

The dance ensemble NanaNom - "the Royals or Chiefs" who are the custodians of culture throughout Ghana - was formed in 1983 by Ephraim Ketsri to preserve and perpetuate the traditional dance and drumming styles of the many regions of Ghana. From the beginning, the mission of the group has been two-fold: to teach young people in Ghana the traditions of their elders



and to share this rich heritage with the outside world.

The six lead dancers and drummers of NanaNom, in Middle Tennessee since 1999, are artists-in-residence at the Global Education Center in Nashville, where they provide classes and workshops in Ghanaian dance and drumming to the general public. They are also active in school programs, festivals, cultural fairs, and full concert performances.

The ensemble is well-known for their large repertoire of dances and rhythms that span traditions of ceremony, court, festival, harvest, ritual, and recreation. They are equally acclaimed for the intricate and colorful costumes, all authentic and made by hand, that represent the traditional or ceremonial dress of a variety of Ghanaian regions. Each dance requires its own set of costumes and drums in order to be authentic, and all of the drums come from Africa, as they must be made from the specific woods and hides that can only be found there. In Ghana, drumming is an exclusively male activity, but both men and women dance.

Ephraim Ketsri, artistic director and head choreographer of NanaNom, actively researches and documents the history and traditions of all regions of Ghana, working with the master dancers and drummers of each region to learn the rhythms and steps from the source. Growing up in a family of traditional performers, dance and drumming have been part of Ephraim's life since early childhood. He is passing on the traditions to his own children as well, and they already perform with the group on some occasions.

Ephraim works with his company to bring traditional song, music, and dance to stages all over the world. The ensemble has traveled throughout Africa and Europe for the last two decades, serving as artists-in-residence in major cities, music schools, and at festivals. The total group comprises six drummers and up to 20 dancers who come from the many different traditional groups and regions of Ghana. NanaNom also continues to perform and teach in Ghana, with most of the group still resident there.



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Ewe Drums of Ghana

Atsia, meaning "style" or "to display" in Ewe ("Ay-way"), is considered by many to be one of the oldest styles of music and dance among the Ewe-speaking people of Ghana. *Atsia* is a social dance and, as a piece, comprises drumming, dance and songs collectively.

Atsimevu is the lead drum. It is a narrow drum approximately four feet tall and its head is about eleven inches in diameter. Some *atsimevuwo* (plural) are considerably taller and have a much wider midsection. *Atsimevu* is leaned against a stand to let the sound escape through its open bottom and to make it easier to play. The name for this stand in Ewe is *vudetsi*, "drum stand."

The function of the lead drum during *Atsia* in particular and Ewe music in general is to lead the group through a performance. The person who plays *atsimevu* uses a variety of strokes to produce a tonal and rhythmic language that imitates speech. With this language, the lead drummer is able to communicate with the rest of the ensemble.

During *Atsia* drumming, *atsimevu* is played with two sticks and/or with a stick and a hand. The lead drummer sets the tempo for *Atsia*. After a good tempo is established, the lead drummer will call the supporting drummers in by playing the opening call.

These drummers play the following types of drums."

Kaganu: a narrow drum about two feet tall with a head that is about three inches in diameter and an open bottom. It is a supporting drum that plays a continuous rhythm throughout *Atsia*. The main function of *kaganu* is to give some color or flavor to the music.

Kidi: a drum about two feet tall, with a head that is about nine inches in diameter and a closed bottom. *Kidi* responds to calls from the lead drummer. This is known as dialogue or call and response. *Kidi* plays in unison with *sogo* when engaged in a dialogue. During a dialogue the people playing *sogo* and *kidi* will change their rhythms to interlock with those of *atsimevu*, the lead drum. The lead drummer will play another call to bring the supporting drums out of a dialogue and back into their basic rhythms.

Sogo: the largest of the supporting drums used to play *Atsia*. In some other pieces it is used as a lead drum. It is about two and a half feet tall, its head is about ten inches in diameter and it is closed at the bottom. Like *kidi* and *kaganu*, *sogo* plays its own rhythm during the basic pattern. *Sogo* is also free to play some variations and improvisations during the basic pattern. *Sogo* responds to the lead drummer's calls in unison with *kidi*.

Audio Recordings - Ghana and West African

African Heartbeat: The Essential African Music Collection. Shanachi1 (1988), Audio CD - Box set.

Alhaji Ibrahim Abdulai and the Master Drummers of Dagbon. Rounder Records, Vol.1 (1985), CD or cassette; Vol. 2 CD or cassette.

These two volumes of field recordings by John Miller Chernoff offer documentation of a little-known African culture. The Dagbamba of northern Ghana share a number of musical traits with other savannah cultures, but they have also developed ensemble drumming to a high standard. Here, Alhaji Ibrahim Abdulai leads a large group in 16 traditional beats.

Field Recordings in Ghana: Drums of Death.
Various Artists - International - Africa.
Avant Records (1998), Audio CD.

Ghana: Music of the Northern Tribes.
Lyrichord Discs Inc. (1993), CD.

Ghana: Rhythms of the People.
Music Earth / Multic (2000), CD.

The Kora and the Xylophone. Sounds of West Africa.
RCA677. Music of the Lobi and Dagarti tribes of Northern Ghana. Features world famous Gambian Kora player Foday Musa Suso.

Ohene Kesse a Ebin. Asante.
Wild Child Records (2000); Audio CD.

Master Drummer from Ghana, Mustapha Tettey Addy. Lyrichord Discs Inc (1995); Audio CD.
Well known international performer brings the rhythms of the Ashanti, Ga, Fanti, Ewe and Dagomba peoples of Africa.

Rhythms of Life, Songs of Wisdom: Akan Music From Ghana, West Africa. (1996) CD.

Traditional Songs & Dances from Africa
Adzido. Arc Music (1997); CD.



Readings on African dance and drumming

Abraham, K. Adzenyah, Dumisani Maraire, and Judith Cook Tucker. *Let Your Voice Be Heard! Songs from Ghana and Zimbabwe*. World Music Press; ISBN: 0937203750; Book and CD edition.

W. Ofotsu Adinku, *African Dance Education in Ghana*. Ghana University Press (1994) ISBN: 9964302053.

V. Kofi Agawu, Kofi Agawu. *African Rhythm: A Northern Ewe Perspective*. Cambridge University Press; ISBN: 0521480841; Book and CD edition.

The Diagram Group, *Peoples of West Africa*. Publisher: Facts on File, Incorporated (1997) ISBN: 0816034850.

Frances Harding. *The African Performance Reader*. Routledge; ISBN: 0415261988.

Myra Herr, Christopher Ronan, Mira Bartok, Christine Ronan, Esther Grisham. *West Africa: Ghana (Ancient and Living Cultures)*. Goodyear Pub Co; ISBN: 0673360539.

Michel Huet (Photographer), Claude Savary (Contributor), Dorothy Blair (Translator). *The Dances of Africa*. Harry N Abrams; ISBN: 0810932288.

Ashenafi Kebede. *Roots of Black Music: The Vocal, Instrumental, and Dance Heritage of Africa and Black America*. Africa World Press; ISBN: 0865432856; Reprint edition 1995.

David Locke, Abubakari Lunna. *Drum Damba: Talking Drum Lessons (Performance in World Music Series, No 2)*. White Cliffs Media Company ISBN: 0941677109; Audio cassette also available.

Alphonse Tierou, Deirdre McMahon (Translator), Dierdre McMahon (Translator). *Doople: The Eternal Law of African Dance (Choreography and Dance Studies, Vol. 2)*. Routledge; ISBN: 3718653060.

Lee Warren, Vyvian D'Estienne. *The Dance of Africa: An Introduction*. Publisher: Prentice Hall; ISBN: 0131967339.

Kariamuwelsh-Asante (Editor). *African Dance: An Artistic, Historical and Philosophical Inquiry*. Africa World Press; ISBN: 0865431973.



This Press Kit Project was funded through a Technical Assistance Grant from the Folk Arts Program of the Tennessee Arts Commission. Research and writing by Ellen Gilbert, Global Education Center and Patricia A. Wells, Heritage Partnerships. Photographs by Dan Loftin • Design and layout by Paul C. Sternberg