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Analytical Pursuit of C.W.K. Mireku's 'Asomdwee Hen' Operetta

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Abstract



This article aims to introduce and analyse C.W.K. Mireku's *Asomdwee Hen*, an operetta, which has been the most performed African oriented musical drama in Ghana. The work which combines drama with music tells the story of the faith of Christians on the birth of Christ. The article does not only examine the African musical compositional features but pulls out the aesthetics of this traditional musical drama through musical analysis and delves to unearth the relevance of the work in the field of practical African musical drama composition. It concludes that the potential vivifying catalyst of the work is seen in the several artistic multicultural vicissitudes of thought, such as drum patterns, tonality, vocal style and language, submitted to the musical treatment by the composer. *Asomdwee Hen* is indeed a fundamental platform for the creation of African musical drama and pursuit of its aesthetics.

Keywords: *Asomdwee Hen*, African drama, Mireku, multiculturalism, operetta

1. Introduction

Asomdwee Hen is a term in the Fante language in Ghana which translates, 'Prince of Peace'. It is a title of an operetta composed by C. W. K. Mereku. The work was started on Tuesday, 4th August, 1987 and completed on Sunday, 11th October, 1987 but it was reviewed in 1990 after his Masters Degree study at the School of Music, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. *Asomdwee Hen* centres on the generic elements that constitute the progression of a story of the nativity of Jesus Christ expressed through the combination of spoken dialogue and songs in the acts and scenes. The function of the songs used in the generic structure of the operetta is seen as a punctuation of some of the acts.

Indeed, the work was premiered by the then National Academy of Music (NAM) Philharmonic Choir in 1991 during the Christmas season. The audience were drawn from the then Accra Teacher Training College, Specialist Training College, National Academy of Music, Winneba Secondary School, Nurses Training College, Eldra-Hillard Vocational School, Church Choirs in Winneba as well as many people from the Winneba community (Mereku, 2011). In 2017 December, the work was staged by the Department of Music Education, University of Education Winneba as well as the Department of Music of the University of Ghana, Legon, at different times. In Winneba, the then assembly hall (now Amu Theatre) with 600 seating capacity was filled to its full capacity with the music of the drama resonating the entire hall and touching the emotions of the audience. The clarity, brightness, powerfulness and the boldness of the rhythm, the passionate nature of melodies and the exuberance injected into the music performance, the impressiveness of the distinctive styles of African indigenous folk media filled the drama from the beginning to the end. The intense hate for Christ that was painted with the music as well as the generality of the dramatic movements with various forms of choral music became a classic spread throughout. The use of various voice textural combinations: 1st Soprano, 2nd Soprano and Alto (SSA), 1st Soprano, 2nd Soprano, 1st Alto and 2nd Alto (SSAA), 1st Tenor, 2nd Tenor, 1st Bass and 2nd Bass (TTBB), Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass (SATB), Baritone and Solos profoundly explored the possibility of ranges of voices that are worth emulating in contemporary compositions. The libretto of the songs of the operetta is in Fante and Twi languages with one in the Ewe language, acted with African costume, scenery and theatrical lighting and sound effects. Although the texts of the songs are in the local dialects, the spoken dialogue is written in English language. The composer probably did that in order to reach out to a wider audience. In fact, such works are limited in Ghana as they are hardly heard or staged in the Ghanaian community.

It is generally noted that the music performed in Ghana is predominantly vocal (Acquah, Amuah, Annan & Tsemafo-Arthur, 2015). Indeed in Ghana, most composers have concentrated their compositions on choral music and few instrumental ones. In comparison, only two composers have so far dared to create musical dramas within the context of the African Culture apart from the choral and instrumental forms: Walter Blege—*Kristo* and Cosmas W. K. Mereku—*Asomdwee Hen*. Incidentally, the two works are sacred works, the former on the theme of ‘the man Jesus Christ’ premiered by the Dumedefor of E.P Church, Ho, in 1985 and the latter on the theme of ‘the Christian nativity story’ that had its debut performance at the National Academy of Music, Winneba in 1991 as already stated. It was again revised and reproduced in 2010 before a local and international enthusiastic audience during the Pan African Society of Musical Arts Education (PASMAE) conference held in Winneba that year.

Notwithstanding, the continuity of such creative works is important to expand the repertoire because large audience that usually patronize the productions. It is upon this background that this article analyzes *Asomdwee Hen*, which happens to be the most performed operetta in Ghana in terms of its unique African compositional features as well as its aesthetics. This article exposes young composers to move their attention to the creation of more such works to meet contemporary times.

2. Synopsis of *Asomdwee Hen*

Asomdwee Hen is a traditional musical drama unfolding the Christmas story in songs. The act begins from Angel Gabriel’s visitation and unfolds up to where the baby Jesus was presented with gifts by the wise men from the East. With a total of two acts (Act I & Act II), Act I has six scenes while Act II has four scenes. Act I comprises *the Visitation, the Magnificat, Caesar Augustus’ Decree, the Birth of Jesus in a Manger, Shepherds Keeping Watch over their Flock by Night* and *Shepherds coming with their Testimonies*. The visitation describes where angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to reveal the mystery of the messianic birth while the Magnificat portrays the joy outpoured from the heart and lips of Mary to respond to the news given her by angel Gabriel. This is followed by Caesar’s decree to have population census in all Judah when Mary and Joseph (the betrothed husband of Mary) also went to Bethlehem to be counted. The birth of Christ in a manger follows when the shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night as well as the three wise men presented their gifts to the new born baby (Luke 2:1-17)

Act II consists of *King Herod in his palace, the High Priest Blesses baby Jesus, How meaningful is the Christmas Message to You* and finally, *Merry Christmas Wishes*. King Herod became angry after hearing the birth of the new king and this is followed by

the blessings given to the baby by the high priest. The scene continues to alert the audience on what Christmas means to them and finally songs portraying Christmas wishes are sung accordingly to end the acts. By its nature, songs in the work were art music compositions hinged on the theory of multiculturalism.

3.1 Theory of Multiculturalism

The culturally heterogeneous composition of a society, multiculturalism, has been studied and used in many different disciplines, such as anthropology (Saunders & Haljan, 2003), sociology (Kivisto, 2002), and political science (Citrin, Sears, Muste, & Wong, 2001), with the focus on different components of multiculturalism. In psychology for instance, multiculturalism is seen as an ideology that refers to the acceptance of cultural diversity, and active support for these cultural differences by both majority group and immigrants (Berry & Kalin, 2002). DeSensi (1995) had earlier on described it as a process or an event when several different cultures are gathered and incorporated in a container that interacts to produce a new product. That is to say, the process of multiculturalism is a cultural development generated by the influence of various foreign materials.

With respect to multiculturalism, its adaptation in music is a possibility because music as universal language needs valuing diversity and proactive stances with regard to educating about diversity in society and music settings in particular. Mereku's *Asomdwee Hen* was really based on the sound cultures of the Ghanaian linguistic traditions. He identified these African elements in some of the existing dances and musical ensembles and merged with the Western compositional styles to bring the multiculturalism to fruition. Thus, the shape of the operetta was nonlinear that conformed to the forms and structures of the unique musical practices of the Ghanaian traditional music. The texts of the compositions were within the framework of the multiculturalism theory in a multilingual society and pivots on the systemic-functional theory of register and genre. The librettos of the songs were in Fante, Twi and Ewe with special attention given to the role of songs in the unfolding of the narrative.

Besides, Mereku used *Ebibindwom*, *adowa*, *akpi*, *agbadzaasfoand* many other indigenous musical types, including the Ghanaian highlife style, in the movements of the operetta. He used antiphonic singing in the African setting and then combined with Western compositional styles and dynamics to create that multicultural theatrical music.

3.2 Music and Theatre

It is significant to review some brief account of key features of music and theatre in order to identify the juncture at which musical drama can emerge. It is worth stating that music and theatre are symbiotic as they share a common bond in drama. Through an array of emotional experiences both move the audience in a fascinating way of reaching the human psyche, it is however observed in most of the local films on television that music is ubiquitous and so drama without music within the cultural milieu in Ghana seems incomplete. Wilson (2012) is of the view that “the expressions created through manipulations of mere sound waves or simple human movement penetrate deep into the listener’s inner being more than mere words alone ever could hope to achieve” (p.1). Music, through its internal organization, acts to allow meaning to happen (Cook, 2003) and so theatrical performance with music is likely to represent the passions and humours of both performers and audience. The two, music and theatre are therefore complementary to creating a musical drama piece.

The idea to create the operetta in the traditional musical drama was probably a kind of compositional drive of creative live theatrical performance that derived from the Western Opera. Writing on Opera, Hongxing (2015) posited:

the word opera was sourced from its hometown - Italy. At the early 17th century, opera was born in Florence. Its origin was the theatre music in ancient Greek drama. Compared with ancient artistic form of drama, opera is the same as drama in terms of performance. Both items need typical theatre elements, such as the background, props, costumes and the performance of performers. However, opera is also different from drama. The former lays particular emphasis on vocal music techniques and music attainments of performers. Some operas even require the performers to have a certain foundation of dance performance. (p.797)

An opera is, therefore, seen as a kind of comprehensive form of art integrated with music singing, dance and dramatic performance. For instance, Say (1997) talked about some of the characteristics of opera and stated that “opera is the combination of theatre and music that rejoices in literature, poetry and plastic arts” (p. 165). It does not only lay emphasis on plot development but also on artistic expression, and strives to describe and highlight dramatic conflicts by concentrating means of artistic expression (Hongxing, 2015). For this reason, creators normally have to possess extremely strong creative

ideas, inject a soul to musical drama, and touch on the emotions of the audience. It is therefore important to unearth the relevance of what Mereku has created to enhance more other creative works in the field of practical African musical drama composition.

Admittedly, Mereku's idea to create and establish the musical drama was probably about the intermedial combination of music and theatre through the writing and performance. Megarrity (2015) considered intermediality to entail the collaboration, transformation and combination of both music and theatre. He is of the view that theatricalising music or musicalising theatre creates some kind of in-between-ness that inspires a kind of axial thinking (p.29). As Eno (1996) put it, this kind of axial thinking "triggers an imaginative process, an attempt to locate and conceptualise the newly acknowledged greyscale positions" (p. 298). Therefore, as music invades intermedial performance practice, and the significance of language diminishes, it conducts and contributes to the creation of *mise-en scene*, rather than being one of its instruments (Megarrity, 2015, p.28).

Megarrity (2015), citing Roesner (2008, p.3), identifies the potential of musicalisation to "re-introduce the full range of textual potential: as a rhythmical, gesticulatory, melodic, spatial and sounding phenomenon as well as a carrier of meaning". This is to say that music can conjure up characters and narratives as songs can be strung together into stories. The rhythms in music alone may be conceptual, musical, theatrical or visual and therefore may emerge from narrative or elsewhere. This is why Langer (1953) commented on the power of music in theatre:

Music, like language, is an articulate form. Its parts not only fuse together to yield a greater entity, but in doing so they maintain some degree of separate existence, and the sensuous character of each element is affected by its function in the complex whole. This means that the greater entity we call a composition is not merely produced by mixture, like a new colour made by mixing paints, but is articulated, i.e. its internal structure is given to our perception. (p. 31)

Of course, music with text gives a sense of background story, which can be acted in the form of a drama or fully performed as a musical show, but setting a play into music can be appropriate to give new life of musicalising theatre. Dyer (2012) for instance stated, "Because they have words, songs can name and ground emotions; because they involve music, they can deploy a vast, infinitely nuanced range of affects; because they are vocally produced, they open out into physical sensation" (p.4). This corroborates the claim by Rosenthal and Flacks (2015) that "Song...is theatre" because they possess "... implied narratives, they have a central character, the singer; a character with an attitude

in a situation talking to someone (if only to herself)” (p.169). If song is theatre, then every song with text is likely to tell a story that can be harnessed for a larger musical work, combining possible elements of drama in our folk media.

3.3 Adaptation of Folk Media in Traditional Musical Drama

Creative ethnomusicological research cannot yield any traditional musical artefact without the use of the folk resources of a people. This may include folkstories, folksongs and dances. Ribe (2015) described these folk media as oramedia or indigenous media which are regarded as intangible artefact of a culture. So Ghanaian customs, traditions, stories, songs, religion, performance arts and superstition have great relevance within African culture and which are prime disseminators of our culture (Ugboajah, 1985). These can be tapped by researchers in the Creative Arts to create works that can promote the cultural ideals and values of the society. Indeed, folk media is adaptable to the indigenous sensibility and utilizes frames of reference that are familiar to the people (Uzochukwu & Ekwugha, 2015). Ugboajah (1985) commented on how the folk media as entertainment can draw many audience:

traditional media as entertainments can attract and hold the interest of large numbers of people. As oral media in local languages, they can involve the poorest groups and classes. As dramatic representations of local problems, they can provide a codification of reality which can be used by participants to analyze their situation. (p. 54)

These traditional media forms are channels of education and entertainment among all class of people within the society and so they are great source materials for creating traditional musical dramas. *Asomdwee Hen* was created based on an existing story but the creation of the music was done within the context of the use of traditional source materials.

Furthermore, Nketia (1963) offered discussion on the music of the Akan people including its significance in the society, the occasions on which the music is performed, the identity of the performers, and a general musicological analysis of the song-types themselves and contended that folk songs are found in musical types such as *Adowa*, *Asaada* and other women musical types among the Akan of Ghana. So, folk songs as part of the musical culture of the people inevitably portray the identity of the people through dissemination of traditional wisdom, relaying the history of a people as well as teaching and informing people about their identity. Melodies, modes and rhythmic patterns as well as the spoken phraseology of folk tunes across the traditions of Ghanaian

music were embedded in the work to achieve what is truly African.

4. Methodology

In approaching the study, musical analysis was used. Musical analysis is the study of musical structure in either compositions or performances (DeVoto, 2004). This undoubtedly helps to understand the structure of a musical work and exposes how the work achieves its effects. Orio (2006) enumerated two techniques of musical analysis to include discretization analysis and compositional analysis. He explained that discretization has to do with breaking a musical piece down into smaller and simpler parts and then examining the way these parts fit together and interact with each other. Similarly, he explained that compositional analysis deals with the various techniques used in the musical work. Infact, he is of the view that musical analysis is also applicable to Music Information Retrieval (MIR), where it is seen as a means to retrieve information from music. Obviously, depending on the analyst, analysis can involve constructing a set of features for the musical text, the score, performance situation or the aesthetic aspect. Therefore, in pursuing the analysis of *Asomdwee Hen*, the compositional analysis was predominantly used to make readers understand the various techniques, in terms of composition, used in the work while unearthing the aesthetic aspect of the work.

The work was pursued by firstly, looking at the order in which the musical works appear in it. This was followed by purposive sampling of 8 pieces to illustrate the varied compositional devices used.

4.1 Order of Musical pieces in the work

The musical pieces in the work occur according to how the story unfolds. The following table shows the titles of the musical works, English translation, the choral medium and the page number in which each of the pieces is located in *Asomdwee Hen* operetta.

Table I

Musical pieces in Asomdwee Hen

S/N	Title of work	English translation	Choral Medium	Page in the work
1	<i>Yebɔtow Ebenezer</i>	We will sing Ebenezer	SSA	21
2	<i>Nhyira nka wowɔ mbaa mu</i>	Blessed are you among women	SSAA	22
3	<i>Me kra tonton Ewuradze</i>	My soul magnifies the Lord	Soprano Solo	23
4	<i>Ambrado Caesar Reba</i>	There comes Caesar Augustus	TTBB	25
5	<i>Yema wo akwaaba</i>	We welcome you	SATB	29
6	<i>Enyimnyam wɔ sorsor</i>	Glory in the highest	SATB	34
7	<i>Hom mma yensɔr nkɔ Bethlehem</i>	Let us rise to Bethlehem	SATB	38
8	<i>Na wɔawo ɔba no ama hen</i>	For unto us a child is born	SATB	41
9	<i>Katakylie</i>	Omnipotent	SATB	52
10	<i>Agoo</i>	Knock in	Baritone against SATB	54
11	<i>Yeye enyansafɔ</i>	We are wise men	Bass trio	56
12	<i>Henanye Jewfo Hen no?</i>	Who is the king of the Jew?	SATB	57
	<i>Yeye enyansafɔ baasa</i>	We are three wise men	SATB	61
13	<i>Osee na wɔaye</i>	He said it and has done it	Cantor & Chorus/ sop/SATB	63
14	<i>Jesus gyina w'a bow ano</i>	Jesus stands at your door	Tenor solo & Chorus	66
15	<i>Ampa Wɔawo Christ</i>	Truly, Chris is born	Soprano solo against SATB	69
16	<i>Nde ye enyigye da</i>	Today is a happy day	SATB	73
17	<i>Egbe nye dzidzɔgbe</i>	Today is a happy day	SATB	74

The musical pieces in the work begin from *Yebɔtow Ebenezer*, created in SSA and end with *Egbe nye dzidzɔgbe*.

4.2 Sampling

As already stated, 8 of the pieces were purposively sampled and used to illustrate the various analytical treatment embedded in *Asomdwee Hen*. The following table shows the titles of the selected pieces.

Table 2

Musical pieces in *Asomdwee Hen* selected for Analysis

S/N	Title of work	English translation
1	<i>Yebɔtow Ebenezer</i>	We will sing Ebenezer
2	<i>Nhyira nka wo wo mbaa mu</i>	Blessed are you among women
3	<i>Ambrado Caesar Reba</i>	There comes Caesar Augustus
4	<i>Yema wo akwaaba</i>	We welcome you
5	<i>Katakyie</i>	Omnipotent
6	<i>Agoo</i>	Knock in
7	<i>Osee na wɔaye</i>	He said it and has done it
8	<i>Jesus gyina w'a bow ano</i>	Jesus stands at your door

5. Analysis

5.1 Indigenous Compositional Devices

There are many compositional techniques used in the pieces found in the operetta. Some of these techniques are counterpoints, modulations, imitations, unisons, fugal expositions, staccatos, falling tones, cadential extensions, use of spoken text, syncopations, call and response and *ebibindwom* singing style. For the purpose of this article, the analysis looks at the predominant use of features of African traditional music in the pieces such as voice textural forms, call and response, *ebibindwom* singing style, falling tones, spoken texts and traditional dance styles.

5.1.1 Use of Voice textural Forms

The use of baritones, male chorus, female chorus and soprano solos were carefully done to reveal theatrical conflicts and the characterization of the plot of the story. Since the introduction of academic music in Ghana, lots of musical compositions in the various vocal styles of realistic literary trend have been pursued. Mereku is unavoidably affected by this trend of thought. In his creative practice, he has a strong dramatic conflict and profound theatrical heart manifested in some of his instrumental works such as *Sasabonsam's Match*. Even in most of his choral works, he pays attention to the performance of music and the close cooperation between the creation of music and the story. In *Asomdwee Hen*, various voice textural forms were used. The following are excerpts as found in the work:

Yeɔtow Ebenbezer

The musical score for 'Yeɔtow Ebenbezer' is presented in three staves. The top staff is for the 1st Soprano, the middle for the 2nd Soprano, and the bottom for the Alto. All parts are in 4/4 time with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The lyrics are: 'Ye - ɔ - tow E - be - ne - zer ___ Nya - me N'a-dom a - ra kwa ___'. The 1st Soprano part begins with a quarter note 'Ye', followed by a dotted quarter 'ɔ', and then a half note 'tow'. The 2nd Soprano and Alto parts begin with a quarter note 'Ye', followed by a dotted quarter 'ɔ', and then a half note 'tow'. The Alto part has a more complex rhythmic pattern in the first few notes, including a quarter note 'Ye', a dotted quarter 'ɔ', and a half note 'tow', followed by a quarter rest, a quarter note 'E', a dotted quarter 'be', and a half note 'ne'. The lyrics are written below each staff, with a long line under 'zer' in each part to indicate a sustained note.

Excerpt 1: 1st Soprano, 2nd Soprano, Alto (SSA)

Excerpt 1 above is an arrangement of *Yeɔtow Ebenezer* into three female parts: 1st Soprano, 2nd Soprano and Alto. It was carefully arranged to depict the context of the story since that role was assigned to females. The same treatment was done to the excerpt 2 below. The only difference is that while excerpt 1 was arranged for three female voices with just a divisi in the Alto part at the beginning, excerpt 2 was composed for four voices: 1st Soprano, 2nd Soprano, 1st Alto and 2nd Alto. Even with the female chorus, Mereku varied the texture of the voices. These textural forms are seen in many Akan female indigenous traditional musical types such as *nnwomkoro*, *asaadua*, *adzewa* and *adowa*.

Nhyira nka wo wə mbaa mu

Musical score for 'Nhyira nka wo wə mbaa mu' for SSAA voices. The score is in 6/8 time and B-flat major. It features four vocal parts: Soprano 1 (S1), Soprano 2 (S2), Alto 1 (A1), and Alto 2 (A2). The lyrics are: N - hyi - ra nka wo wo mbaa muo.

Excerpt 2: 1st Soprano, 2nd Soprano, 1st Alto, 2nd Alto (SSAA)

Majestically

Ambrado Ceasar Reba

Musical score for 'Ambrado Ceasar Reba' for TTBB voices. The score is in 4/4 time and D major. It features four vocal parts: Tenor II, Bass I, and Bass II. The lyrics are: Ye - ye Ro - man nsor - daa__ fo o.

Excerpt 3: 1st Tenor, 2nd Tenor, 1st Bass, 2nd Bass (TTBB)

Excerpt 3 above was arranged for four male voices: 1st Tenor, 2nd Tenor, 1st Bass and 2nd Bass. In that context of the drama, the role was assigned to men as soldiers who should portray the rendition as quick and loud as possible to depict an aggressive moment. In the traditional set up, men were mostly used in wars, and this concept was adapted in the drama to portray the role as such. Many warrior musical types in Ghanaian community such as *Atsiagbeko*, *asafo* and *Takai* have been the prerogative of men, therefore, the

male chorus textural form was appropriate for the act of the story.

5.1.2 Call and Response

Call and response is predominantly a unique feature in the musical fibre of most traditional music in Ghana. Hickok (1989) is of the view that call and response involves repetition of short melodic phrases. There is usually a cantor and chorus alternating fragments or the whole of the song. This was carefully employed as compositional technique in many of the pieces in *Asomdwee Hen* as exemplified in the following excerpt.

Agoo C.W.K.Mereku

The musical score is for a piece titled 'Agoo' by C.W.K. Mereku. It consists of three staves: Baritone (bass clef), Soprano (treble clef), and Bass (bass clef). The time signature is 6/8. The Baritone part starts with a forte dynamic (f) and sings 'A - goo' with a long note. The Soprano part starts with a forte dynamic (f) and sings 'A - mee' with a long note. The Bass part provides a rhythmic accompaniment. The score is divided into two measures, each with a double bar line at the end.

Excerpt 4: *Agoo* illustrating call and response

As in excerpt 4, the call is usually done by the lead singer (as indicated with green circle) while response is done by the chorus (as indicated with blue circle).

5.1.3 Use of *Ebibindwom* Singing Style

Ebibindwom (Akan sacred lyrics) singing style, which is peculiar to the Akan of Ghana was adapted and used as a technique in some of the pieces. Amuah (2014) observed that *Ebibindwom* arose from the attempt to set Christian lyrics to existing traditional tunes from some of the existing musical traditions such as *Asafo*, *Adenkum* and *ɔmpɛ*. Similarly, Amuah and Arthur (2013) described *ebibindwom* as the first authentically indigenous musical style to emerge in the course of the evolution of Ghanaian church music. Notably, it is characterized with call and response as well as cantor and chorus. This technique is what Mereku used in some of the pieces. One of them is *Osee na W'ayɛ* as illustrated below in excerpt 5.

Osee, na W'aye

Cantor

O-see na w'a-yeo me Nya - mea o-see na w'a - yeo E-hun-

Chorus

hmm

hmm

7

- nyan - kwa Na-na Nya - mea O - see a e - na w'a - yeo

7

7

e - na w'a - yeo

Excerpt 5: *Ebibindwom* device used in *Osee na W'aye*

The *ebibindwom* singing style also has a lead singer as exemplified in excerpt 5. In this excerpt, the cantor is the lead singer who dictates the pace of the performance and uses declamatory style while the chorus usually enters at the cadential progression points of the lines of the cantor, especially in the concluding parts.

5.1.4 Use of falling tones

One traditional feature found in some of the pieces is the use of falling tones to depict the tonal inflections of the texts. This technique is found in many languages in Ghana and Africa as a whole. Part of the song, *Jesus gyina w'abow ano* has this feature as below:

Jesus Gyina W'a bow Ano

The musical score is in 2/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The vocal line (treble clef) features a glissando effect in the final measure, indicated by a circle and the word 'Glissando' written above the staff. The lyrics are: e - mi - gyi-na kyir, mo ro bo woa-ḥow muo mo ro-bo. The bass line (bass clef) provides accompaniment with a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure, marked with a '3' above the notes. The lyrics for the bass line are: muo Je - sus Christ mi-gyi-na woa-bowa - no.

Excerpt 6: Falling tones expressed in glissando

In excerpt 3, the falling tones are indicated with the glissando (as shown with the circle). The lower range may not be necessarily the E in bar five of the excerpt but can go beyond it depending on the performers and how they want it.

5.1.5 Use of Spoken Texts

In representing some features of African compositional style, it is sometimes difficult to ensure exactitude of notes juxtaposing particular text in a composition. It can easily be performed but difficult to notate since the text may be well understood by speaking instead of singing in the course of the performance. This is seen in *asafo* music of the Akan. In the CODA part of *Ye ma hom akwaaba* (we welcome you), a spoken text, *akwaaba* is written and indicated to be spoken to end the piece. It is usually rendered spontaneously with varied tones and voice textures. Mereku used this traditional technique to situate appropriately the context of the plot of the story as illustrated in excerpt 7 below:

The musical score is for the CODA section, starting at measure 6. It is in 2/4 time with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The score includes a treble clef and a bass clef. The vocal line (treble clef) features a *ff* dynamic and includes a triplet of eighth notes. The lyrics are: Ye ma woa kwaa ba A-bo-fra ka-kra ba O-nya-me 'nhyra wo. The bass line (bass clef) also features a *ff* dynamic and includes a triplet of eighth notes. The lyrics are: muo Je - sus Christ mi-gyi-na woa-bowa - no. To the right of the score, the text 'AKWAABA!!!' is written, with 'Spoken' written below it.

Excerpt 7: Spoken text in *Ye ma hom akwaaba*

Katakylie

In the style of Adowa Dance

The musical score is written in 8/8 time. It features a vocal line for the Cantor and Chorus, and instrumental parts for Bell and Hand Clap. The lyrics are: "He - rod ee - hen He - rod ee, A - hen mu hen He - rod ee, A - hen mu hen". The score is divided into sections for Pomposo, CANTOR, and CHORUS. The accompaniment includes a Bell pattern and a Hand Clap pattern.

Excerpt 8: Adowa dance style in *Katakylie*

From excerpt 4, the piece written in 8/8 has a cantor and chorus accompanied with *adowa* bell pattern and hand clapping. Other drums might be added to go with the rhythm.

6. Aesthetics of *Asomdwee Hen*

In my opinion, when a work is an excellent one, it can lead the audience to a remarkable appreciation and cause them to have deeper level of emotional meaning to the work. Mereku's operetta is such a potential, which can touch on the emotions of the audience to express their inner feelings and expectations. This work has paved the way for appreciation for a musical drama situated in the African cultural setting laying the foundation for future establishment of an opera industry in Ghana. The melody of the work is beautiful, impressive, emotional, and inspiring. The rhythm is strong and consistent with the tastes of the Ghanaian audience. The music was accompanied with keyboard extemporizations, so beautifully done to enhance the singing of the songs of the operetta. The music in the play has a good connection between the character and emotions and the conflict between the plot and the story.

The work is really a master piece among Mereku's compositions from the ideological content as well as the technical design of the work. The choral songs in *Asomdwee Hen* are of great significance, organically connected with the plot, and integrated with the

content of the drama. The simple and rigorous male chorus exhibited in unison by the soldiers to welcome Ceasar Augustus on stage is also commendable. In terms of the vitality and simplicity of the musical language, it is impressive and levels well with the integrity and power of an artistic conception.

7. Conclusion

The work, *Asomdwee Hen*, by C.W.K. Mereku is organically, the Christian's faith on the story of the birth of Jesus Christ reflecting a holistic idea of operetta creation. Creating varied forms of voice textures and blending with African rhythms and traditional musical styles in synchronization of the spoken texts is really a master piece. From Angel Gabriel's Visitation to where the son was presented with gifts by the wise men from the East, the operetta retells the story in a more contextual setting of the African culture, taking the compositional styles of the pieces, costuming, props and the general spectacle of the drama into consideration. The work reflects Mereku's feelings about the use of traditional source materials in the compositions of African musical works which serves as a springboard for creating more African musical dramas. Apart from a score for bugle, as it appeared in the unfolding story, all the pieces were arranged for the voice without any instrumental accompaniment but in the performance of the work, piano extemporizations are used. The colour and expressiveness of the keyboard would greatly enhance renditions and provide interludes as well as special sound effects in the acts.

To sum up, the African musical compositional features found in the operetta are call and response, the *ebibindwom* singing style, falling tones, spoken text, use of diverse languages as well as varied indigenous dance styles. These are the several indigenous artistic vicissitudes of thought employed in the work thereby, aesthetically, having the potential to touch on emotions of audience. It is no doubt that the work shows the possibility of setting ancient stories to operettas in a more several artistic multicultural musical treatment that will foster and capture the expectations of the audience. Mereku stands as one of the African operetta composers in Ghana as his work, *Asomdwee Hen*, is the mostly performed African operetta in Ghana. The work is undoubtedly, a contribution to African operettas in Ghana which are in few quantities. Indeed, the indigenous knowledge systems used by the composer blends well the Jewish, Roman and Ghanaian aesthetics to achieve great originality that makes the production an African.

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