

Digital and Multimedia Way Out to the Preservation of *Ebibindwom* (Akan Sacred Lyrics)

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ABSTRACT

The Methodist Church, which is recognized as one of the largest and oldest Protestant denomination in Ghana, traces its roots back to the landing of Rev. Joseph Dunwell on January 1, 1835 in Cape Coast. During Rev. Thomas B. Freeman's tenure as the Reverend Minister of the Methodist Church in Cape Coast, he encouraged the non-literate members of the Church to sing *Ebibindwom* when he realized they could not participate in the singing of English hymns. It's worthy to note that the participation of the younger generation of the Church, in the singing of the *Ebibindwom* has dwindled. This paper is an attempt to present a way out to preserve this legacy in the digital and multimedia fashion so that the younger ones through the current technological era would learn, participate in, and sustain the singing of *Ebibindwom*.

Preamble

Among the Fante of the coastal region of Ghana taken as the epicenter of the phenomenon, one comes across an already secular pre-literate body of choral practices, the *Ebibindwom* (Akan Sacred Lyrics) within the Methodist Church, for which there is a need for preservation. In a contemporary African society where youth learning environment has transcended pure oral modes of preservation concerning those sacred and didactic repositories deserve an efficient redirection.

Accordingly, this paper is divided into two main sections of equal significance. The first section presents the necessary glosses about *Ebibindwom*, its origins and historical background, the traditional or cultural resources from which it draws, its geographical area, its users and its place in the Methodist Church Ghana. The second section proposes modes of preservation that convert oral transmission into interactive knowledge for contemporary Ghanaian youth.

Ebibindwom - A Historical Background

The story of *Ebibindwom* (Akan Sacred Lyrics) starts with the contact the European visitors to the West Coast of Africa (also known as the Guinea Coast) made with the indigenous people of this part of the world. Prince Henry "The Navigator" of Portugal initiated this contact, which took place around 1443. Prince Henry had a number of aims for organizing the voyages of explorations to this part of Africa. First, he was seeking to form an alliance with non-Western rulers of Africa against the Moslems of the North. Portugal had had a long and bitter struggle against the Moslems who had for centuries dominated the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean region. Second, he had the missionary motive of taking the Christian faith to the 'pagan' inhabitants of this part of the African continent. Third, he was seeking adventure, as well as geographical knowledge of Africa. At that time knowledge of the geography of Africa was restricted to North Africa and some vague notions of the Red Sea regions and the East Africa Coast. Finally, he also had an important economic aim, to gain access from the South to the gold trade of Western Sudan then controlled by Moslem North Africa along the Trans-Saharan trade routes (Osae and Nwabara, 1968. p. 152-153).

European colonization brought Ghanaians and Europeans into contact. This contributed to the emergence of a new society in which members of different ethnic groups and Europeans got together to create new arts,

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new wealth based on an industrial-commercial economy and new ways of living. In Africa we have evidence of early contact with the external world, and also contacts of African peoples with one another. These contacts have produced new musical values as well as social values and customs. Very often these contacts have resulted in both new musical hybrids and recreation of entirely new musical types such as the *Akan* sacred lyric (Turkson, 1975. p. 5). The *Ebibindwom* was one of the products of this Ghanaian European socio-cultural interaction (Mensah, 1966. p.1-3).

The Emergence of Ebibindwom in the Methodist Church

In the Methodist church, Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman, an African American, in 1835 at Cape Coast Methodist Church encouraged the non-literate older women to sing Christian scripture to traditional tunes because they could not participate in singing of the English hymns. He therefore encouraged members to sing biblical texts to traditional tunes.

The Methodist Church Ghana was established through the collaboration of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society and a band of local Christians dedicated to the study of the Bible. At their request, the first missionary arrived in 1835. He and many others died of malaria. All these pioneer missionaries are buried under the pulpit of Wesley Chapel at Cape Coast. The Methodist Church Ghana, which used to be under the British Conference, became autonomous in 1961. Methodism has since spread throughout the country and beyond. The Methodist approach to evangelization in Ghana has always included formal education and other social services including medical care. (http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/methodist-church-ghana_br)

Ebibindwom, therefore, arose from the attempt to set Christian lyrics to existing traditional tunes some of which we shall see below were from the *Asafo*, *Adenkum*, *Ompe* musical traditions.

Because of the native's musical ingenuity, participation in the singing of *Ebibindwom* did not require the congregation to be literate. It made it possible for the illiterate and semi-literate to be actively involved in the church singing in the form of *Ebibindwom*. Members of the congregation tended to be more interested and understood than if they had listened to a sermon. For this reason, the missionaries allowed *Ebibindwom* to flourish.

Cultural/Traditional Resources of Ebibindwom

Asafo, *Adzewa*, *Adenkum*, *Ompe* and many other female bands perform all except *Ompe*. *Adenkum*, (lit. calabash) has been performed during festivals such as *Akwambo* which takes place at the beginning of the New Year, and during thanksgiving and cleansing rites.

Not all Akan sacred lyrics can be traced to traditional indigenous songs. Many of the songs while built on traditional lines owe their inspiration to biblical thought or text. Rev. Dr. S.G. Williamson has also suggested two possible directions in which the traditional background of the Akan sacred lyric may be sought.

The first direction leads to *Anansesem*, folk-tale in which narration can be interrupted (*mboguo*) (as the sermon is interrupted by the introduction of a lyric). Such interruptions may be either by way of diversion, similar to the entr'acte in Western dramatic production, or may serve the purpose of commentary on the story or some aspect of it. These musical interludes may take the form of a regular, metrical song or of recitative (call and response) (Williamson 1958).

The second direction in which Williamson sought the traditional background of the *Ebibindwom* was the *AsafoMmobome* and *Asrayere* songs: The most probable source of *Ebibindwom* seems to be *Adenkum*. According to Turkson (1975:6) expert Akan sacred lyricists differentiate between *Adenkum*-derived *Ebibindwom* which they refer to as the old type and *Ebibindwom* based on biblical text, which they refer to as the new type.

Geographical Area of the Ebibindwom

The home of *Ebibindwom* is Fanteland. With time, the Akan sacred lyric reached other communities including Effutu, Ahanta and Nzima where Fante is spoken as an alternative language. In Ashanti as well as the other remaining Akan areas, *Ebibindwom* is regularly heard during worship. In Ashanti the features of the Akan Sacred lyric in worship are not prominent.

The Users of Ebibindwom

The *Ebibindwom* is basically a Methodist Tradition. Other denominations using the *Ebibindwom* lyric include the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (A.M.E. Zion).

The Akan societies affiliated to a particular church and using the Sacred lyric not only in the church but also during meetings, such as the Women's Fellowship, Christ's Little Band of the Methodist church, the Anglican Women's fellowship and the Catholic *MboaKuw* of the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Church. Fante syncretic churches like the Hope Society and Honest Society. Akan syncretic churches such as the Musama Disco Christo Church, started as the "Faith Society" when Prophet Jemisimiham Jehu-Appiah, a Methodist Catechist who was expelled from the Methodist church because of his "strange action". The African Faith Tabernacle popularly known as *Nkansa* named after the Liberian William Wade Harris, Non-Christian churches, for instance the Moslems during outdoorings especially the "Fante Moslems"(Ahmadiyya Movement) in the Ekumfi area and the areas around Cape Coast are also users of *Ebibindwom*.

Ebibindwom in the Methodist Church

Like all Western churches in Ghana, the Methodist church strongly reflects its British origins in ethos, its organization and policy, worship and discipline. Among pre-literate Fante Christians, these lyrics are beloved and deeply prized. In the rural areas, they largely displace the western type of hymn. A vernacular hymnbook *Christian Asor Ndwom* (lit. Christian church songs) and henceforth written as C.A.N containing 90% transliteration of hymns from Methodist and other Western hymn books old and recent, is available, and a small selection of such hymns are memorized and lovingly used. Eighteen such lyrics appear as an appendix to C.A.N under the title *Ebibindwom* and can be studied, but the fullest devotional expression of Christian worship in song among village congregation expresses itself in the Akan Sacred lyric. The words of many of these, handed down by tradition, are more or less fixed. Minor variations can be met within the individual congregations which use them.

In the Methodist church, Christ's Little Band, a voluntary group made up of mostly women, are usually those who rehearse and sing *Ebibindwom*.

Contemporary Preservation Tools for the Perpetuation of Ebibindwom

Firstly, Finale 2010 was used to score the thirty *Ebibindwom*. An example of such pieces entitled, *Menye Kronkron rekasa (I am speaking to the Holy one)* is shown below as follows:

Me nye kran kran Rekasa
(To the Holy One I talk)

Transcribed by
Joshua Amuah and Anthony Nyamful

Score

Solo

Me nye kran kran re ka sao ----- E- mia----- menyekran kran re ka sao -----

Chorus

Hmm----- menyekran kran re ka sao -----

7

Solo

A dam de tse na nso be sia ba E mia me nye kran kran re ka sao----- E wo sao sao moen-sa se.

Chorus

14

Solo

ma ra nye owu ɔ -- dze ban nyenyi man se twe nyi nyem' apem-pem si nyi nyem na ma tse nbo foa---

Chorus

©

2

Solo



sa hɛll ----- ɔ do man-ko ma Nya me N kyɛm yie -- ntsi a ma ne ba Je sus Christ a-bɔ- tɔ nkwa a-kyɛ mei

Chorus



Solo



A dom a- tsen nkan kan a kt da hea -ven dɛm n tsi E mi so dɛmyi mo wɔ ho kwan dɛ me nye kɛɛn kɛɛn re-

Chorus



Solo



ka sao----- me nye kɛɛn -kɛɛn re ka sao ----- E - mi a me nye kɛɛn - kɛɛn -- re ka sao -----

Chorus



Digital and Multimedia Preservation of Ebibindwom

During the early eras of music, such as the baroque and the classical period, music compositions were preserved solely in notation format. However, with the advent of the computer and its introduction into the world of music, digital music in audio and video formats has become a powerful means of notating and preserving compositions by musicians. Nonetheless, there has not been any major attempt to digitally

preserve *Ebibindwom* a traditional music style (unique to the Methodist Church of Ghana for liturgical purposes) for future generations.

The purpose of this paper therefore is to sensitize music composers, music educators and music technologists to digitally preserve *Ebibindwom*. The writers of this paper therefore have digitally preserved thirty *Ebibindwom* in the following formats: MIDI, (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), Mpeg layer 3(MP3), Notation (Score), Audio Video Interleaved (AVI), DVD Mpeg2, and Mpeg layer 1(video format) through the use of music applications such as Nuendo, Finale, Fruity Loops and *Ebibindwom* 3.3. It is the hope of the writers that such digital preservation could be very useful for educational purposes thus inculcate into the youth religiousness and aesthetic beauty exhibited by *Ebibindwom*.

As stated above, four music applications, Finale 2010, Nuendo, Fruity Loops and *Ebibindwom* 3.3 were used for the digital preservation of *Ebibindwom*. Finale 2010 is a powerful integrated programme for music transcription, notation, playback, and publishing. Finale 2010 incorporates elements of a word processor, a graphics designer, a sequencer, and a page-layout programme. Nuendo on the other hand is a powerful sequencer capable of video editing, MIDI, and audio recording. Thus when it is activated in edit mode, it becomes very useful when one works with audio and video materials. *Ebibindwom*3.3 is an application developed by the writers as one of the means of digitally preserving *Ebibindwom*. It consists of menu items leading to various *Ebibindwom* performances. FL Studio is a full-featured music production environment capable of multi-track audio recording, sequencing and mixing for the creation of professional quality songs and realistic drum loops with VST/DX hosting, 32 bit internal mixing and advanced MIDI support.

The pieces were then exported in MIDI format to Nuendo and through the use of Virtual Sound Technology (VST) of Nuendo; the pieces could be heard in various instruments as selected through a hypersonic plugin. An example of a piece exported to Nuendo is shown below as follows:

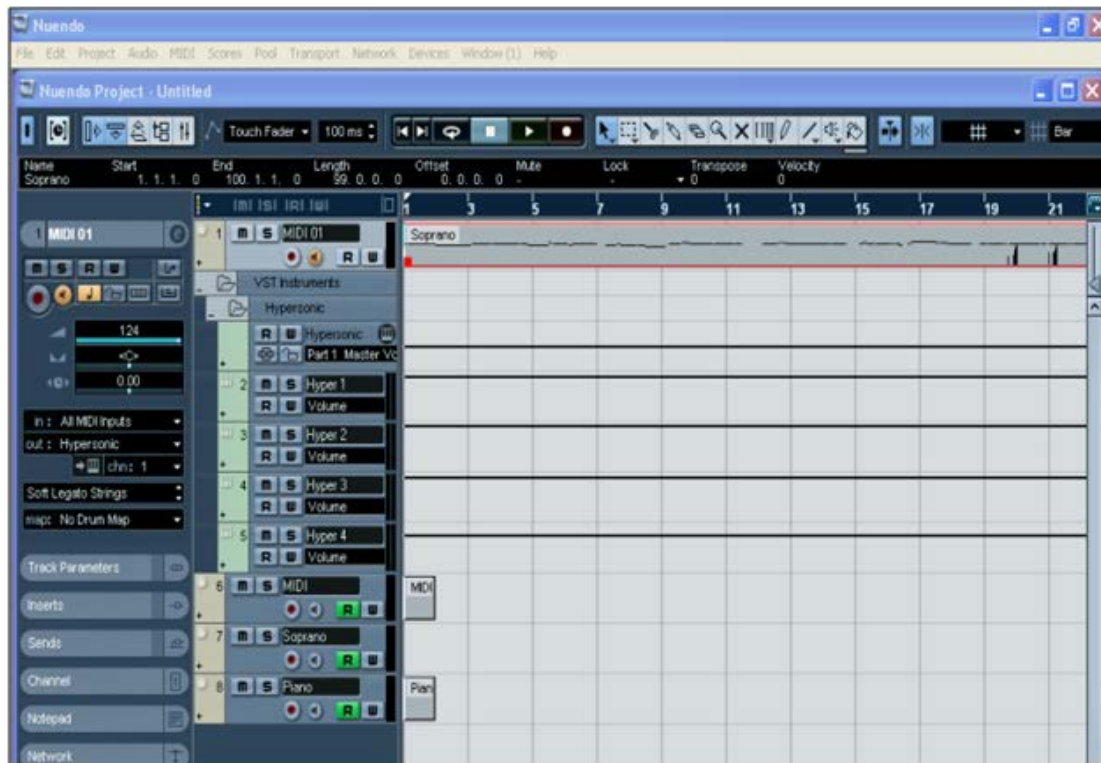


Figure 1

Virtual sound was created with the dondo because it is not a common instrument among drum loops in Fruity Loops. Thus drum loops were created involving dondo, castanet, and conga (because they are the commonly used instruments by *Ebibindwom* performers) and exported into Nuendo as an accompaniment

to sections of the *Ebibindwom* pieces which required drum accompaniment. Effects were added to enhance the final sound output. Mixing was done as regards the output of each instrument and finally the pieces were saved in MIDI and WAVE formats.

Video formats were preserved in the *Ebibindwom* 3.3 software. The software was created with four main *Ebibindwom* groups from Ebenezer Methodist Church, Good shepherd Methodist Church, Calvary Methodist Church and Mount Olivet Methodist Church. Thus in addition to the thirty *Ebibindwom* in various audio formats, sixteen video performances were added. As regards the software, one could navigate to any portion of the software to have access to performances by the four groups. In addition to video performance one could access a video on the origins of the *Ebibindwom* by Dr. Francis Saighoe, the current acting head of the Music Centre of the Methodist University College Ghana. The software was actually in response to a request by the Principal of the Methodist University College for the music Centre to do some work on *Ebibindwom*. Below is the interface for the *Ebibindwom* application.

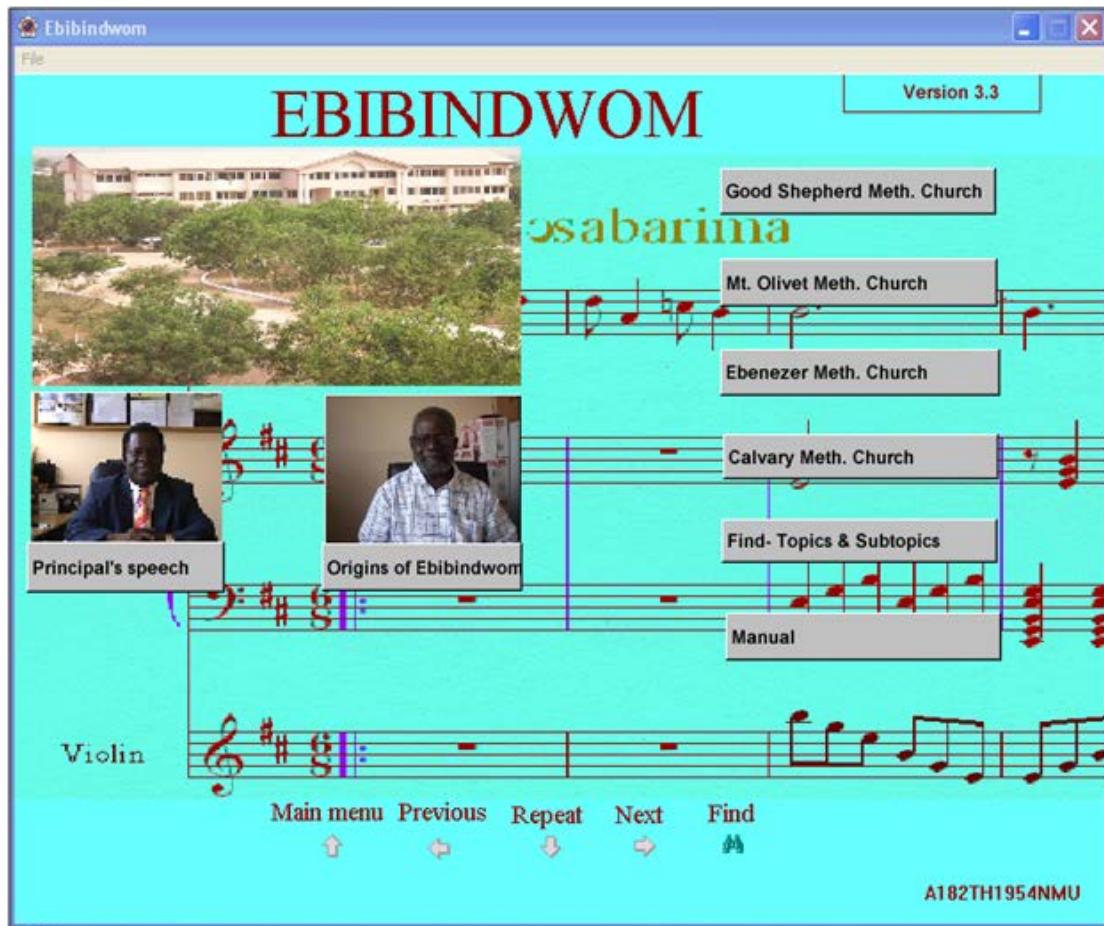


Figure 2

Below is a graphic example of drum programming in Fruity Loops.



Figure 3

Summary, Recommendation and Conclusion

Ebibindwom is one of the outcomes of the European-Ghanaian contact which began in the 1440's. This resulted in the establishment of Christianity and its attendant music on the Ghanaian soil. In the Methodist community, a revolution began a spin-off of this accommodation of the vernacular. This was the emergence of the *Ebibindwom*. This traditional song has come to stay as a result of social change. It has derived its source from other traditional songs e.g. *Asafo* and *Adenkum*. The *Ebibindwom* initially stayed with Fantes and later spread to other areas for example, Nzima and Effutu. In the Fanteland, the *Ebibindwom* started with the Methodist Church. Other churches that broke away from the Methodist church, for example M.D.C.C, AME Zion and the Ahmadiyya movement also use *Ebibindwom*.

It is the belief of the writers that what has been presented in this paper will be of value to music educators and the youth and that it will help to impart knowledge of this genre to pupils and students (youth). The paper has shown how a traditional song can be preserved through the digital and multimedia fashion for the benefit of the youth because many of the current performers of *Ebibindwom* are mostly adults.

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