

Adventist Music Development in Ghana

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The development of indigenous Adventist music in Ghana dates from 1922, the year in which the Agona Seventh-day Adventist Singing Band was organized in Agona-Ashanti led by one Mr. Tenkorang.¹ It was the first indigenous singing group in Adventist circles that used the indigenous language of the Akan people, Twi, in their singing. The formation of this singing band drew its inspiration from the Methodist Church which already had singing bands that assisted in its evangelistic efforts.²

The Rise of Singing Bands

Singing bands began to rise among Adventist churches by the late 1940s and the early 1950s. They performed gospel songs at camp meetings, church services, and evangelistic campaigns. Agona Adventist Singing Band was the premier group, which traveled long distances even to the Buem town of Bodada in the northern Volta area (now Oti Region) to attend a camp meeting and strengthen the church there.³

Singing bands were popular in the Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Western, and Eastern regions of Ghana. In 1956, Bernard C. Bamfo Debra formed the Accra Seventh-day Adventist Singing Band.⁴

The First Indigenous Hymnal

The first indigenous Adventist hymnal, *Akwanhwefo Nnwom*, was translated into and printed in the Twi language in the 1940s by the first African to operate the Adventist Press, Emmanuel Tetteh Abbey, a native of Accra. He worked under the leadership of F. L. Stokes, the superintendent of the Seventh-day Adventist mission in the eastern territories of the Gold Coast. The press, located at Asokore Koforidua (at the training college), was the first Adventist printing press in Ghana.⁵

In 1948, 1950, and 1952, the *Akwanhwefo Nnwom* was reviewed. Henry K. Owusu played a leading role in the translations. It was reviewed again in 1974 by a committee chaired by B. C. B. Debra. The outcome was the emergence of a new Twi hymnal *Ghana Akwanhwefo Nnwom* which had 319 hymns.⁶

The presence of Adventist Missionaries who used the English hymnals led to their continuous use for years in the Accra Seventh-day Adventist Church. Singing of choruses in English was popular among the youth and children in Accra.

The First Adventist Church Choir in Ghana

The first Adventist church choir in Ghana was formed in the Accra Seventh-day Adventist church by Andrew N. Daitey. Later, missionaries such as Lorraine Henri, Violette Meredith, and S. T. Addotey (a Ghanaian) took over leadership of the choir leadership.⁷ The church choir grew and started appearing on the local television station of the Ghana Broadcasting House in the mid-1960s.

Church Choirs Emerge in Ashanti Region

The achievements of the Accra Adventist Church Choir on state television and at evangelistic campaigns motivated Paul Yeboah and Mr. Frimpong to establish a church choir in the Amakom Seventh-day Adventist church in Kumasi. It was followed by the third Adventist church choir established at Ntonso by a teacher, Kwame O. Afriyie. Isaac K. Annan played the organ, piano, guitar, and, sometimes, the accordion to support the choir and church services.⁸

The Seventh-day Adventist Secondary School and Training College at Bekwai in Ashanti and the Agona Teacher Training College had choirs that performed at church services and public functions.

Music Galore at the First National Adventist Camp Meeting in Accra

In 1965, the Ghana Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, headed by John K. Amoah, organized the first national Adventist camp meeting at the Accra Sports Stadium. This was hosted by the Accra Adventist church⁹ since the mission headquarters were in Kumasi. In attendance were five Adventist church and institutional choirs in the country. Many singing bands attended from all over the country including the Accra Singing Band.¹⁰

More Church Choirs Arise in the Ashanti Region and Beyond

After the national camp meeting in Accra, I. K. Annan, K. O. Afriyie, Frimpong, Paul Yeboah, Master Domfeh, Asare Bediako, and A. K. Amofa opened more church choirs in the Ashanti region. Over the next nine years, choirs were organized in Agona Ashanti, Wiamaose, Asante Mampong, Bekwai, Cape Coast in the Central Region, and eventually Tamale in the North Ghana Mission. The Western and other regions also had church choirs. By the time of the first choir convention in 1974, the number of church choirs had increased to fourteen.

¹¹ The Kumasi Amakom Church Choir was the toast of the Union Youth Congress held at Accra Academy in 1974

with youth director Matthew A. Bediako in charge. The Heritage Singers from the United States also performed with acclaim at the Youth Congress.¹²

The First Male Quartets in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ghana

In 1958, the first male quartet from within the Accra Adventist Church Choir was formed. The quartet included Jacob J. Nortey, Emmanuel Olaore, Moses Olaore, and A. B. Hammond, Sr. Others such as Emmanuel C. Tetteh and Gordon Attoh also sang in this quartet over time.¹³ The Accra church quartet was encouraged by meeting the American Golden Gate Quartet, which, while touring Africa, was invited to sing at evangelist Coleridge D. Henri's 1959 campaign in Accra.¹⁴

In 1966, the King's Ambassadors, a male quartet formed in 1965 at the Adventist College of West Africa (ACWA) and led by Emmanuel Atolagbe, visited Ghana to promote the college's ministerial training program. Hermann V. A. Kuma was one of the singers.¹⁵ Their singing thrilled the Accra audience and left in its trail two male quartets, the Advent Messengers led by Emmanuel Obiri Antwi and the Gospel Melodians led by Emmanuel O. Abbey in Accra. The influence of these two male quartets in and around Accra at evangelistic campaigns, camp meetings, in hospitals, and other venues filtered into Nsawam, Koforidua, Begoro, Anyinam, Kumasi, and beyond.¹⁶ In 1979, the Advent Messengers represented the West African Union Mission at the Division Youth Congress in Tromsø, Norway, and also performed creditably in Sweden and Denmark, having earlier performed in Nigeria.¹⁷

New male quartets continued to spring up, including the Faith For Today Singing Group (Accra, 1970) led by Adu Poku; the Advent Heralds (Accra, 1973) led by James Antwi; the Blessed Hope (Accra, 1974) led by Daniel Antwi Twerefour; the Statesmen (Accra, 1997) led by Eric Amoani, the Good News Singers (Accra, 1984) led by William Ackah,¹⁸ the Christ Ambassadors (Kumasi, 1970s), The Last Delegation (Kumasi, 1970s) led by Brempong Owusu-Antwi, the Blessed Paradise (1978) led by Eric Oko Borketey, the Signs of Hope (Accra, 1987) led by Isaac Asiedu, and the New Era Acapella Group (Kumasi, 1989) led by Ampratwum Barimah, and the others.¹⁹

Emergence of More Small Groups and Quartets

In the early 1960s, small singing groups emerged, first in the Ashanti Region and then in the Western, Eastern, Brong-Ahafo, and Accra Regions, singing in local dialects and supporting their songs with local musical instruments such as the *frikyiwa*²⁰ and *akasa*.²¹

During the early 1970s, mixed small singing groups and quartets continued to proliferate. These groups included the Gospel Singers (Sekyere Odumase) led by Oti Manu and later by Kofi Abraham, the Missionary Singers (Bantama in Kumasi) led by Daniel Oduro-Barnie, the Pilgrim Singers (Bekwai) led by J. K. Amoako, the Young Missionary Singers (Bohyen-Kumasi) led by Alexander Acheampong, the Victory Voices (New Tafo,

Kumasi) led by Kyei Baffour, the Advent Voices (Asokore Oguaa) led by Osei Boateng, the Deliverance Singers (Accra) led by Mark Anim-Yirenkyi, and the Steps to Christ (Accra) led by Kwaku Ampong, and the others.²²

Birth of Choir and Singing Band Unions

B. C. B. Debra, I. K. Ansong, I. K. Annan, and K. O. Afriyie mooted the idea of forming a choir union in the Ashanti Region. When in 1971 the Ghana Conference voted to form the Ghana Adventist Choir Union (GACU) covering all the choirs in Ghana, Debra, Ansong, and Annan became chairman, vice chairman, and secretary respectively of the first executive committee of the union. K. O. Afriyie, Kumasi, and Clifford T. Abbey of Accra were also members of the committee (GACU).²³ In 1972, the first music school was held at the Agona Seventh-day Adventist Training College and Secondary School.²⁴ On March 13, 2011, the Ghana Adventist Singing Band Union (GASBU) was inaugurated at Asem Park in Kumasi.²⁵

The First GACU Convention

Fourteen choirs from across the country attended the first GACU convention. I. K. Annan, GACU secretary, led out in organizing it at Agona Adventist Secondary School & Training College in 1974. I. K. Ansong, headmaster, and S. A. Amfo, Sr., Agona district pastor, hosted the convention. The host choirs were the Agona Seventh-day Adventist church choir led by Francis Frimpong and the Agona Seventh-day Adventist institutional choir, led by Emmanuel O. Abbey.²⁶

By 2019, choirs from all the conferences in Ghana were members of the GACU. In addition, Ghanaian Adventist churches in North America and in Europe founded regional chapters of GACU (NAGACU and EGACU). NAGACU celebrated its seventeenth anniversary in the United States in April 2019.²⁷

Ghana Adventist Small Groups Association (GASGA), Umbrella of Small Singing Groups

The president of South Ghana Conference, Solomon O. T. Hammond, inaugurated the Ghana Adventist Singing Groups Association (GASGA) on September 20, 2014.²⁸ The GASGA is open to all small Adventist singing groups, but excludes large choirs, singing bands, and praise choral groups.

South Ghana Conference Creates the First Music Department in Ghana

In the 1990s, the South Ghana Conference created the first conference music department with input from the South Ghana GACU committee leaders—Clifford Abbey, Chairman; Joshua Sarpong, vice chairman; and Grace

Adjei, secretary; and Nii-Lante Thompson, youth director. The new department was solely in charge of music. All the fields in Ghana followed suit.²⁹

Women and Youth Music Development

The music associated with gatherings, church programs, and other social events for Adventist women is called *abibinwom*, which means black lyrics and tunes. It is derived from the Methodist Church's Women's Fellowships dating as far back as 1922 when Adventist singing bands began.³⁰ *Abibinwom* is mostly sung in the minor key and has always had a lead with responses, accompanied by claps, a bell, and other local instruments flavored with praises and "holy" dance. Some Adventist Youth Band squads have transformed their parade bands into mini orchestras and perform at youth gatherings and church funerals. This phenomenon is still growing.³¹

Translation of Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal into Ghanaian Languages

Among the first hymn books that were used by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Gold Coast (i.e. before March 6, 1957) and in Ghana's Adventist churches (after independence) were *Christ in Song*, the *Advent Hymnal* (AH), the *Church Hymnal* (CH), the *New Advent Hymnal* (NAH) and the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (SAH). All of these were published in English and from outside of Ghana.³²

Three local languages in Ghana benefitted from the translation of the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (SAH), Twi (the language of the Akan people), Ewe (spoken in the Volta Region), and Ga (the language of the people of Accra and the Dangme areas in Greater Accra and the Eastern Regions).

Twi Language Hymnal—Memeneda Akwanhwefo Nnwom

The Twi hymnbook, *Memeneda Akwanhwefo Nnwom*, was translated in 1998. The Twi translation committee was chaired by Emmanuel O. Abbey. The other members were Yaw Afari Ankoma, J. Pepra Mensah, A. A. Agyeman, Kumasi, and Samuel Kwaku Agyemang. All the 695 hymns in the SAH were translated. The committee added fifty-five popular hymns from the *New Advent Hymnal* and *Ghana Akwanhwefo Nnwom* which were not included in the SAH, and twenty hymns by Ghanaian composers.³³ I. K. Annan, based in Berrien Springs, Michigan, had previously translated 530 hymns from the SAH for the North American Ghanaian Seventh-day Adventists, some of which were published as the *Akwanhwefo Nnwom* in 1996). Ghanaian Adventist churches in Europe also used this hymnal.³⁴ Osei Gyasi Aggrey developed Twi fonts to enable translations of the hymns into Twi and for PowerPoint presentations.³⁵

Ewe Language Hymnal—Nkeke-adrelia Mokpolawo Fe Hadzigbale

Motivated by Sampson K. Twumasi (based in the United States), Dzidzorm R. Asafo, Nicholas A. Nai, Nathan T. Odonkor, S. K. Agyare, L. D. K. Dotse, and K. M. Ayivor worked on a complete translation of the SAH into Ewe. Entitled *Nkeke-adrelia Mokpolawo Fe Hadzibale*, it was published in 2016. The South Ghana Conference Ewe translations committee was chaired by Selorm K. Amedzo in 2013. Other members included Martin Luther Mawutor, Victor Hukporti, and Prosper Amevor. The hymnal was complete with 695 hymns and, in addition, all the responsive readings. Thirty-seven popular hymns from the *New Advent Hymnal* were added and listed as HT1 to HT37 (an abbreviation for *hاتیاتیawo*, meaning additional hymns). The Ewe hymnal is used in Ghana, Togo, and Benin, and has enhanced worship and praise among the Ewe-speaking congregations in the West Central Africa Division.³⁶

Ga Language Hymnal—Seventh-day Adventist Ga Lala Wolo

In 1984, 131 hymns were selected from the *New Advent Hymnal* and translated into Ga, the language of the indigenes of Accra, for use among the Ga-Dangmes in Greater Accra. The Ga hymnal was entitled *Advento Ga Lala Wolo* and published in 1984. The translation committee was chaired by Hermann V. A. Kuma. The other members were S. T. Addotey, M. A. Aryee, J. A. Ankrah, Nicholas A. Nai, Constance M. Laryea, Eunice M. Brocke, and Joseph Nii Ayi Hammond.³⁷

The *Seventh-day Adventist Ga Lala Wolo hymnal* was completed with the assistance of Constance M. Laryea, Eunice M. Laryea, and Nicholas A. Nai, and published in June 2019. The South Ghana Ga hymnal translations committee was chaired by Nicholas A. Nai. The committee members were Solomon O. T. Hammond, Emmanuel O. Abbey, Isaac N. Dowuona, Felix Bortey Bortier, Constance M. Laryea, and Eunice M. Brocke. All 695 hymns were translated in addition the responsive readings.³⁸ The newly translated hymnal was released in 2019 by Thomas T. Ocran, president of Southern Ghana Union Conference, and Solomon O. T. Hammond, president of the Accra City Conference (formerly South Ghana Conference), at the Ghana Trade Fair Center in Accra as part of the Ga Rural Mission Project.³⁹

The First Adventist National Music Awards

On December 31, 2012, the first Seventh-day Adventist Church Music Awards night took place at the National Theatre in Accra, organized by the Ghana Union Conference. It commemorated the 125th anniversary of Seventh-day Adventism in Ghana with awarding the Quasquicentennial Awards. The Twi hymnbook translation committee members were given awards and I. K. Annan was recognized for his work. Osei Boateng, Sam K. Asare-Bediako, Kwabena Donkor, K. O. Afriyie, the Advent Heralds, the Deliverance Singers, and others were also given awards for their contribution to Seventh-day Adventist music.

Music in Valley View University (VVU), Oyibi, Accra

Apart from the averagely seventy-five-member strong Valley View University Choir, there are many other active choral groups at the university. Among them are the Symphonials founded by Edmund Bobie Ansah in 2005 and directed by Emmanuel Ayi, the Melodians led by Mizpah Boakye Marfo, the Heralds, and the Royals.⁴⁰ Among the groups preceding the Symphonials were the New Life Praise Choir and the Inspirers (1999-2004) led by Emmanuel Asamoah.⁴¹

The Valley View University anthem “You Are So Dear,” written in 2011 by Emmanuel O. Abbey, was launched at the graduation in 2012. The anthem of the Valley View Basic Schools “Valley View Is the Place,” also written by E. O. Abbey, was launched at the fifth anniversary graduation of the VVU Basic Schools in 2017. These anthems are based on the values of the university—excellence, integrity and service—and seek to instill in the pupils and students virtuous character, patriotism, and service to their nation.⁴²

Emergence of Praise Choral Groups and Youth / Children Choirs

The twenty-first century has witnessed the emergence of youth praise groups and junior choirs. Inspired by other Christian churches such as Presbyterian, Methodist, and Pentecostal churches in Ghana, almost every Adventist Church in Ghana has youth choirs while a few have children’s choirs. This trend is also visible in Ghanaian Adventist churches in the United States, Canada, and Europe.⁴³

The Place of Adventist Music in Ghana: The National Perspective

Over the years, the impact of Adventist music on the nation of Ghana has been positive. Adventist composers such as Sam K. Asare-Bediako, J. K. Amoako, Osei Boateng, Kwabena Donkor, Newlove Annan, and a few others have captivated the nation with quality choral and gospel music in many Christian churches. At state functions, it is common to hear performing choirs and the armed forces’ bands sing or play music composed by Adventists. An example is the state funeral of the late and former president of Ghana, John Evans Atta Mills in 2012. Almost all of the songs that were sung by the invited choirs, though non-Adventist and played by the military for the three-day funeral, were Adventist compositions. Most popular among them were “Yesu Ka Woho” by Osei Boateng and “Daa Daa Daa Mebo Wodin” by Sam K. Asare-Bediako.⁴⁴

Outstanding among the Adventist choral groups in Ghana are the Symphonials from Valley View University and One Voice, founded in Accra in 2004 and led by Derrick Antwi, which ranks among the top best chorales in the country. Other state functions, such as non-denominational national thanksgiving services and carol nights by parliament, have featured Adventist choirs, choral groups, and singing bands. These small singing groups and quartets have also performed on state television stations featuring “Encounter with Truth” and on Adventist television stations such as Hope Channel, 3ABN, and Hope Channel Ghana TV. The King’s Heralds from the United States visited twice, performing well-received concerts at the Prempeh Assembly Hall in Kumasi in 1976

and at the National Theatre in Accra in 2009.⁴⁵

Anthems for Centennial and Quasquicentennial Anniversaries of Adventism in Ghana

When in 1988, the Adventist Church in Ghana celebrated its centennial anniversary, the theme song “Sing Hallelujah, the Lord is Coming,” which heralded the visit of Neal C. Wilson from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists at regional church services throughout the nation, was written by Sam Kwaku Asare-Bediako. Emmanuel O. Abbey wrote three songs for the celebration, “Onyame Yeda Wase,” performed by singing bands and used for route marches; “Onward, Forward, Advent People,” a choir anthem; and the theme song for the Centenary National Youth Congress, “O Lord, Send Me.” These songs were some of the highpoints of the celebration.⁴⁶

In 2013, the 125th anniversary of the Adventist Church in Ghana climaxed with a grand national church service at the Accra Sports Stadium with Ted N. C. Wilson, General Conference president, in attendance. For this event the singing band anthem “Adikanfoe, Mommo” was composed by Emmanuel O. Abbey, and the choir anthem “Tweduumpon Yeda Wase” was written by Sam K. Asare-Bediako from Toronto, Canada. The service was telecast live on the state television GTV.⁴⁷

Roll Call of Influential Music Personalities in Adventist Circles in Ghana

Among the leading Adventist musician-composers who influenced Seventh-day Adventist music in any form in Ghana, whether for choirs, singing bands, chorales, or small groups and quartets were: Clifford T. Abbey (Accra), Emmanuel O. Abbey (Accra and Agona, Ashanti), Kofi Abraham (Sekyere-Odumase, Ashanti), Alex Acheampong (Oboshen, Kumasi), Owoahene Acheampong (Kumasi, Wiamaosi, and France), Nkrumah Adasah (Kumasi and Asamang, Agona), K. O. Afriyie (Kumasi), Gyasi Aggrey (United Kingdom), A. A. Agyemang (Kumasi), Kwaku Agyemang (Kumasi and United States), J. K. Amoako (Bekwai, Ashanti), Ofosuhene Amaniampong (Mampong, Ashanti), A. K. Amofa (Bekwai, Ashanti), Kwaku Ampong (Accra), Mark Anim-Yirenkyi (Accra), Yaw Ankomah-Afari (Cape Coast), Newlove Annan (Accra and United States), Emmanuel Obiri Antwi (Accra), James Antwi (Accra and United States), Asare-Bediako (Sunyani), Stephen Asare (New Town, Sunyani), Sam K. Asare-Bediako (Kumasi and Canada), F. Y. Ayi and the Ayi family (Bekwai and Kumasi), Kyei Baffour (Kumasi), C. A. Bediako (Mampong, Asante), Charles Bediako (Kumasi and Germany), Osei Boateng (Assamang, Ashanti, and United States), Kwabena Donkor (Tema and United States), Kingsley Nsiah Dwomoh (Kintampo, Brong-Ahafo), Francis Frimpong (Agona, Ashanti), Sam K. Gyimah (Mampong and Kumasi), Oti Manu (Sekyere-Odumase, Ashanti), John Mensah (Kumasi and Techiman), Alex Oduro-Barnie (Kumasi and Tamale), Daniel Oduro-Barnie (Bantama, Kumasi),

Maxwell Oteng (Kumasi), Anane Sarpong (Mampong, Ashanti), Dan Antwi Twerefour (Accra), and Paul Yeboah (Kumasi), and others.⁴⁸

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NOTES

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21. *Akasæ* are maracas made of moderate-sized empty gourds covered with woven beads and strings; E. O. Abbey, *Observation* (Agona-Ashanti, Ghana: n. p., 1972).
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