**BOKOOR AFRICAN POPULAR MUSIC ARCHIVES FOUNDATION: GHANA’S HIGHLIFE MUSIC INSTITUTE & THE NEED FOR POPULAR MUSIC ARCHIVING**

**by John Collins**

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Whereas it seems quite sensible for African countries to preserve their old traditional art, it is not so obvious that popular music needs the same attention – as it is current and ongoing. Nevertheless popular music in Africa is now quite old itself as it goes back to the 19th century, during which time there has been a succession of changing styles – with the old giving way to the new. Moreover wars, coups and socio-economic crises have negatively affected the growth of popular music and the livelihoods of its practitioners and audiences. Thus the need for archives that preserve African popular music. This chapter therefore looks at one such archive, the Bokoor African Popular Music Archives Foundation (BAPMAF) that I established in Ghana in 1990. Infact this Non Government Organisation (NGO) was the country’s very first popular music archive and it was set up after almost twenty years of military rule which had resulted in the collapse of the local music industry, the demise of highlife music and a ‘brain-drain’ of talented performers abroad. This chapter provides a chronological history of the development of BAPMAF.

**Beginning of BAPMAF, 1990-2007**

BAPMAF is a Ghanaian NGO that I put together in 1990, encouraged and assisted by some leading Ghanaian highlife musicians, such as King Bruce of the Black Beats band, E.T. Mensah of the Tempos band, the guitarists Koo Nimo and Kwaa Mensah and the media-man (and grand-son of a famous Pan Africanist) Beattie Casely-Hayford who sadly died shortly before BAPMAF was formally launched. We were all concerned with the lack of research and information on local Ghanaian highlife music and particularly disturbed by the demise of the 'classical' dance band and guitar band styles of highlife that occurred during the various military regimes of the 1970s and 80s when the country’s commercial highlife music scene collapsed.

The core of the BAPMAF holdings are my own extensive music archives I began collecting from the late 1960s with further important contributions from the five core supporters mentioned above. Other contributions were made by Mr. Y.B. 'Opia' Bampoe of the Jaguar Jokers bands, the highlife composer Oscarmore Ofori, the veteran guitarists T.O. 'Jazz' Ampoumah and Edinam Ansah, the drummer Kofi Ghanaba (aka Guy Warren) and actor Ben Ahorlu Adjokpa. Special mention must also be made of Ghana’s first Minister of Information Jimmy Moxon and some of the staff of the university of Ghana at Legon: Prof. Atta Annan Mensah and Prof. Mawere Opoku of the School of Performing Arts, Robert Sprigge of the History Department (and pianist for the Red Spots band) and my own late father, Edmund Collins, of the Philosophy Department who was a keen follower of the guitar band music of Onyina, Yamoah, E.K. Nyame and Love Nortey. Some later BAPMAF affiliates were the Afro-jazz reed player Jimmy Beckley, the ‘gyil’ xylophone player Aaron Bebe Sukura, recording engineer Panji Anoff, the late American jazz percussionist Juma Santos (Jim Riley),the university lecturers Peter Arthur and the late Dr. Zabana Kongo.

In its early years BAPMAF donated materials to the W.E.B. Dubois Centre, the Padmore Library, the University of Ghana’s Institute of African Studies, Professor J.H.K. Nketia’s university based International Centre for Music and Dance, Achimota and Saint John’s schools, the British Council, the American USIS Library, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation and the Ghana Folklore Board.

In February 1996 BAPMAF and the German Goethe Institute in Accra (Director, Sabine Hentzch) organised a ‘Highlife Month’ that included the‘Golden Years of Highlife Music Photographic Exhibition’, seminars and films on highlife and performances by the Ankobra and Grassroots highlife bands, Nii Noi Nortey’s Mau Mau Musiki and the Afro-jazz drummer Kofi Ghanaba who also runs the African Heritage Library. Many organizations attended this month long event including theDubois Centre (Ebo Hawkson, Director), the National Theatre (Dr. Komla Amuoko, Director), the Musicians Union of Ghana MUSIGA (Joe Mensah, President), King Bruce (B.B. bands), the University of Ghana (Profs. Kofi Agovi and Kwesi Yankah), the Ghana Copyright Administration (Betty Mould-Iddrisu, Director), the Ghana National Folklore Board (Colonel Amuzu, Chairman), the Ghana Concert Party Union (Mr. S.K. Oppong and Mr. Mensah, Executives) and the Ghana Record Producers Union (Dick Essilfie-Bondzie and Kojo Donkoh, Executives).

After the 1996 BAPMAF/Goethe Highlife Month, the BAPMAF Highlife Photo Exhibition was moved to a temporary space in my Bokoor House premises at South Ofankor, Accra. This was open to the general public up until 2001. It hosted many local and foreign visitors and was televised twice; for Ghana Broadcasting in 1996 (Producer, Cynthia Jikpani) and in 2000 by the London Shai Shai company (Producer, Martine Stone).Then in mid-2001, and with the help of Harmattan Productions and the French Embassy, the BAPMAF Highlife Photo Exhibition was re-mounted and displayed in Accra at the Alliance Francaise (Director, Didier Martin) as part of the 'Story of Highlife' event.

The following January BAPMAF and the Swizz Embassy organized the launch at the DuBois Centre of the Basel Mission/UTC compilation CD *Ghana Popular Music 1931-57* put together by the scholars Veit Arlt and Serena Danquah. From February to March 2002 BAPMAF organized a series of seven lectures/performances at the National Theatre for the US Embassy Public Affairs Section for ‘Black History Month’. Then in 2004 BAPMAF was involved in local work with the Presence musical youth talent-scout organization, Seth Adam’s Pan African Arts NGO which involved a highlife photo exhibition at the British Council in October,and in 2005 a workshop on ‘Researching Ghanaian Theatre’ held at the University of Ghana’s Institute of African Studies, Legon. It was also in February 2005that BAPMAF again helped the US Embassy Public Affairs Section organize ‘African American Heritage/History Month.’

In September 2005 BAPMAF was involved with the opening of Kofi Ghanaba’s re-vamped African Heritage Library at Medie and in March the following year BAPMAF provided photos for the Rocky Dawuni/Africa Live ‘Independence Splash: Ghana Music Revival Explosion’ at the Accra International Conference Centre. Then in 2007 and as part of Ghana’s 50thindependence celebrations BAPMAF curated the Ghana Music Exhibition held in October at the Greenwich Heritage Centre in London and organized by the African Image Alliance.

**Establishment of the BAPMAF Highlife Institute, 2007-2011**

As part of extensive rebuilding of my Bokoor House in the mid-2000s, after receiving my university pension, I included proper accommodation for the BAPMAF. This consisted of 2,400 square feet of premises comprising a photo and memorabilia exhibition room, seminar room, audio-video and digital documentation lab and a library for photos, video, printed matter and recorded music. The new BAPMAF premises was opened in 2007 as the BAPMAF Highlife Institute. It was also in 2007 that BAPMAF supplied 70 highlife songs and other materials related to gender issues for the ‘Changing Representation of Women in Popular Culture’ project of the University of Ghana’s Institute of African Studies Centre for Gender Studies & Advocacy.

Numerous local and foreign musicians, researchers and media people continued coming to BAPMAF. This included groups of foreign students coming for lectures and workshops - such as from University of Arlington in Texas (led by Dr. Michael Varner and Sierra Leonian Prof. Alusine Jallo), the US SIT summer school students(led by Gavin Webb and Olayemi Tinuoye) and Simon Fraser University (led by Dr. Albert Smith). Drummers in the United States also brought groups to BAPMAF, such as the Ghanaian Obo Addy who brought musicians from Portland and Vida and Big Joe Galeota who came with a group from Arlington.During2007-2008 a team of New York students (Seth Paris, Mikey Hart, Richie Levinson, etc.) began cataloguing on spreadsheets the audio component of the BAPMAF archives. In December 2008 the death occurred of my longtime friend and fellow archivist Kofi Ghanaba andI drew on the BAPMAF archives to help his family prepare a funeral brochure.

In 2009 the German Goethe Institute in Accra (Director, Mrs. Eleonore Sylla) provided a grant to BAPMAF for technical equipment, the creation of awebsite and helping with the public display side of the BAPMAF Highlife Institute. With the new equipment a substantial component of the BAPMAF music, photographic and video holdings were digitized. Also digitized were some works brought to BAPMAF by artists like the singer Pat Thomas, multi-instrumentalist Amartey Hedzoleh, Anum Telfer and drummer Glen Warren. The BAPMAF website[[1]](#endnote-1)was created by my son Thomas Kojo and also Raymond Gyemeki.

This German assistance was celebrated by an event at the BAPMAF Highlife Institute which drew 120 visitors, including students, journalists, researchers and diplomatic staff. Some of the many Ghanaian musicians who came were the Ramblers dance-band trumpeter Peter Marfo, the trumpeter Edmund Mensah (son of E.T. Mensah), Dela Botri the leader of Hewale Sounds, the hiplifer Wunlov the Kubolor, Stan Plange and Kpakpo Addo of the old Uhuru band, the Afro-jazzist Nii Noi Nortey, the percussionist Johnson Kemeh, Daniel ‘J.B’. Koranteng Crentsil (Fela Kuti’s conga player) and the atratoa/televi instrument player Kay Opare.

The same year therewas also an exchange of materials between BAPMAF and the Nigerian Legacy Museum and Hall of Fame. This had been set up in Benin City in the mid-1990s by Nigeria’s highlife maestro Victor Uwaifo who at the time was the Commissioner of Arts and Culture for Edo State and with whom I had recorded with in the1970s. Toward the end of 2009 BAPMAF supplied historical photos for the High Vibes Festival at Ghana’s National Theatre, sponsored by the French Embassy, UNESCO and the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Culture. In early 2010 BAPMAF digitised seven records for T.D.B. Adjekum of the Happy Stars guitar band. In September 2010I was involved with a musical and written tribute to the late Mac Tontoh who had been one of the founders of the Osibisa Afro-rock group and had donated photographic materials to the BAPMAF archives.

By September 2011 the BAPMAF holdings consisted of 1200 photographs, 700 publications as well as many rare documents, speeches, brochures, posters, record sleeves,80 videos and 1600 hours of recorded music; including 780 old highlife songs on shellac 78 rpm records and master-tapes of Ghanaian artists recorded by John Collins Bokoor Recording Studio in the 1980s. The materials of the ‘Golden years of Highlife’ photo exhibition were organised chronologically on 15 separate boards in the BAPMAF exhibitions room in Bokoor House where there were also a display of numerous, documents, posters, album covers, musical instruments, artifacts and memorabilia. Streams of visitors came to call at the BAPMAF premises between 1996 and 2011 to access materials in the collection and to view the curated exhibition. These included African music scholars and researcher from Nigeria, Ghana, Botswana and Zimbabwe; African musicians from Ghana, Nigeria, Togo and Cameroon; composers from Ghana, Holland and Germany; journalists from Ghana, Germany, Holland, France, Nigeria, Jamaica and South Africa; Western scholars of African music; Ghanaian music producers and promoters; World Music producers and promoters; documentary makers; radio broadcasters; diplomatic staff from the embassies of France, Germany and Spain.

**Floods Hit BAPMAF in October 2011**

Disaster struck the BAPMAF premises on the 26th of October 2011. At this time flooding occurred over many parts of Accra due to an unseasonal and massive rainfall compounded by people building in or blocking water ways - so that rivers could no longer easily run into the sea. In our particular Taifa-Ofankor area this was compounded by the construction of a section of the Kumasi highway without adequate storm gutters - and also some of the saw-millers in the immediate neighbourhood had been dumping sawdust in rivers and wetlands over the years. The resulting floods on the 26th October was unprecedented with almost 6 feet of water smashing walls around the BAPMAF land and 4.5 feet entering into the downstairs house and premises where some of the BAPMAF archival holdings were kept. About 10% of the BAPMAF archives was damaged or lost as well as thousands of dollars of technical equipment.

After the flood numerous friends, family, well wishers and organizations donated monies to help rebuild the grounds, make them secure against future floods, replace some of the technical equipment and re-locate all valuable BAPMAF holdings upstairs where the BAPMAF Highlife Institute exhibition was located. Although it is impossible to mention all those who helped financially or in kind I would like to mention four in particular. Firstly, the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana where I have been working for the last 18 years instantly helped me financially. Then in Canada, Batuki Music quickly organized a benefit for BAPMAF called "Highlife Help" at the Lula Lounge in Toronto in December 2011[[2]](#endnote-2) that featured the Toronto based Ghanaian Afrafranto highlife band that includes a number of musicians I know personally – like vocalist Theo Yaw Boakye, guitarist Paa Joe, drummer Kofi Ackah(Jewel Ackah’s son)and bassist Marshall Nketiah. Later another fund raising show was organized in London in June 2012 put together by Rita Ray and Max Reinhardt of the Shrine dance-club. This featured Ghanaian acts by Kari Bannerman, Konkoma, Pax Nicholas, Wunlov the Kubolor & Mensah. As Mensah states ‘We're sleeping on a hero. This man is not only preserving our music, but our history and more importantly our culture and unique identity. Its rather unfortunate that he's not getting the support he deserves but here is a good place to start.’[[3]](#endnote-3) It was also in June that BAPMAF received a substantial grant from the Dutch Prince Claus Cultural Emergency Response Program that was to replace lost technical equipment, repair the BAPMAF physical infrastructure and strengthen its perimeter walls with embankments and dykes to stop future flooding.[[4]](#endnote-4)

**Post-flood BAPMAF activities, 2012-2014**

With all this assistance BAPMAF was able to begin operating again, although the public exhibition component of BAPMAF was temporarily closed down. Nevertheless, all the other research, preservation and promotional work of BAPMAF continued. As early as January 2012 I was interviewed on the origins of highlife by Susan Lamptey of Radio Gold 90.5 FM for its weekly Saturday ‘Solid Gold Countdown’ show and provided some music samples from the BAPMAF archives. In March 2012 the sad death of the veteran guitar band leader F. Kenya occurred and BAPMAF was able to supply some biographical information to his family for the funeral brochure. At the same time, some of the BAPMAF archives are being used for the new PhD courses on African popular music that I am helping set up for the Music Department at the University of Ghana.

The BAPMAF archives were also consulted for the Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA) research project entitled ‘Revitalizing the Creative Art Industry: The Contribution of the Music Sector to the Socio–Economic Development of Ghana’. This MUSIGA project was publically launched in January 2013 and we hope our figures will convince the government to create ways of re-structuring the industry, reduce regulatory burdens on it, deal with music piracy and upgrade the teaching of music in Ghanaian schools.

In March 2013 I used BAPMAF photos and music samples to give a presentation on ‘The Concert Party in Ghana’ for the International World Theatre Day Celebration held at the National Theatre, Accra. Around this time I was also awarded a Ghana Music Honours by MUSIGA at the National Theatre and later in the month the ex Fela-Kuti Ghanaian percussionist, Daniel J .B. Koranteng, donated 175 highlife records to BAPMAF.

The BAPMAF public display and seminar space was re-opened in mid-2013.Visitors started coming again, including the American historian Douglas Sofer and calypso researcher Alison Okuda, the German music photographer Bugs Steffan, Dan Walter of the Sigauque Rocording Studio Recording Studio in Maputo, Mozambique, the Ghanaian musicologist Nat Damptey, the American music lawyer Laurence Singer, the Holland-based Ghanaian musician Sloopy Mike Gyamfi, the musicians Ekow Micah and Akosua Agyempong of Ghana Music Council, the Ghanaian-New Zealand musician Leila Adu-Gilmore, Ashesi College students, Titus Arko of the Ghana Fire Service dance-band and Hayford Siaw, Director of Volunteer Partnerships for West Africa (VPWA) NGO.

In September 2013 BAPMAF began collaborating with the MUSIGA for its planned Music Academy and in December BAPMAF supplied materials for two films. One on Ghanaian masquerades was for Ernest Abbeyquaye’s Trumpet African Production and the other on South African Popular Music was for a Ghana TV news film on the death of Nelson Mandela. In mid-2014 BAPMAF became involved with the first annual Bands Competition of the Ghana Security Agencies (BACOSA) organised by the Ministry of Interior and held at the National Theatre in Accra on 3rd October. At the time of writing, October 2014, BAPMAF is currently collaborating with Dinah Reindorf of the Dwanesie Cultural Institute in Accra, for its planned score book ‘Ghanaian Folksongs and Highlife for Schools and Colleges’.

In Ghana there are various governmental financed or supported bodies that deal in the preservation and dissemination of traditional musical instruments and performance. These include the National Museum, the Arts Council, the nine Centres for National Culture, the National Commission on Culture and the various universities. However, there are just a few local archives dedicated to Ghanaian popular music and these are all operated by private persons or their estates. These are Kwame Sarpong’s Gramophone Museum in Cape Coast, the African Heritage Library at Medie near Accra put together by the late Ghanaian Afro-jazz musician Kofi Ghanaba and the BAPMAF Highlife Institute. For these there has been very little or no state support and these organizations have only managed to survive through assistance from outside organizations, like the German Goethe Institute, the Alliance Francaise, New York University in Ghana, the Canadian Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology and the Dutch Prince Claus Fund. This Ghanaian governmental blind-spot for local popular music stems from it being contemporary and therefore deemed not to warrant the state support of older traditional forms of music. This should be rectified as today’s popular is tomorrow’s tradition.

1. The website can be found at [www.bapmaf.com](http://www.bapmaf.com) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. See: <http://batukimusic.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=76> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See: [*http://www.richmix.org.uk/whats-on/event/the-2-jonz-benefit/*](http://www.richmix.org.uk/whats-on/event/the-2-jonz-benefit/) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. See: http://www.princeclausfund.org/en/activities/bapmaf.html [↑](#endnote-ref-4)