrumental appellations before the introduction are inexistent. In the instrumental interlude, *gentleman thief* presents a bluesy static harmony in D minor with twice a four-bar harmonic digression

starting with I, vi, I and iii on the first beat, respectively. *I am alone* is based on a harmonic progression stretching over four bars, which starts on IV, I, V and I, respectively. While *Every day I give you penny* runs a single-bar perfect cadence built on I, IV, V and IV harmonic progression with a characteristic salsa lilt.

### **The Band's Contribution to the Cultural Revival in Ghanaian Popular Music**

The contribution of the Local Dimension Band to the cultural revival in Ghanaian popular music was validated based on these four theoretical lenses in urban and ethnomusicological studies, such as *change and continuity*, *style*, *modernisation*, and *network*. In terms of *change and continuity*, it is worth noting that no ethnic claim prevails in the case of the Local Dimension Band due to the diverse ethnic background of the members, as stated earlier. The artistic trend is set at an open interethnic, traditional and popular confluence, resulting from the founders' cultural background. Furthermore, the prevailing compositional procedures remain close to the *gyil* (traditional xylophone) playing, which also implies that *what is being played on the instrument is also sung*. Traditional drum rhythms such as *agbadza*, *adowa* and *gome* are also integrated into the repertoire with traditional instrumental resources.

In the same way, the main traditional mode of participating in singing is maintained, which means that everybody sings in the group while performing. However, the change in the musical orientation of the group resides in the packaging of the music, which is a response to the urban exposure to cosmopolitan and foreign influences. Thus, the performance is amplified, and the musical genres and the packaging labels are diversified for a relatively homogenous musical content. Regarding style, the study focused on aesthetic and cultural goals since the band mainly does not spring from social or economic circumstances. The previous paragraph explains how the Local Dimension Band, initially a blend of *seperewa* and palm wine highlife guitar, gradually expanded to further stylistic influences stretching from the Afrobeat and the Congolese calypso reggae, salsa, *agbadza*, *kpanlogo* and *adowa*. In dealing with *modernisation*, the appropriation of traditional resources is conceived of and presented in *modernist* terms, as Webb (2011) informs, but in a specific ratio established in the previous paragraphs. Even the traditional equipment has undergone additional technical functionality: tuning pegs and pickups (microphones) have been added to the *seperewa*, whose size has been reduced, and metallic slabs on the xylophone have replaced wooden slabs. The *band's network analysis shows* the diverse urban and even traditional *networks* tapped by [the founders] of the group," that is the idea of nexus and confluence discussed previously. The formation of the Local Dimension Band with its eclectic and Afro-fusion peculiarity and its consequent performances have impacted the Ghanaian popular music turf. This impact has brought forth other groups, such as the Bigshots, Santrofi, Kwan Pa and Legon Palmwine Bands. These bands are also blazing the rekindled cultural flame of Africanness on the Ghanaian pop music scene. It is also envisaged that with time the wave will catch up on other groups and further give birth to the very authentic pop bands that will create that unique artistic identity of Ghanaian popular music.

## CONCLUSION

The musical contribution of the Local Dimension Band to the cultural revival in modern Ghanaian popular music cannot be overemphasised. The band is predominantly African in idiom and instrumentation with little reference to Western elements. The band's compositional procedures are derived from the traditional Dagaaba xylophone music, where the main composer, Aaron Bebe Sukura, was nurtured. The band's eclectic choice of musical genres proceeds from the rhythmic dimension whose lilt is juxtaposed to the compositional procedures of the band by suggesting timelines whose development is left to the discretion of the various percussionists who have served in the Local Dimension Band. Considering the musical practices of the band, we can conclude that musical nationalism is not opposed to foreign influences; however, it depends on the mode of absorption of the latter, which also justifies music as a subject of instruction. This study contributes to the growing body of literature in Ghanaian popular music through the discipline of urban ethnomusicology, especially in the emerging area of academic inquiry into indigenous and African popular music. We hope this study in urban ethnomusicology will commence and further develop culturally-artistic dimensions in the pop music setting of Ghana and Africa. It will also open academic discourses hinged on the above perspectives to students, educators, composers and researchers about intercultural compositional processes and further development and improvement of the modest yet significant achievements attained by the Local Dimension Band. Therefore, we recommend the works of the Local Dimension Band for students, composers and researchers with interest in intercultural, multicultural, syncretic and hybrid music.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> First President of Ghana.
  - <sup>2</sup> Ghanaian ethnic group.
  - <sup>3</sup> Ga neo-traditional music group.
  - <sup>4</sup> A suburb of Accra.
  - <sup>5</sup> Traditional drum music.
  - <sup>6</sup> Traditional drum music.
  - <sup>7</sup> Neo-traditional dance music.
  - <sup>8</sup> Ghanaian ethnic group.
  - <sup>9</sup> Akan sub-ethnic group.
  - <sup>10</sup> Akan Traditional harp-lute.
  - <sup>11</sup> Liberian ethnic group.
  - <sup>12</sup> Nigerian ethnic group.
  - <sup>13</sup> Traditional Box-like lamellophone.
  - <sup>14</sup> Ga Kpanlogo drum.
  - <sup>15</sup> Acoustic highlife guitar music.

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## Appendix

- An audiotape expressly suggested by John Collins and comprising five vocal and instrumental pieces without bass. See table 1 below.

Table 1.

S/N	Title	Composer	Language	Genre
1.	Konkonsa	Aaron Bebe	Twi	Highlife
2.	Dina-ei	Aaron Bebe	Dagare	Highlife
3.	Yeven ketinontaa	Aaron Bebe	Dagare	Highlife
4.	Tiere Naagme	Aaron Bebe/John Collins	Dagare	Highlife
5.	Onukpa yeyekuye	John Collins	Ga	Afrobeat
6.	God man creation	Aaron Bebe	English	Reggae

- a DVD including four musical works composed by Aaron for the instrumental resources, which has remained unchanged since 2007. See table 2 below.

Table 2.

S/N	Title	Composer	Language	Genre
1.	Gentleman Thief	Aaron Bebe	English	Afrobeat
2.	Konkonsa	Aaron Bebe	Twi	Highlife
3.	Bobo Diolasso	Dagati folk song	Dagare	Afrobeat
4.	Tinkule	Aaron Bebe	Dagare	Agbadza

- An audio CD consisting of 11 musical pieces depicting the same composer's diversity of sources of inspiration: Agbadza, highlife, Afro-beat and adowa. See table 3 below.

Table 3.

S/N	Title	Composer	Language	Genre
1.	Wobeyε papa ye papa	Aaron Bebe	Twi	Adowa
2.	Nibei	Aaron Bebe	Dagare	Highlife
3.	Gyae corruption	Aaron Bebe	Twi/English	Highlife
4.	Konkonsa	Aaron Bebe	Twi	Highlife
5.	Dina-ei	Aaron Bebe	Dagare	Highlife
6.	Yeven ketinontaa	Aaron Bebe	Dagare	Highlife
7.	On my way	Aaron Bebe	English	Highlife
8.	Tinkule	Aaron Bebe	Dagare	Agbadza

9.	Gentleman Thief	Aaron Bebe	Pidgin English	Afrobeat
10.	Tiere Naagme	John Collins/Aaron Bebe	Dagare	Highlife
11.	Onukpa yeyekuye	John Collins	Ga	Afrobeat

- A live performance audio recording in 2012 at the Department of music, University of Ghana, portraying one of the departmental Fridays' performances. The content of the 17 pieces comprised in this digitally stored recording includes one work by John Collins, one by T. O. Jazz, one by Peter Menu, 12 by Aaron Bebe and 2 Ghanaian folk tunes rearranged by the group, as shown in table 4 below.

Table 4.

S/N	Title	Composer	Language	Genre
1.	Onipa nye	Aaron Bebe	Twi	Kpanlogo
2.	Bobo Diolasso	Dagati folk song	Dagare	Afrobeat
3.	Baby	Aaron Bebe	English	Calypso
4.	Wobeyɛ papa ye papa	Aaron Bebe	Twi	Adowa
5.	Nibei	Aaron Bebe	Dagare	Highlife
6.	Gyae corruption	Aaron Bebe	Twi/English	Highlife
7.	I am alone	Aaron Bebe	English	Reggae
8.	Aba taayele	Aaron Bebe	Dagare	Highlife
9.	On my way	Aaron Bebe	English	Highlife
10.	Dagaaba Frafra	Aaron Bebe	Dagare	Rap
11.	Gentleman Thief	Aaron Bebe	Pidgin English	Afrobeat
12.	ɔnam bebi basaa	T.O. Jazz	Twi	Highlife
13.	Onukpa yeyekuye	John Collins	Ga	Afrobeat
14.	Everyday I give you penny	Anonymous	English	Salsa
15.	Mehu nuwo esie	Peter Manu	Twi	Highlife
16.	Poɔgle	Aaron Bebe	Dagare	Agbadza
17.	Nie saala	Aaron Bebe	Dagare	Agbadza