

JOURNAL OF AFRICAN ARTS & CULTURE

A REVIEW OF GHANAIAN AND PAN-AFRICAN ARTISTIC RENAISSANCE: AN IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW WITH ANUMNYAM

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CITATION: Gbormittah, F. (2025). A review of Ghanaian and Pan-African artistic renaissance: An in-depth interview with *Anumnyam*. *Journal of African Arts and Culture*, 8(4), 187-208.

Abstract

This paper examines the life, work, and enduring legacy of Anumnyam Anumnyam, a seminal figure in Ghanaian cultural expression whose contributions span music, literature, performance, curation, and cultural activism. Employing a qualitative case study design, this research draws on in-depth interviews with Anumnyam, archival analysis of his literary works and organizational records, and critical review of his artistic collaborations to construct a holistic portrait of his career. A protégé and collaborator of the legendary percussionist Kofi Ghanaba (Warren Gamaliel Akwei), Anumnyam embodies a dynamic synthesis of traditional African aesthetics and contemporary artistic practice. His partnership with Ghanaba, an architect of Afro-jazz who revolutionized the integration of African talking drums into spiritual and jazz idioms, anchors Anumnyam within the broader narrative of Ghanaian cultural resurgence and Pan-Africanist thought. Beyond performance, Anumnyam has been instrumental in shaping national cultural policy and literary development. His leadership roles in key institutions including the Ghana Association of Writers (GAW) and the Pan-African Writers Association (PAWA), underscore his commitment to fostering creative communities and advancing the professionalization of the arts in Ghana and across the continent. As a writer, Anumnyam has enriched Ghanaian letters through poetry, children's folktales, and biographical narratives. These works reflect a sustained engagement with cultural preservation, oral tradition, and the reimagining of African stories for new generations.

Drawing on in-depth interview analysis, this paper situates Anumnyam's multifaceted career within the larger context of 20th- and 21st-century Pan-African cultural renaissance. It argues that Anumnyam serves as both a custodian of heritage and a catalyst for innovation, bridging the artistic, intellectual, and political dimensions of African identity in a postcolonial world.

Keywords: Anumnyam, artistic expression, artistic renaissance, performance arts, talking drum, art curation

1. Introduction

Anumnyam Anumnyam, formerly known as Nii Anum Telfer and also Anum Anumnyam is a prominent Ghanaian cultural icon with a diverse career spanning music, literature, performance arts, and cultural activism.

Anumnyam holds a vital position in Ghanaian and Pan-African culture as a versatile cultural figure. Through his engagement across multiple disciplines, he exemplifies the interconnectedness of African artistic expression. As an art curator and performer, he fosters spaces for dialogue between traditional and contemporary arts, enriching understanding of African aesthetics and cultural stories. His multidisciplinary approach elevates cultural conversations beyond isolated art forms, positioning him as a connector that bridges diverse artistic expressions within Ghana and across the African continent.

It aims to showcase his role in promoting Ghanaian and Pan-African cultural revival by examining his involvement across various artistic fields and his impact on national development efforts. The second section aims to explore how Anumnyam's collaborations with legendary figures like Ghanaba have helped preserve and innovate African cultural practices and identity. He shared firsthand insights into Ghanaba's character and artistic vision. The objectives of this interview are, to: explore the multifaceted contributions of Anumnyam Anumnyam to Ghanaian and Pan-African cultural resurgence through his engagements in music, literature, performance arts, and cultural activism; examine the influence of Anumnyam's collaborations with prominent figures like Kofi Ghanaba on the synthesis of traditional African rhythms with contemporary artistic expressions, and their role in promoting African cultural identity; and evaluate Anumnyam's impact on national cultural development and preservation, particularly through his leadership roles in arts organisations and his literary works that reflect themes of cultural innovation and heritage.

It is hoped that this interview with Anumnyam will serve as an academic reference for future research, fostering further exploration and dialogue on Ghanaian music, literature, performing arts, art curation, and cultural activism. The inquiry opens with a biographical overview that highlights significant milestones in his career, followed by an outline of the methodological approach. The subsequent sections feature a combination of a transcribed interview and thematic analysis, culminating in a conclusion. This organised structure aims to offer a

comprehensive understanding of Anumnyam's contributions, impact, and lasting legacy in the arts.

1.1 Brief Profile of Anumnyam

Anumnyam received his education at Adisadel College in Cape Coast, Oda Secondary School in Oda, the Ghana Institute of Languages (GIL), and the School of Performing Arts (SPA) at the University of Ghana, both located in Accra. He initially worked with the Ghana Customs, Excise and Preventive Service, where he advanced to the position of Senior Collector before resigning to manage his own enterprise, *The Telfer Art Gallery*. He also collaborated with Kofi Ghanaba (also known as Guy Warren of Ghana and the Divine Drummer), renowned for pioneering the infusion of traditional African rhythms into jazz (Personal interview, 2025). During his tenure as a Customs Officer, he participated in numerous national trade fair planning committees, including the Pan-African Arts and Music Awards, dubbed "PAFAM 1990," the first Pan-African fair for art and culture held in Accra (Catalogue of the 1st Pan-African Fair, 1990).



Figure 1: Anumnyam Anumnyam
Source: Authors Collection

He also served on the Technical Implementation Committee for the National Theatre Project (Ghana Ministry of Culture, 1989). As a performing artist, Anumnyam Anumnyam acted in several student productions organised by the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), now the Institute of Film and Television (IFT) of the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC) in Accra (NAFTI Annual Report, 2005). He is a pioneer in the art of mime, a discipline he began exploring as a student (Mime Society Ghana, 2010). In the literary discipline, he was an executive member of the Ghana Association of Writers (GAW) and participated in the first writers' workshop organised by the late Professor Atukwei Okai under GAW during the 1980s (Brochure of GAW Literary Night, 1985). Anumnyam is a founding member of the Pan-African Writers Association (PAWA), established in November 1989 as part of the broader Pan-African movement, an umbrella organisation representing writers' associations across Africa and the diaspora (Constitution of PAWA, 1989). His published works include the poetry collection, *Poems with Music from Africa* (2014), which features musical accompaniment, as well as other poems available online (Personal interview, 2025). He is also the author of *Azuma Nelson: 12 Rounds of Boxing and Life* (2019) and *Olewu: An African Folktale*

(2019). Currently, he is working on the archives of John Buckman, a talented Ghanaian artist and calligrapher known for introducing the art of illuminating addresses, texts, and quotations into Ghana upon his return from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1901 after his studies (Personal interview, 2023).

Anumnyam's background and importance stem from his role as a guardian and pioneer of Ghanaian and African cultural traditions, employing art as a way to connect the spiritual, artistic, and political realms. His work highlights the transformative influence of culture in shaping identity, promoting unity, and inspiring political awareness throughout Ghana and the broader African continent. He is, unapologetically, a proud Pan-Africanist who resides in Osu, Accra.

2. Literature Review

The scholarly exploration of African cultural figures often emphasises their multifaceted roles in shaping national identity and fostering Pan-African solidarity (Appiah, 2011). This paper on an interview with Anumnyam shows this by positioning him as a quintessential figure embodying the convergence of traditional African arts, contemporary artistic expressions, and political activism. His life and work are situated within a broader scholarly discourse that recognises cultural icons not merely as artists, but as catalysts for socio-political transformation and cultural revival.

Drawing from the intersection of music, literature, performance arts, and activism, the paper aligns with existing studies that underscore the importance of multidisciplinary engagement in African cultural renaissance. Scholars such as Asante (2020) and Appiah (2011) have previously highlighted how African intellectuals and artists serve as custodians of cultural heritage, while simultaneously innovating within modern frameworks. A study by Makau (2007) on "African Cultural Renaissance and the Role of the Arts in Social Transformation" underscores the significance of integrating various artistic disciplines, music, literature, dance, and activism, in fostering a vibrant cultural renaissance across Africa. It advocates for a holistic approach where arts serve as tools for social change and identity reinforcement. Agawu (2003) explores the interconnectedness of music, history, and activism in Africa, emphasising multidisciplinary engagement as essential for understanding and fostering a cultural renaissance. Oyěwùmí (1997) advocates for integrating gender studies, literature, and performance arts to challenge stereotypes and promote a nuanced African cultural renaissance, while Achebe (1983) discusses the role of literature, music, and oral traditions in shaping African cultural identity, stressing the importance of multidisciplinary engagement in cultural revival and activism. Anumnyam's collaborations with legendary figures like Ghanaba assert this synthesis, confirming previous analyses of Ghanaba's role in integrating African rhythms into jazz, thus, bridging traditional and modern musical practices (Collins, 2022).

Also, by integrating traditional arts and philosophies into contemporary expressions, Anumnyam demonstrates "cultural decolonisation," a process emphasised by scholars like Mafe (2015) and Fanon (1961), who argue that reclaiming indigenous epistemologies is essential for genuine liberation. Anumnyam's invocation of spiritual power and ancestral energies reflects a refusal to accept Western paradigms of modernity as the sole measure of cultural worth.

Furthermore, the paper's emphasis on Anumnyam's involvement in cultural activism and arts management ties with existing literature on the politicisation of African arts. Scholars like Mbembe (2001) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1997) have articulated how cultural figures actively participate in nation-building and identity politics through literature and performance. Anumnyam's leadership roles within organisations such as GAW and PAWA reflect this tradition of cultural advocacy, aligning with the notion that arts serve as tools for political consciousness and social cohesion.

The thematic analysis of Anumnyam's works reveals recurring motifs such as cultural identity, political consciousness, and spiritual heritage, drawing parallels with postcolonial theories that explore the reclamation of African heritage amid colonial legacies, notions forcefully articulated by Ngũgĩ (1986) and Nkrumah (1964); also, Mafe (2015) and Nketia's (2007) vision of blending traditional arts into modern society to foster socio-cultural resurgence. Anumnyam's literary contributions, poetry, folktales, performances, et cetera, are positioned as mediums for cultural transmission and innovation, stressing the scholarly emphasis on storytelling as a vital tool for cultural preservation in Africa.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, single-case study design to explore the life and legacy of Anumnyam Anumnyam. Data is triangulated through three primary sources: (1) semi-structured interviews conducted with Anumnyam Anumnyam, (2) archival analysis of his published literary works and policy documents from organizations such as GAW and PAWA, and (3) critical analysis of his musical and performance collaborations. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related to cultural synthesis, Pan-Africanism, and artistic activism, framed within the context of postcolonial cultural theory.

The inquiry design provided a flexible yet structured framework (Smith, 1999) for examining Anumnyam's perspectives on Ghanaian music, literature, performance arts, art curation, and cultural activism, which helped in developing questions for interviews. These approaches facilitated a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of his multidisciplinary contributions.

This interview constitutes the second in a series of four in-depth dialogues conducted with influential figures in Ghanaian performance arts. The series is designed as a qualitative inquiry into the intersections of theatre, film, television, and cultural history, domains often underrepresented in formal academic scholarship. The inaugural interview featured Ernest Kofi Abbeyquaye, a pioneer in Ghanaian acting and directing, whose insights established a foundational perspective on the evolution of Ghanaian cinema and theatre.

The present interview is structured in two parts to capture the breadth of Anumnyam Anumnyam's contributions. The first section explores his biography, artistic philosophy, and multifaceted career as a cultural icon whose work synthesizes traditional African arts with contemporary expressive forms and political consciousness. The second section (to be detailed in subsequent analysis) extends this inquiry into his institutional leadership and literary legacy. Together, these dialogues aim to generate primary source material that deepens and complicates existing narratives of Ghana's cultural renaissance.

The interviews served as one of the primary methods of data collection, concentrating on his artistic collaborations, political activism, and cultural initiatives. They provided him the opportunity to elaborate on his experiences and insights, while ensuring that key topics were thoroughly addressed throughout the discussion (Creswell, 2014). Additional sources included a review of his literary works, recordings of his performances, official records from arts organisations such as GAW and PAWA, as well as media archives containing interviews, documentaries, and coverage of his activities.

At Anumnyam's request, the primary interview took place on June 14, 2025, at his residence in Osu, an upscale suburb of Accra, Ghana's capital city. The interview was conducted in his living room, compound, and garden. These locations were not intentionally selected, but became necessary as the interview evolved into a mobile format driven by Anumnyam, allowing for a comprehensive discussion without fatigue. The session lasted approximately two and a half hours. Prior to this interview, he visited me in my office at the School of Performing Arts in the University of Ghana, Legon, on June 3, 2025, which occasioned a brief interview. The coincidental WhatsApp conversation that preceded his arrival is noteworthy.

[03/06/2025, 9:48 am] *Francis*: [...]. In relation to our discussion for you to serve as a resource person in my [African Arts and Ideas] class, can you please supply me with a brief profile of yourself? [...]. *Anumnyam*: [...], I am stepping out presently. [...]. Actually I am coming your way going to Agbogba. I can stop by if it is okay with you (Personal communication, June 3, 2025).



Figure 2: *Anumnyam in performance during the late Prof. Kofi Awoonor's memorial evening, PAWA House, Nov. 7, 2013. Source: Author's Collection*

In both interviews, I endeavoured to record with a high-definition Black Magic 4K video camera and various accessories to capture multiple angles, alongside advanced audio equipment, including microphones and an audio mixer, to ensure superior sound quality (Cohen, 2016; Creswell, 2014).

Prior to these formal interviews, several informal conversations, including discussions via WhatsApp, were conducted. For example, regarding a VHS tape with recorded performances, the WhatsApp message read as follows:

[10/06/2025, 5:00 pm] *Anumnyam*: Good evening, Francis. There is a VHS tape in my collection with the caption *Nii Anum Telfer: Mime 1990*. I took it to studio this morning to have the material on it transferred onto a pen drive. Unfortunately, the studio's gadget has malfunctioned sometime back. I can't remember this VHS tape, who shot it, when or where. I am sure I have not even watched it since it was given to me. Do you have any idea where we can get it put on pen drive? It may prove useful to our exercise. *Francis*: I think we have a VHS player at our audio-visual centre on campus. We can do the transfer there (Personal communication, June 10, 2025).

Subsequently, the tape was digitised at the J.H. Kwabena Nketia Archive of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon. As Anumnyam anticipated, the VHS tape proved valuable for viewing and developing questions related to its content for the interview, particularly concerning two of his previous performances: two mime performances in 1990. Anumnyam provided me with personal archival materials, including media coverage (Figure 1), interviews, and documentaries featuring him. He also shared documents from performances and exhibitions (Figures 2 and 3), along with a photograph I took of him in 2013 related to his work with GAW and PAWA. These materials were gathered in preparation for his role as a guest lecturer in my "African Arts and Ideas" course in the Department of Theatre Arts. The following chat took place between us on WhatsApp, regarding sharing his songs and biography:

[09/06/2025, 1:23 pm] *Anumnyam*: [...]. This music is just an introduction [three of his songs sent via WhatsApp]. I'm aware of the ones you want. [...]. I don't remember ever sending my brief to any institution. *Francis*: The brief (your bio), about 5 lines only, talking about your training, past works, current works and future projects.

[05/06/2025, 7:57 pm] *Anumnyam*: We have to start putting together documents to illustrate the story. My computer was damaged, but quite a lot are on my telephone.

[03/06/2025, 9:48 am] *Anumnyam*: I've got some really good books here I wish I could go through before our program, if not for my eyes. But no fears it's my experience I will be sharing. The coming days I let you have the music you requested for.

[06/02/2025, 11:37 am] *Anumnyam*: [...]. I am eagerly looking forward for the interaction with your students on the subject of mine and improvisation we discussed.

[22/12/2024, 11:41 am] *Anumnyam*: [...]. This short note is just to say that it will be great if we can meet before this year passes.

[29/12/2024, 1:16 pm] *Anumnyam*: Francis, sometime next year I will like to come and share my experiences as a mime actor with your students. If you will arrange it (Personal communication, June 9, 2025).

These conversations demonstrate Anumnyam's passion, enthusiasm, and commitment to my students, particularly the younger generation, as he endeavours to share his knowledge and help them pursue their career goals.

The secondary data sources included digital and online resources such as the website of GAW, as well as documentaries and performances accessible on YouTube. Furthermore, a review of relevant scholarly literature on music, literature, and performance arts, particularly within Ghana and Africa, was conducted to provide a thorough and contextualised analysis of his influence within Ghanaian and Pan-African cultural contexts. To analyse his literary, artistic, and performances, I conducted content analysis of his poetry, folktales, biographical narratives, and recorded performances like *Nii Anum Telfer: Mime* (Jan. 1990, Accra). Additionally, a thematic analysis was carried out to identify recurring motifs related to cultural identity, political consciousness, and spiritual heritage. These materials form the basis for an upcoming comprehensive documentary project, currently in production alongside this paper, which will delve into his life, philosophy, and influence. Silverman (2000) emphasises the value of interviews, including biographical and bibliographical approaches, as fundamental methods in qualitative research, allowing researchers to access in-depth personal perspectives and life histories. Likewise, Corbin and Strauss (1990) in *Basics of Qualitative Research* discuss the significance of narrative and biographical interviews as tools for exploring individuals' lived experiences, highlighting their role in constructing detailed social and personal stories within research, and Atkinson (1990) in his work on ethnographic research and qualitative methods, advocates for the use of biographical and autobiographical interviews as a way to understand participants' life histories and social contexts.

Ethical considerations were prioritised throughout the entire process. Prior to the discussion, I gave Anumnyam a comprehensive briefing regarding the purpose of the interview and secured his informed consent. He was made aware of his voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. I informed him about the publication of relevant WhatsApp chats between us. Furthermore, I assured him that all data collected would be used solely for academic purposes (Creswell, 2014).



Figure 3: Poster of Anumnyam's Mine Show, School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, July 15, 1990. Source: Anumnyam's Collection.

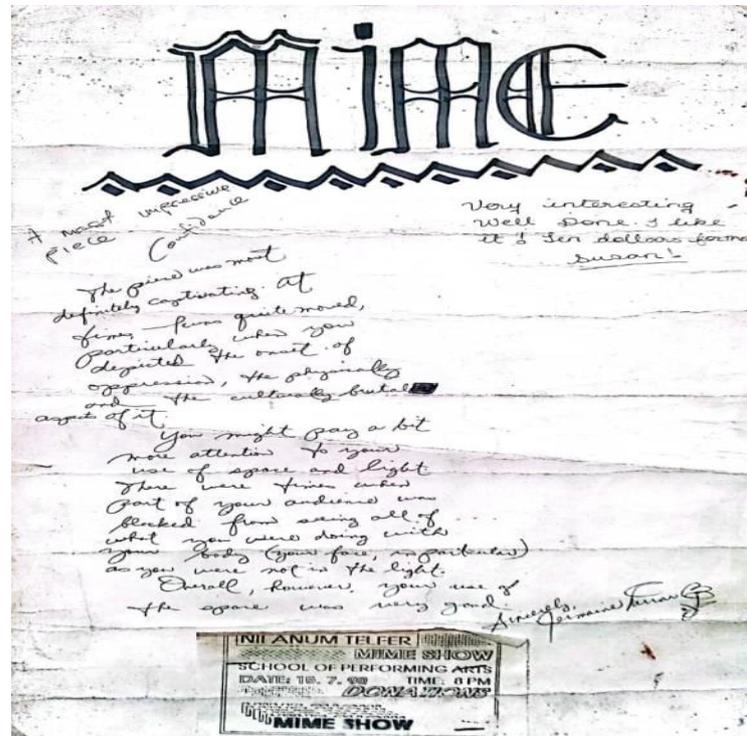


Figure 4: Audience comments on the July 15, 1990, show: "Very interesting. Well done, I like it!" "This piece was most definitely captivating." Source: Anumnyam's Collection.

The background and results of the various methodological approaches outlined above offered insights and served as a foundation for formulating the questions and guiding the line of inquiry. Initially, the transcripts from the recordings were created verbatim to ensure precision. The interview is organised thematically under the following sub-headings: Prologue, Personal and Educational Background, Artistic and Cultural Contributions, Cultural and Political Engagement, Literary and Artistic Innovation, Vision and Future Perspectives, Ghana from the Perspective of Anumnyam and Conclusion.

This first part deals with the life, work, and multifaceted contributions of Anumnyam as a prominent Ghanaian cultural icon who embodies the synthesis of traditional African arts, contemporary artistic expressions, and political consciousness. It aims to highlight his role in fostering Ghanaian and Pan-African cultural resurgence by exploring his engagements across various artistic disciplines, including music, literature, performance arts, and art curation, and his influence on cultural activism and national development initiatives.

4. Interview Transcript and Thematic Narrative

4.1 Prologue

Francis Gbormittah (FG): *Good afternoon, Anumnyam. I'm honoured to have the opportunity to speak with you today about your career, cultural impact, and your vision as a Pan-Africanist.*

Anumnyam Anumnyam (AA): Good afternoon, Francis, and thank you for having me.

4.2 Personal and Educational Background

FG: *Can you share your journey from your early life in Accra to your educational experiences at Adisadel College, Oda Secondary School, and the University of Ghana?*

AA: Thank you for the question. My journey began in Accra, where I was born and raised. Growing up in a vibrant and diverse city exposed me to a variety of cultures, ideas, and challenges that shaped my worldview. I attended Adisadel College in Cape Coast, a school renowned for its academic rigour and rich history. There, I developed a deep appreciation for education and leadership. After completing my secondary education at Oda Secondary School, I pursued higher studies at the School of Performing Arts in the University of Ghana, where I specialised in the performing arts and African studies. My educational experiences were instrumental in fostering my passion for African development, cultural identity, and Pan-Africanism, which continue to influence my work and vision today.

FG: *How did your educational background influence your artistic and cultural pursuits?*

AA: My educational background played a significant role in shaping my artistic and cultural pursuits. Studying at the University of Ghana exposed me to a rich array of African history, philosophy, and contemporary issues that deeply resonated with my desire to promote African culture and identity. The academic environment encouraged critical thinking, research, and a deeper understanding of our societal challenges and strengths. This fostered a strong sense of pride and responsibility to use art and culture as tools for social change and cultural preservation. Additionally, exposure to diverse perspectives among students and faculty broadened my horizons, inspiring me to incorporate traditional African motifs, narratives, and languages into my artistic expressions. On the whole, my education provided both the

intellectual foundation and the confidence to pursue my cultural work with purpose and genuineness.

4.3 Artistic and Cultural Contributions

FG: *You have worked extensively in music, literature, performance arts, and curatorial work. How do these disciplines intersect in your creative vision?*

AA: Thank you for that insightful question. In my creative journey, I see music, literature, performance arts, and curatorial work not as separate disciplines, but as interconnected avenues that collectively serve my broader vision of cultural expression and Pan-Africanism. Music allows me to evoke emotion, tell stories, and celebrate our rich heritage through sound. Literature provides the narrative and intellectual depth, it's about capturing our history, struggles, and aspirations in words that inspire reflection. Performance arts bring these elements to life, creating immersive experiences that engage audiences on an intuitive level, fostering a sense of community and cultural pride. Curatorial work acts as the bridge that contextualises and preserves our cultural artifacts, ensuring that our stories are presented faithfully and meaningfully. When these disciplines intersect, they create a holistic approach to cultural activism, where each art form amplifies the other, creating a powerful platform for dialogue, identity, and transformation. My vision is to harness this synergy to elevate African voices, challenge stereotypes, and foster a deeper understanding of our shared heritage, eventually contributing to a Pan-African consciousness that unites us across borders.

FG: *Your collaboration with Ghanaba is well-known. Can you describe how his pioneering work influenced your own artistic journey?*

AA: Collaborating with Ghanaba was truly transformative for my artistic journey. As a pioneer who revolutionised African music by blending traditional rhythms with jazz and other contemporary styles, Ghanaba exemplified innovation rooted in cultural depth. His fearless approach to challenging musical conventions and his dedication to preserving and celebrating African musical heritage deeply inspired me. Working with him opened my eyes to the importance of pushing artistic boundaries while staying true to our cultural roots. His pioneering spirit encouraged me to explore new creative territories, whether through experimenting with sounds, storytelling, or performance, always with a conscious effort to honour our traditions. Ghanaba's emphasis on spiritual and cultural profundity tied in with my own vision of using art as a tool for cultural affirmation and social change. His work taught me that embracing innovation and tradition simultaneously can create powerful, meaningful art, something I strive to embody in all my pursuits.

FG: *Ghanaba's reinterpretation of Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" with African talking drums is iconic. What does this fusion symbolise for you and for Ghanaian culture?*

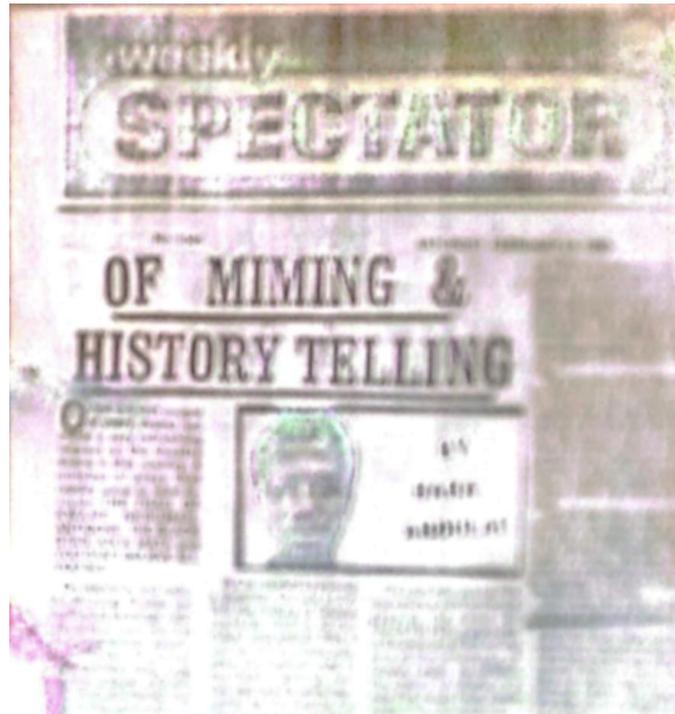


Figure 5. Anumnyam's was featured in the "Weekly Spectator" newspaper, highlighting his brilliant mime performances, Accra, Ghana, 1991.

Source: Anumnyam's Collection.

AA: It is a profound symbol of cultural resilience and artistic self-determination. It challenges the notion that Western classical music is the sole standard of musical excellence, asserting instead that African rhythms and our ancestral sounds are equally divine and expressive. For me, this fusion represents the idea that our cultural identities are not separate from global traditions, but can be harmoniously integrated to create something uniquely ours. It's a bold statement that African musical elements, such as talking drums, are not just traditional artifacts, but living, dynamic voices capable of engaging with and reinterpreting universal themes. In the context of Ghanaian culture, this act signifies pride in our heritage and a refusal to be marginalised or confined by colonial narratives of cultural superiority. It encourages a reclaiming of our musical language, asserting that our music is powerful, sacred, and deserving of global recognition. It's a celebration of our ability to innovate without losing sight of our roots, a message of cultural affirmation and artistic independence.

FG: *As a performer and actor, how has your experience in theatre and the performing arts shaped your understanding of traditional and contemporary African storytelling?*

AA: Theatre is a living, breathing art form that demands a deep engagement with narrative, culture, and emotion. Through performance, I've learned to embody stories that have been passed down through generations, appreciating the intricate ways in which African oral traditions, proverbs, music, dance, and symbolism, are woven into our storytelling fabric. Working on stage has also allowed me to explore the evolution of these stories in contemporary contexts. I see how modern themes such as identity, social justice, resilience, are rooted in our cultural heritage, but also respond to current realities. Theatre has given me a platform to bridge the old and the new, emphasising how traditional stories can be reinterpreted to appeal to today's audiences, promoting a sense of continuity and relevance. Also, performance has taught me the importance of community, rhythm, and collective

memory in African storytelling. It's more than recounting tales; it's about creating an experience that connects us to our roots while inviting dialogue and reflection. Theatre has deepened my appreciation for storytelling as a vital, dynamic force that sustains our culture and inspires change.

4.4 Cultural and Political Engagement

FG: *You served on several national committees related to trade fairs and the arts, including PAFAM 1990 and the National Theatre Project. How do you see the role of cultural policy in national development?*

AA: Serving on committees like PAFAM 1990 and the National Theatre Project has reinforced my understanding that cultural policy plays a crucial role in shaping national development. Culture is not just about preserving our heritage; it is a vital driver of economic growth, social cohesion, and international diplomacy. Effective cultural policies can foster a vibrant arts sector that creates jobs, stimulates tourism, and promotes local craftsmanship. For example, initiatives like trade fairs showcase our cultural products to global markets, opening avenues for economic empowerment of artists and entrepreneurs. Similarly, supporting the arts through policy ensures that our stories, music, dance, and visual arts are sustained, celebrated, and integrated into national identity. Beyond the economic benefits, cultural policy can serve as a unifying force that strengthens social fabric and national pride. It provides platforms for dialogue, education, and inclusion, helping to address social issues and promote unity across diverse communities. A well-crafted cultural policy positions a nation on the global stage, advancing soft power and cultural diplomacy. It signals that we value our heritage and innovation, which in turn attracts international partnerships and investments. In essence, cultural policy is a strategic tool for holistic development, balancing economic, social, and diplomatic objectives, eventually contributing to a resilient, vibrant, and self-defined nation.

FG: *You had mentioned to me before that people connected to President Kwame Nkrumah, or his secret Inner Cabinet, used to meet in your father's house. Could you share insights into how cultural and spiritual knowledge influenced political decision-making during President Nkrumah's era?*

AA: During President Kwame Nkrumah's time, cultural and spiritual knowledge played a subtle, yet profound role in shaping his approach to independence, nation-building, and governance. Nkrumah was deeply aware of the power of cultural identity and spiritual beliefs as tools for uniting Ghanaians and fostering a sense of pride and sovereignty. He recognised that colonial rule had often marginalised indigenous cultures and spiritual practices, which were vital sources of resilience and community cohesion. By emphasising African cultural renaissance, through promoting traditional arts, languages, and philosophies, Nkrumah sought to reinforce a collective identity that could underpin political unity and resistance against colonial domination. Spiritually, Nkrumah was influenced by Pan-Africanist ideals and philosophies rooted in African spiritual traditions, which emphasised interconnectedness, communal responsibility, and the pursuit of liberation. These ideas informed his vision of a united Africa and his efforts to foster solidarity among African nations. Nkrumah's policies often reflected an understanding of the importance of cultural symbols and spiritual values in inspiring national pride and political stability. For instance, state-sponsored cultural festivals and the promotion of traditional arts were strategic moves to entrench cultural consciousness within the political narrative. Nkrumah's leadership exemplifies how cultural and spiritual knowledge

can serve as foundational elements in political decision-making, providing moral authority, fostering unity, and inspiring a shared vision for independence and progress.

FG: *As a Pan-Africanist, how do you view the relationship between art and political activism in contemporary Africa?*

AA: As a Pan-Africanist, I see art and political activism in contemporary Africa as deeply intertwined, serving as powerful tools for social change, cultural affirmation, and political resistance. Art, whether visual, literary, musical, or performative, acts as a mirror to society, revealing underlying issues, celebrating cultural identity, and mobilising communities around shared goals. In the contemporary African context, artists often use their work to critique political injustices, highlight social inequalities, and advocate for national and continental unity. For example, through murals [Chale Wote Street Art Festival of Accra], poetry [PaGya! A Literary Festival in Accra], and music, artists address issues like corruption, human rights, and environmental challenges, inspiring activism and public discourse. Furthermore, art functions as a form of cultural resistance, reclaiming indigenous identities and histories that colonial narratives sought to marginalise. It fosters a sense of pride and resilience, which are essential for collective empowerment and nation-building. From a Pan-Africanist perspective, art also bridges borders, emphasising continental solidarity. For instance, PANAFEST, the Pan African Arts Festival, previously called the Pan African Historical Theatre Festival, a landmark biennial event initiated in Ghana for all Africans in the spirit of re-uniting the African Family, Pan Africanism and the African Renaissance. Artists collaborate across nations, sharing stories of resistance, resilience, and cultural richness that reinforce a collective African identity beyond individual nations. Art in modern Africa is not merely aesthetic; it is a vital component of political activism that energises movements, sustains cultural revival, and promotes a shared vision of sovereignty, unity, and social justice across the continent.

4.5 Literary and Artistic Innovation

FG: *Your literary works include poetry, children's folktales, and biographical narratives. What motivates your storytelling and poetic expressions?*

AA: I aim to reflect the rich insights of human experiences, celebrating cultural heritage, illuminating social issues, and fostering empathy across diverse communities. In poetry, I seek to evoke emotion, provoke thought, and inspire action, using rhythm, metaphor, and imagery to capture moments of joy, struggle, or hope. For example, in *Poems with Music from Africa*. It is a way to give voice to the unspoken and to honour the beauty and complexity of life. Children's folktales serve as vehicles for transmitting cultural values, wisdom, and history to younger generations. They motivate me to preserve and share indigenous stories that carry moral lessons and cultural identity, ensuring that these stories remain alive amidst changing times. These are the energies *Olewu: An African Folktale* fosters. Biographical and autobiographical narratives are driven by a motivation to honour individual journeys, highlight resilience, and shed light on extraordinary lives that can serve as sources of inspiration. They remind us that personal stories are integral to understanding collective history and social progress. A case in point is my book, *Azuma Nelson: 12 Rounds of Boxing and Life*. By and large, my motivation centres on using storytelling and poetry as tools for empowerment, drawing from cultural roots, fostering understanding, and promoting a shared sense of humanity and purpose.

FG: *The compliment from Professor Ama Ata Aidoo about your children's book "Olewu" highlights your innovative approach to African folklore. How do you see your work contributing to African literary traditions?*

AA: Receiving praise from Professor Ama Ata Aidoo for *Olewu: An African Folktale* is deeply meaningful, as it affirms the importance of innovative storytelling within African literary traditions. I see my work contributing in several ways. The first is, revitalising folklore by reimagining and adapting African folklore for contemporary audiences, I aim to preserve and breathe new life into traditional stories. This ensures that cultural narratives remain vibrant and relevant in a rapidly changing world; the second is creating innovative narratives through blending traditional themes with modern storytelling techniques that allows me to expand the boundaries of African literature. This approach encourages other writers to explore creative avenues, fostering a dynamic literary landscape that respects tradition while embracing innovation. The third has to do with cultural representation. My work seeks to highlight the richness and diversity of African cultures, making folklore accessible and engaging for children and readers globally. This contributes to a broader appreciation of African heritage and promotes cultural pride. The fourth contribution to African literary traditions by *Olewu*, is its educational impact. By presenting folklore through engaging narratives, I hope to inspire curiosity, moral reflection, and cultural understanding among young readers. This helps cultivate a new generation that values and continues African storytelling traditions. Bridging generations, is the fifth contribution *Olewu* and similar works provide. *Olewu* serves as a bridge between elders who hold the oral traditions and the youth who consume literature in written form. This helps sustain the oral heritage within a literary framework, ensuring its transmission into the future.

FG: *You have also produced a CD of poetry with musical accompaniment. How important is the integration of music and poetry in your artistic philosophy?*

AA: The integration of music and poetry is fundamental to my artistic philosophy because it amplifies the emotional and cultural significance of both art forms. As I mentioned earlier, music has a unique ability to evoke feelings, evoke memories, and create a communal experience, which complements the expressive power of poetry. By combining poetry with musical accompaniment, I aim to establish a number of things. Music elevates the mood and tone of poetic words, allowing listeners to connect more deeply with the themes, whether they evoke joy, longing, hope, or reflection. Many African oral traditions inherently blend music and poetry, think of praise songs, proverbs, and storytelling. Integrating them in my work honours these traditions and keeps them alive in contemporary formats. This fusion engages multiple senses, making the poetic message more memorable and accessible to diverse audiences, including those who might connect more readily through sound and rhythm. Music and poetry together foster a sense of communal participation, celebration, and cultural pride. They transform individual expression into collective experience. The musical dimension allows my work to transcend the page, reaching audiences through performances and recordings, thus, expanding the reach and impact of African poetry. It's about creating art that moves both the heart and the body, fostering connection and cultural continuity.

4.6 Vision and Future Perspectives

FG: *As a cultural custodian and activist, what are your hopes for the future of Ghanaian and African arts?*

AA: My hopes are rooted in the belief that our creative expressions can be powerful catalysts for cultural pride, social cohesion, and positive change. I wish for African arts, be it music, dance, literature, visual arts, or oral traditions, to receive the recognition and support they deserve from governments, institutions, and the international community. This includes safeguarding our cultural heritage against erosion and commodification. I hope to see African artists empowered through platforms, funding, and education that allow them to innovate boldly while staying rooted in their cultural identities. Supporting young and emerging artists is crucial for sustaining vibrant creative networks. I envision a future where arts and cultural education are, unapologetically, integral parts of our curricula, fostering pride and awareness among our youth about their history, languages, and traditions. This will nurture a new generation of culturally conscious citizens and creators. I aspire for African arts to gain greater visibility and respect on the global stage, fostering meaningful collaborations that showcase our diversity and richness. This can lead to cross-cultural dialogues that benefit all parties. I see arts increasingly serving as tools for activism, social justice, and community development, addressing issues like inequality, environmental sustainability, and identity politics through creative expression. I hope for a thriving arts sector that contributes substantially to local economies, creating jobs, tourism opportunities, and sustainable livelihoods for artists and cultural entrepreneurs. Embracing technology and digital platforms can democratise access to African arts, allowing our stories, music, and visual arts to reach a global audience while empowering local creators. I believe that the future of Ghanaian and African arts lies in a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation, preserving our roots while boldly exploring new creative frontiers. This will not only enrich our cultural setting, but also serve as a powerful means of asserting our identity and agency in the world.

FG: *How do you envision the role of young artists and writers in advancing Pan-African cultural ideals?*

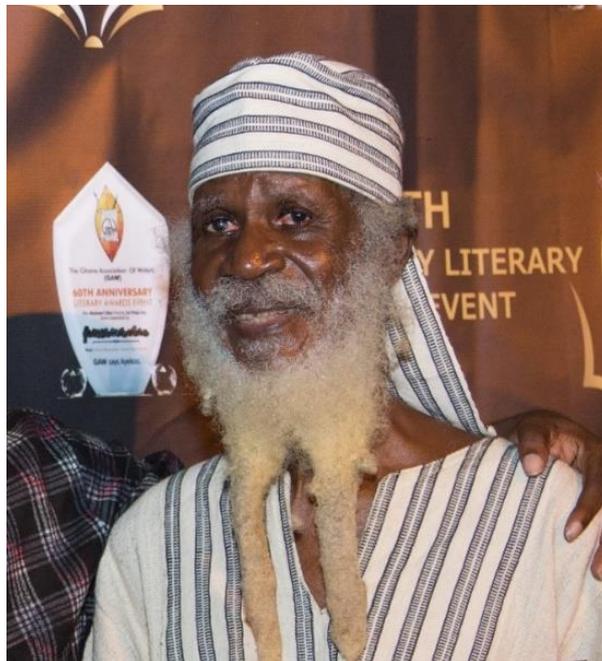


Figure 6. Anumnyam at the Ghana Association of Writers (GAW) Literary Awards 2017, Pan-African Writers Association (PAWA) House, Accra. Source: Author's Collection.

AA: Young artists and writers as the torchbearers and innovators who will shape the future of Pan-African cultural ideals. They are uniquely positioned to bridge tradition and modernity, fostering a shared sense of identity, solidarity, and pride across the continent. Their roles are many. Young creators have to reclaim, reinterpret and reimagine heritage in contemporary forms by delving into our diverse histories, languages, and oral traditions. This act of cultural reclamation strengthens our collective identity and counters cultural marginalisation. They also have to foster Pan-African solidarity. Through art and literature, they can highlight common experiences, struggles, and aspirations such as anti-colonial resilience, social justice, and unity, thus, reinforcing a shared Pan-African consciousness. Younger generations are adept at blending genres, collaborating across disciplines, and using digital platforms. Their innovative approaches can make Pan-African themes accessible, crossing boundaries, relevant, and engaging to diverse audiences both within and outside the continent. They have the power to elevate stories and perspectives often underrepresented such as those of women, rural communities, and marginalised groups, contributing to a more inclusive and true Pan-African narrative. Young artists and writers can critically engage with issues like neo-colonialism, globalisation, and identity, fostering dialogue that advances progressive and transformative ideals within Pan-Africanism. They can establish transnational partnerships, festivals, and platforms that promote cultural exchange, mutual learning, and solidarity among African nations and the diaspora. Through their work, they serve as role models and educators, inspiring young Africans to take pride in their heritage and to actively participate in shaping their cultural and social landscapes.

FG: *Are there upcoming projects or initiatives you are excited about that continue your mission of cultural preservation and innovation?*

AA: Projects like the *African Digital Heritage*, a Nairobi based, non-profit organisation, and the *Pan-African Heritage Museum (PAHM)* initiated by Kojo Yankah of Ghana, initiatives aim to digitise and make accessible Africa's rich cultural artifacts, oral histories, and traditional knowledge. These platforms ensure that invaluable cultural resources are preserved for future generations and accessible globally. Events such as the *National Festival of Arts and Culture (Ghana)*, *Contemporary African Arts Fair (Morocco)*, *Art x Lagos (Nigeria)*, *National Arts Festival (South Africa)*, *et cetera*, bring together artists, writers, musicians, and performers from across the continent and the diaspora to celebrate and showcase African creativity, fostering unity and exchange. Organisations like *Bantaba Africa* focus on nurturing young talent through residencies, workshops, and funding. These hubs emphasise innovation while grounding work in cultural roots. Platforms like *African Writers' Trust* and your own initiatives at *GAW*, *Writers' Enterprise Fund* and *Young Writers Forum*, support emerging writers and promote stories that reflect contemporary African realities, histories, and aspirations. These projects are vital in ensuring that African art, history, and identity remain dynamic, relevant, and celebrated globally.

FG: *Is there anything else you would like to share about your journey, philosophy, or vision for Africa's cultural renaissance?*

AA: Yes, I have a number of things to put across. Embracing heritage while innovating, decolonising narratives, building inclusive and collaborative platforms, using technology as a catalyst, instituting education and intergenerational dialogue, and establishing global engagement with local roots. Let me expand on these ideas or concepts. Africa's rich histories, languages, and traditions are the foundation of its cultural renaissance. The journey involves

honouring and preserving this heritage while embracing innovation, using modern tools like digital media, AI, and global connectivity to amplify African voices and stories. It is also key in re-centering African perspectives in global narratives, challenging stereotypes, dismantling colonial legacies, and fostering true representations of African identities, achievements, and aspirations. The renaissance thrives on inclusivity, empowering marginalised voices, supporting young artists, and fostering collaborations across borders, disciplines, and generations. Collective effort is essential for a resilient and vibrant cultural atmosphere. Employing AI, virtual reality, and other emerging technologies can revolutionise the way African culture is documented, shared, and experienced, making it more accessible, participatory, and innovative. A sustainable cultural renaissance depends on education, integrating African histories and arts into curricula, and fostering dialogue between elders and youth, ensuring that cultural knowledge is transmitted and evolved. Africa's cultural renaissance is both local and global. It involves sharing African stories worldwide and learning from global influences, all while maintaining a strong connection to local roots and identities.

4.7 Ghanaba from the perspective of Anumnyam

This second part deals with the life, work, and contributions of Ghanaba, the prominent Ghanaian cultural icon, who embodies the synthesis of traditional African arts, contemporary artistic expressions, and political consciousness, from the perspective of Anumnyam who worked closely with him. It aims to highlight Ghanaba's role in fostering Ghanaian and Pan-African cultural resurgence by exploring his engagements across various artistic disciplines, including music, journalism, author, broadcasting, sports.

FG: *Ghanaba's work revolutionised the incorporation of African rhythms into jazz, especially with his introduction of the African Talking Drum to the U.S. Do you know how his early experiences shape this groundbreaking approach?*

AA: Yes, I do. Ghanaba's formative years profoundly shaped his innovative fusion of African rhythms with jazz. Born in Accra on May 4, 1943, during a period marked by cultural colonialism, he was named Warren Gamaliel Akwei, after U.S. President Warren Gamaliel Harding. According to him, growing up in Accra, he developed a keen interest in music, leading his school band at the Government Elementary Boys' School and participating in performances that laid the groundwork for his distinctive style. He told me that he took part in the pantomime *Zachariah Fee*, produced by Governor Sir Arnold Hudson, during Christmas seasons. And that his decision to leave Achimota College was driven by a desire to preserve his African identity, fueling his dedication to authentic African musical traditions. He once explained that dropping out in 1943 was because he was bored stiff with his studies and the stern discipline of the college, which attempted to change him into an Englishman. According to him, enlisting in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), a secretive branch of the U.S. Army involved in World War II operations, he traveled to the USA in 1943, where exposure to international influences and jazz music inspired him to merge African elements with Western styles. His work as a broadcaster and journalist further promoted African rhythms, and collaborations with Afro-Cuban jazz musicians expanded his musical perspective. His extensive experience with traditional African drums, particularly the Talking Drum, motivated him to introduce this instrument into the U.S. jazz scene, exemplified by his album, *Africa Speaks, America Answers*. I can say that his cultural roots, international experiences, and creative vision converged to shape his revolutionary approach to jazz, one that highlighted African identity and rhythms.

FG: *What inspired Ghanaba to blend traditional African music with jazz, and how was his approach received initially in the international music scene?*

AA: I believe by his desire to truthfully represent African culture and spirituality within modern music. His innovative approach aimed to elevate African rhythms and instruments, like the talking drum, to the global jazz scene. Initially, his fusion was met with curiosity and admiration, but also skepticism, especially in the international jazz community, which often favoured Western styles. Over time, however, his pioneering work gained recognition for its originality and cultural significance, establishing him as a trailblazer in world music and expanding jazz's expressive boundaries.

FG: *Can you describe the significance of his album, "Africa Speaks, America Answers," and its impact on both African and global music audiences?*

AA: This groundbreaking album by Ghanaba was recorded in 1956, notable for its pioneering blend of African rhythms, jazz, and Western music. It highlighted Africa's rich cultural heritage to an international audience. By integrating the African Talking Drum (Mpintin Donno) into jazz and the broader American musical scene, Ghanaba challenged stereotypes and broadened the scope of jazz, emphasising its African origins. He introduced this drum through his acclaimed Decca album, *Africa Speaks, America Answers*. The album's commercial success revealed a global demand for authentic African sounds and influenced musicians around the world. It also elevated the profile of African music on the international stage, inspiring future artists to explore their cultural roots through music. Ghanaba's innovative work laid the foundation for Afrocentric jazz and world music genres, encouraging cross-cultural understanding. His legacy stands as a testament to music's power as a universal language that unites Africa and the world.

FG: *What challenges did he face in popularising African rhythms in the jazz genre, especially during the 1950s and 1960s?*

AA: Primarily racial biases and cultural misunderstandings. Western audiences and jazz musicians often viewed African music as primitive and incompatible with jazz's sophistication. Additionally, there was resistance within the jazz community to integrating African drums and rhythms, which were seen as unfamiliar or exotic. As mentioned earlier, Ghanaba's efforts to fuse African traditional elements with jazz were sometimes met with skepticism, prejudice, and a lack of recognition from mainstream jazz circles, making his pioneering work both groundbreaking and challenging.

FG: *He has been called the "Divine Drummer" and "Odomanankoma Kyrema." What do these titles mean to him personally, and how do they reflect his musical philosophy?*

AA: To Ghanaba, "Divine Drummer" and "Odomanankoma Kyrema" reflect his spiritual connection and reverence for African heritage. They embody his philosophy of music as a sacred, transformative force, emphasising divine inspiration, spiritual awakening, and the power of African rhythms to transcend cultural boundaries.

FG: *How did his experiences in Ghana, Liberia, and the United States influence his musical style and worldview?*

AA: In Ghana, he was exposed to local traditions, rhythms, and spiritual practices, which fostered a deep appreciation for African musical and cultural heritage. His leadership in school

bands and early performances helped cultivate his understanding of indigenous sounds and their spiritual significance. Moving to Liberia, he worked with the national broadcasting service and participated in notable events such as the inauguration of President William Tubman, immersing himself in West African musical expressions. These experiences allowed him to incorporate genuine regional sounds into his performances, promoting African musical identity on a broader stage. Relocating to the United States, Ghanaba encountered jazz, blues, and Western musical innovations, which he seamlessly fused with African rhythms and spiritual elements. His collaborations with American musicians and performances at venues like the African Room in NYC exemplify his efforts to create a cross-cultural dialogue through music. These diverse experiences fostered a worldview rooted in Pan-African consciousness, emphasising the spiritual and cultural strength of Africa, while advocating for its recognition and pride within global music.

FG: *As a member of Ghana's inner cabinet of intellectuals, how did his political and spiritual beliefs influence his musical career?*

AA: As a member of Ghana's inner cabinet of intellectuals, personally chosen by President Kwame Nkrumah, he was immersed in the nation's quest for cultural identity and independence, which fueled his dedication to promoting truly African sounds. His spiritual conviction, especially his commitment to honouring his creator through music, guided his innovative fusion of traditional African rhythms with jazz, exemplified by his African Talking Drums and sacred performances. His belief in spiritual possession during performances, where audiences experienced trance-like states, reinforced his view that music was a divine gift capable of connecting humans with higher spirits. Politically and spiritually integrated, Ghanaba used music as a vessel for cultural affirmation and spiritual expression, elevating both his artistry and his influence in Ghana and beyond.

FG: *Looking back at Ghanaba's career, what moments stand out as the most transformative or meaningful to you?*

AA: His innovative blend of African rhythms and jazz, along with his leadership in Ghanaian politics and spiritual music, marked his impactful and meaningful career.

FG: *Thank you for your time and insights.*

AA: You're very welcome. I'm glad I could share these insights with you. Wishing you all the best on your scholarly journey and endeavours.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this interview illustrates Anumnyam's vital role in the ongoing Pan-African cultural renaissance, demonstrating the powerful influence of art and culture in shaping identity, fostering resistance, and promoting social progress. It reveals that Anumnyam's works embody a dynamic synthesis of traditional African elements with contemporary artistic forms, emphasising cultural fusion, innovation, and activism. His comprehensive approach across music, literature, and performance arts revitalises indigenous practices and reinterprets them for modern audiences, contributing to a vibrant cultural movement rooted in African and Ghanaian identities. His active involvement in cultural organisations and policy initiatives further underscores his dedication to promoting African narratives and challenging stereotypes, positioning art as a catalyst for social and political transformation. Through this interview, Anumnyam offers personal insights into Ghanaba's character and artistic vision, emphasising that Ghanaba represented the spiritual and political awakening of African peoples

through his pioneering use of traditional symbols within modern musical contexts, thus highlighting Africa's resilience and spiritual depth. His contributions extend beyond music to embody political activism centered on cultural autonomy and Pan-African ideals, inspiring unity and progress among Africans and the diaspora. The interview was conducted around key themes such as personal and educational background, artistic and cultural contributions, political and cultural engagement, innovation in literature and arts, future visions, and Ghanaba's significance from Anumnyam's perspective. The overarching goal was to explore Anumnyam's multifaceted contributions to Ghanaian and Pan-African cultural resurgence through his involvement in music, literature, performance arts, and activism. The research employed qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, archival analysis, and content review of artistic works, publications, and media. Both Anumnyam and Ghanaba exemplify how art and culture serve as essential platforms for asserting identity, resisting marginalisation, and cultivating a collective consciousness in the ongoing Pan-African renaissance.

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