

The Amu Score Project, Inc.

A digital special collection of the musical works of Dr. Ephraim Amu

Drs Misonu Amu and Felicia Sandler – Co-Directors

The Amu Score Project / 230 Kittredge Street, Boston MA 02131
www.amuscoreproject.com

Introduction – Statement of Significance



Dr. Ephraim Amu (1899-1995)

“There is no single individual who has influenced the course of the development of art music in contemporary Ghana as much as Dr. Ephraim Amu.” (Nketia, 7)

This collection is profoundly significant due to the stature of the composer, his contributions at a pivotal time in Africa’s history, and due to the reality that his complete oeuvre is not currently available. Dr. Amu’s compositions are of import to scholars in a wide array of disciplines in the humanities:

- Musical Composition.** Amu is credited as the “father of Ghanaian art music.” (Agawu, 275; Dor, 7) He was the founder of notated musical composition in Ghana, and architect of the Ghanaian choral idiom. Amu’s “African songs” wed Ghanaian rhythms, speech contours, scales and harmonization norms with Western harmony and four-part textures. His approach was novel & ground-breaking. Amu’s reach was regional, with composers in the wider West African territory recognizing, even drawing on, his work. (Nigerian composer Fela Sowande, for instance, incorporates two of Amu’s works in his own *African Suite* for orchestra.) According to Agawu, “...few [Ghanaian] composers have succeeded in escaping the influence of the basic idiom of his choral works.” (Agawu, 277)
- Ethnomusicology.** Amu was path-finder; one of the first on the continent to record and fix in material form musics from the rural traditional areas. Amu mentored scholars such as J.H. Kwabena Nketia to follow in his footsteps in this regard, laying the groundwork for a systematic study of music on the continent.
- Music Education in Ghana.** In the early colonial period, school curricula followed European models. Amu was hired by Achimota College in 1934 to develop a musical curriculum that would include traditional musics. His influence on academia was foundational.
- Socio-political Activity.** Amu was a key agent in the colonial period moving the country toward independence. Through his lyrics and music, his preaching, his teaching, and as confidant to those in power, Amu was a man of influence. He was honored with a state funeral and awarded with the Grand Medal of the Republic of Ghana.



- Poetry.** Dr. Amu wrote his own lyrics many of which incorporated African proverbs. His output is a rich source for linguistic study.
- African Theology and Liturgical Renewal.** Dr. Amu’s sermons and song lyrics project a Christian identity rooted in Africa. Rev. Laryea expresses Amu’s influence this way: “by using African languages in Christian expression and in the formulation of theological ideas, it is possible [for Amu] to arrive at a completely different understanding of transcendence and thereby make a valuable contribution to world Christianity.” (Laryea, 4) Amu’s belief that African cultural expressions are “of God” led to his, and others’ use of these expressions in the church, where such had been deemed pagan by European colonizers. Wearing of cloth, use of drums and bells and rattles in worship, and the like are all typical in Ghana today. In his day, Amu was pioneer.

Retrieval & Archiving of Print Sources

There are two categories of source materials: written sources in the form of manuscripts and printed scores, and sound sources in the form of recordings.

The most significant written source for this edition is the collection of Dr. Amu’s autograph manuscripts and copies of the same housed at the family home in Peki Avetile in the Volta Region of Ghana, though soon to be transferred and archived at the J.H. Kwabena Nketia Archives, University of Ghana.

Six published volumes are out of print and together contain seventy works. In the academic theses of Dr. Misonu Amu and Professor George Worlasi Kwasi Dor, there are an additional seven works available in Appendices. A few titles are duplicated in hymnals.

Methods & Editorial Procedure (scores)

The new edition is both a performance edition, and a critical scholarly one. It is scholarly based on a number of criteria:

- The new scores have been developed through an analysis of all available sources, print and sound.
- Informed custodians from the culture have provided guidance and comment along the way.
- Editorial principles have been noted and followed.
- Methods have been consistently and explicitly pursued and communicated.
- Specific modifications made are documented, shown on score with square brackets [], and chronicled in a critical notes supplement.
- The proofreading plan is extensive.

The team made the decision early on to favor the performance tradition in the editing process. There are often incongruities between the ways Amu notated his music and the correlating sounds in performances. His notational practices changed over time.

Amu faced formidable notational challenges. He sought to harness Western staff notation to represent features in traditional repertoires he was collecting, repertoires steeped in orality, with intonations outside the Western tempered scale, rhythms that do not fit comfortably in Western meters, polyrhythms, vocal glissandi mirroring spoken word, etc. How, then, was he to notate newly composed works reflecting the nuances of traditional performance practice? Amu received a rigorous training in Western European music, having matriculated at the Royal College of Music in London (1937–1941). Yet the repertoire he was seeking to transcribe was Ghanaian. Amu’s efforts to encode African music in Western notation were pioneering. He coached his ensembles to perform his music as he wished. As such, we have confidence the performances reflect his purpose, and should be favored over the notations in his scores.

We have identified notational norms for the new edition, through analyses of his notational practice and performance practice. (Sandler, 4-6)

The Classification System “EAF”

The compositions are presented in seven volumes. The first six are in chronological order according to voicing. Volume Seven is comprised of Amu’s works in the Western idiom. These are not the works for which he is best known, nor through which he made his lasting impact. Hence, though the music is his earliest, volume seven has been added to the Edition as a type of addendum, after the other six volumes.

The Collected Works of Dr. Ephraim Amu (1899-1995)			
Volume	Contents	Time Period	Number of Scores
1	Mixed Chorus works (SATB)	1928-1933	32
2	Mixed Chorus works (SATB)	1934-1945	34
3	Mixed Chorus works (SATB)	1946-1995	38
4	Men’s Chorus works (TTBB)	1928-1995	27
5	Solo, Duet and Trio works	1928-1995	35
6	Instrumental Works	1928-1995	13
7	Works in the Western Idiom	1920-1933	23

Within each volume, works are assembled chronologically. Where an exact composition date is unknown, works are placed at the most plausible point of composition based on social events related to the work, or otherwise at the end of the chronological category to which they belong.

Each composition is classified with an “Ephraim Amu Foundation” (EAF) number according to its chronological placement in the overall oeuvre. The compositions are then allotted their own numbering within each volume.

Indices further classify works according to language, (Eve, Twi, Ga, English), and purpose (sacred, secular, patriotic).

Working Team & ASPI Board

Working Team	
Member	Role
Misonu Amu	Co-Director – Editor, Translations, Pronunciation guides, Historical context
Felicia Sandler	Co-Director – Editor, Engraver
Kofi Agawu	Advisor
George W. K. Dor	Advisor
David Locke	Advisor
Francis Akutey-Baffoe	Linguist – Twi translations
Philip T. Laryea	Linguist – Twi translations
Gilbert K. Ansré	Linguist – Ewe translations
Newlove Annan	Choir Director: Greater Accra Mass Choir
James Varrick Armaah	Choir Director: Harmonious Chorale

Amu Score Project Board	
Member	Role
Felicia Sandler	President
Misonu Amu	Clerk
Bernard Owusu-Boadi	Treasurer
John Danquah	Director
David Locke	Director

ASPI Recording Projects

There are two types of recording projects the ASPI is undertaking:

- Audio recordings of the compositions
- Pronunciation Guides

Vintage recordings of close to seventy Amu works that span the different periods of his activity are available. For those not available, two of the most celebrated choral groups in the country are recording Dr. Amu’s works for the score project – the Harmonious Chorale and the Greater Accra Mass Choir.

Dr. Amu composed songs in four different languages: Ewe, Twi, Ga and English. All but the last are tone languages. In order to assist non-native singers in each of these languages, and scholars at large, we are developing audio pronunciation guides for the collection.

DATABASE – www.amuscoreproject.com

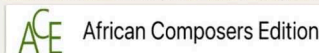
www.amuscoreproject.com serves as an online venue for more than the new scores. In addition, visitors will find:

- Biographical information on Dr. Amu, his work and significance
- Translations of all lyrics
- Historical context for the composition of each work
- A full set of facsimiles of Amu’s autograph scores
- Scans of the out-of-print sources
- Audio recordings of each of the works
- Pronunciation guides for the vocal works
- Critical notes – general and specific for each work
- An unfolding bibliography resource on Amu and his work

Scores for Volume 1 are complete. The recordings for this Volume will be fully available by the end of the calendar year, 2024. For updates on new releases, please sign up for the newsletter on the site.

Distribution

ASPI has recently signed an agreement with African Composers Editions. Amu’s scores will be available through their online catalog in short order.



References

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- Nketia, J.H. Kwabena (1993). “Introduction,” in *Amu Choral Works Volume 1. Accra: Westville*, pp. 7-23.
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Contact Information

ASPI, c/o Felicia Sandler
230 Kittredge Street, Boston MA 02131
Tel: +1 857-719-3789
Email: amuscoreproject@gmail.com
Web: www.amuscoreproject.com