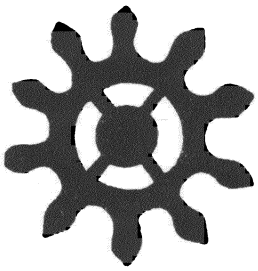


ASHANTI BALLADS

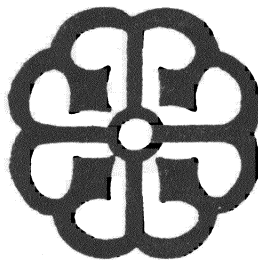


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by
KO NIMO

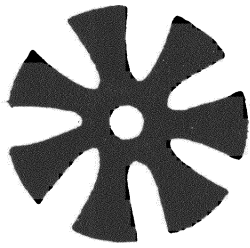
English
by
JOE LATHAM



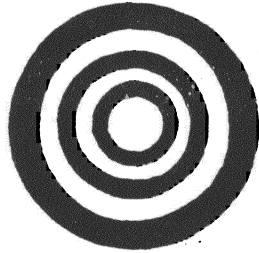
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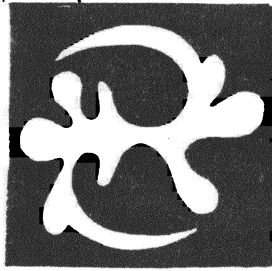
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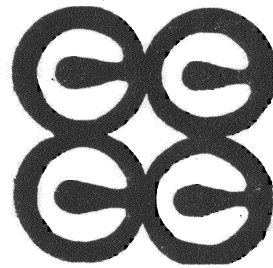
Fofoo



Adinkrahene



Gye Nyame



Abete-toma



Nkyin Kyin



Ani ahun yaa

ASHANTI BALLADS

by

JOE LATHAM

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based on
original Asante Twi by

KO NIMO

Biochemistry Department
University of Science and Technology
Kumasi, Ashanti
Ghana, West Africa

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Front Cover: Ko Nimo

Back Cover: Ashanti Symbols (see page 11)

KO NIMO - THE MAN AND HIS MUSIC

How is it that a British University lecturer should come to write Ashanti Ballads in English? The beginning of this venture took place over twenty years ago. I had just joined the staff of the Chemistry Department of the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti Region of Ghana, in West Africa.

I was intrigued to hear that Mr. Amponsah, the chief technician of the Biochemistry Department, was none other than Ghana's foremost exponent of acoustic guitar highlife - the famous folk musician Ko Nimo. He has now recorded more than eighty songs in Twi. Even in those early days, his music could be heard several times a week on Radio Ghana.

When Ko Nimo explained to me the meaning of his ballads, I was convinced that these Ashanti stories deserved a wider audience than the three or four million people who could understand Asante Twi. So, in 1969, English verse settings of twelve of the Ashanti Ballads were published. This was done first as a series in the local newspaper - the Ashanti "Pioneer". Then a booklet was produced in both English and Twi. When I returned to Britain, at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, I kept in touch with Ko Nimo with correspondence and occasional contacts. More ballads were translated. The present edition is an expanded version of the 1968 booklet.

In this way, a chance co-incidence brought together two strangers to produce a work that neither could have produced on their own. The ballads in this book represent the basic ideas of Ko Nimo's folk songs. There is much that is worth telling after the melody of the music and the beat of the rhythm have been removed from the original performance.

It was in 1957, when the former British colony of the Gold Coast became the independent country of Ghana, that Ko Nimo first received national acclaim. Recognition came through his performances, at festivals and on Radio Ghana, of folk music using traditional instruments. The spirit of Africa is enshrined in his ballads, which are appreciated as much by the illiterate farmer as by the staff and students of the University.

Daniel Amponsah was born in 1934 in the village of Foase, in Ashanti, and comes from a musical family. His father, Opanin Kwame

Amponsah, was a trumpeter and a guitarist. His mother was a chorister in the Methodist Church. His sister had married the brother of the Asantehene (the King of Ashanti) and at the age of eight he lived with his sister in Kumasi. Ko Nimo says of this period that, as a brother-in-law to the Ashanti Royal Family, he was "irradiated with tradition".

At the age of 19, Daniel Amponsah was teaching brass band music, drumming and the guitar in his village. When entertaining, he would tell jokes and stories between songs. It was at this time that he adopted the stage name of Ko Nimo. 'Ko' is short for Kofi - Friday born. 'Nimo' is one who takes the blame for what someone else has done.

Although music has always been his main interest, Ko Nimo turned to science for his professional career. He worked first as a hospital technician in Accra before moving to Kumasi in 1960 to join the staff of the University of Science and Technology. From 1962-1965, whilst on study leave in Britain, he was able to attend classes at the Len Williams Guitar Centre in London.

Ko Nimo says: "I studied the classical style, learning scales and arpeggios. But I didn't want to be a Segovia. I wanted to be an African guitarist, using my technique to do justice to my own music, which, of course, I understand better."

During this study period, he came to appreciate the work of other black musicians, in particular the jazz musicians Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Oscar Peterson and Thelonius Monk. After returning home, he had a chance meeting in Kumasi with a niece of the great American jazz pianist, Thelonius Monk.

"My music career and outlook took a different turn since that meeting. I play traditional guitar, but listen to jazz a lot at home, because the roots come from Africa. There is no record played by either Thelonius Monk or Wes Montgomery which I haven't listened to." He is proud of 27 hand-written compositions which Thelonius Monk personally presented to him. It was a great honour when, in 1982, Ko Nimo was invited to New York to take part in a film dedicated to the memory of Thelonius Monk.

Another chance meeting in Kumasi, as explained earlier, was in 1968 when I met Ko Nimo in the University. I was then a member of the chemistry department staff. It was the enthusiastic support of Albert D. Appea, the Editor of the "Pioneer" newspaper, that gave the initial encouragement to publishing the first set of "Ashanti Ballads".

Ko Nimo had a second period of study leave (1969-1970) in Britain, which was spent at the University of Salford studying laboratory instrumentation. This gave him the opportunity in his free time to study harmony and the classic guitar at the Manchester School of Music. But even for a musician, life is not only music. The difficulties and disillusionment faced by an African living in a foreign land are described in the popular ballad "Aburokyire Abrabo" ("Overseas Life") which he wrote on returning home.

To counter the ever-growing pressure of Western "pop", Ko Nimo organised and directed the Kumasi Adadam Agofoomma Group (translation: Going Back to Roots) which promotes traditional music, drumming and dancing. The group received international recognition in 1976 when it represented Ghana in the Festival of Folk Music organised by the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. This was followed by a coast to coast tour of the United States, playing to audiences of thousands.

In 1984, the Adadam Agofoomma Group, led by Ko Nimo, found themselves in London. They had been invited to represent Ghana in the "African Music Village", organised by the Commonwealth Institute in Holland Park. During rehearsals, a telegram arrived saying that the Uganda delegation could not attend. The Adadam Agofoomma Group gave a double performance, filling the gap in the programme, much to the delight of the public. But, I heard a few comments about the dawn rehearsals made necessary by the extra performances. The beating of African drums is not often heard in Kensington's fashionable High Street.

In 1979, in recognition of his services to Ghanaian music as performer, teacher and administrator, Ko Nimo was elected President of MUSIGA (the Musicians' Union of Ghana). His countrymen appreciated, not only his music, but his love of and respect for tradition.

Ko Nimo welcomes and assists any student of African culture. Over the years he has travelled to many villages to talk to old folk - learning guitar styles and stories that only the old folk know. These must be recorded before they are lost for ever. Ko Nimo sometimes refers to these old folk, with good reason, as "libraries on fire".

Through MUSIGA, a series of negotiations were conducted with the popular British musician Mick Fleetwood, which led to an international album called "The Visitor" (RCALP 5044). In 1981, Mick Fleetwood and American guest artists came to Accra to make the recording, and worked with Ghanaian professionals. Several of the tracks involve amateur backing groups, such as the Accra Roman Catholic Choir.

Following from these successful negotiations, in 1985 Ko Nimo was appointed interim chairman of COSGA, the Copyright Society of Ghana. More recently he has been made an honorary life member of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, along with such distinguished names as Professor J.H.K. Nketia and John Collins.

Though Ko Nimo's professional training is in science, in 1980 he was invited to accept an appointment as a visiting Senior Lecturer in the Department of Music at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. His teaching was on traditional music with special emphasis on the sepetewa, a six-stringed 'lute' played by the Brongs, Sefwis and Ashantis. The appointment was a singular distinction in a country where it is customary to place great weight on formal paper qualifications.

Ko Nimo was now a well known and respected public figure. In 1980, he was invited to serve on the Board of Directors of G.B.C. (the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation). In 1984, he was asked to join the Education Commission of Ghana, on which he still serves. Ko Nimo is also one of the African musicians whose work is studied in the West African Examinations Council syllabus for music.

British television viewers had a chance to see Ko Nimo at work with his group in the programme on the music of West Africa in the series entitled "Repercussions" (Channel 4, 11th March 1985). The programme starts in a forest glade, with the group singing whilst Ko Nimo plays his guitar - with occasional refreshment from a pot of palm wine.

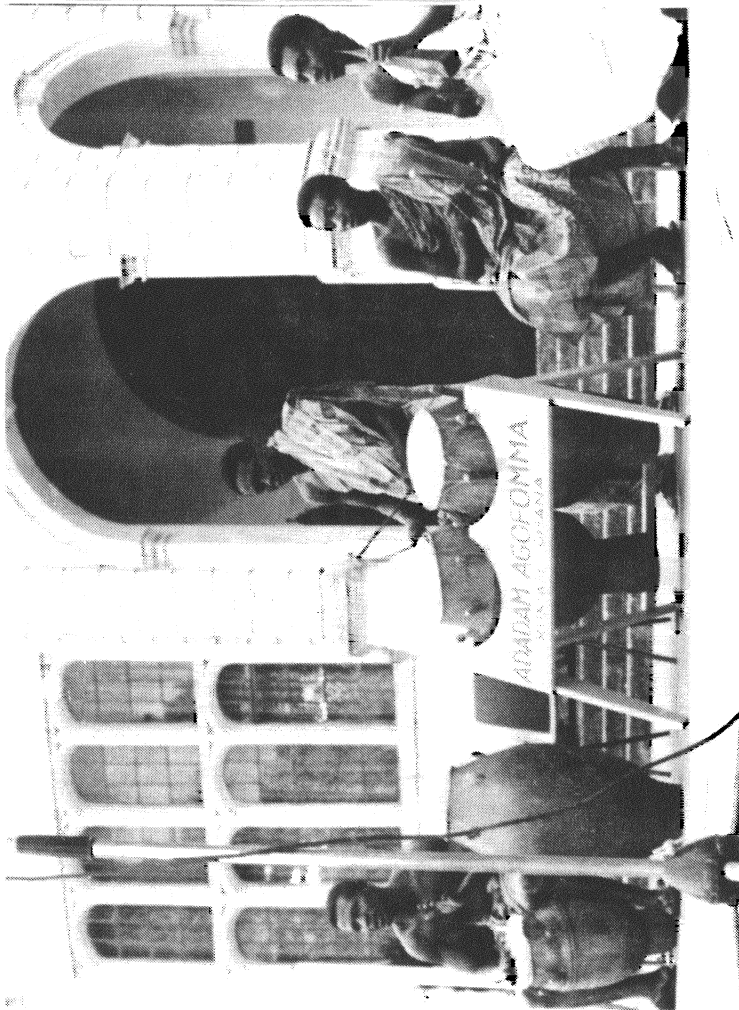
This is fermented sap drawn from a newly felled palm tree. In the heat of the afternoon, the farmer likes to relax under a shady tree with a calabash of palm wine, some company and music. The musicians would argue that music is food of the soul. Just as you feed your body, so you must feed your soul. The Adadam Agofoomma Group specialise in playing on such occasions what has come to be known as "palm-wine music".

Ko Nimo has always been concerned about the least fortunate amongst us. He has caused great delight by performing to the lepers. At present, he is giving guitar lessons at the Institute for the Disabled at Jachie, Ashanti. This Institute is now making the guitar a major feature of its activities, and is producing acoustic guitars for local sale.

In March 1988, Ko Nimo was invited by UNESCO to attend a conference in Trinidad and Tobago to explore the social, cultural and historical linkages between Ghana and Trinidad and Tobago. The links between Africa

and the Caribbean are revealed through music and the oral and the folk tradition. Ghanaian highlife relates to Trinidadian calypso. The Ananse (Spider) stories of Ghana are retold in the West Indies. The board games known as oware in Ghana and ayo in Nigeria are played with the same rules in the Caribbean islands, whose culture still has much in common with that of Africa.

In spite of all the public recognition he has received, Ko Nimo remains a man of the people. Whenever he goes in Ashanti, he is greeted with a joyous shout of "Ko!" - and a hand-shake with a well-wisher. Yet he gets the greatest pleasure from listening to his collection of early highlife records on an ancient wind-up gramophone. His one main aim is to ensure that Ghana's priceless cultural heritage is preserved, not as a lifeless specimen in a museum, but as a living art form.



The ADADAM AGOFOWMA group
performing at the African Music Village,
Holland Park, London, 1984

A BACKGROUND TO ASHANTI

This book has been written for people living outside Ghana, who may not be familiar with the society in which the ballads are sung. The brief descriptions given below will make useful background material for those wishing to appreciate the social significance of the ideas on which these ballads are based.

Geography (For a map see page 38)

The Ashanti Region of Ghana lies at the heart of the West African tropical rain forest, just north of the equator. Its only major city is Kumasi, which lies about 150 miles inland from the Gulf of Guinea. The area of Ashanti is approximately one fifth that of England (9400 square miles). The population was about one million at the time of independence in 1957 and is currently about 4 million. There are heavy, monsoon-type rains from July to September, and a dry season from November to February. This is when the dusty harmattan wind blows from the Sahara desert to the north.

History

The Asante kingdom was founded by the great king (Asantehene) Osei Tutu in the early years of the eighteenth century. His fetish priest, Okomfo Anokye, unified the Asante states through allegiance to the Golden Stool. This had been miraculously invoked to descend from heaven. Okomfo Anokye planted two trees in the forest and predicted that one tree would live and become the capital of Ashanti. Hence is derived the name Kumasi (the tree lived); the place in which the other tree was planted became Kumawu (the tree died).

During the reign of the second Asantehene (Opoku Ware, 1720-1750), military action and political skill extended the boundaries of Asante to their greatest extent. Asante stretched from the European occupied castles on the coast to the south, to the dry savannah lands in the north.

Conflict of interest led to various wars with Britain. It was during these campaigns that the military value of traditional drumming was demonstrated. The phrase "bush telegraph" was invented to describe the relays of Ashanti "talking drums", which could be heard over many miles of impenetrable forest. A skilled drummer can replicate the pattern of

speech of a tonal language such as Twi, and so transmit unmistakable messages.

Eventually, Kumasi was captured by the British Army in 1873 (as a result of which much of the magnificent Asante gold regalia can be seen in London in the British Museum). After a final uprising in 1901, led by the Queen Mother of Ejisu (Yaa Asantewaa), Asante came into British Protection. The Asantehene was exiled to the Seychelles Islands.

The name given to the region by the British administrators was Ashanti, which became a region of the Gold Coast colony on 1st January 1902.

An Ashanti Confederacy Council was established under British rule in the 1930's; and the Asantehene returned from exile. The National Liberation Movement (NLM), based on Ashanti, played a significant role in the Gold Coast's struggle for independence.

In 1957, after a period of internal self-government under the charismatic leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, the Gold Coast became the first African colony to achieve independence. It was renamed Ghana, after an eighteenth century West African kingdom.

The Economy at the Time of Independence

Cocoa was the dominant cash crop but food-stuffs, vegetables and fruit for home consumption also flourished. Typical crops were yam, plantain, cassava, maize, okro, pineapples, oranges and paw-paw. From the forest came game (bush meat), palm-wine and timber. The railway wagons leaving Kumasi were packed with logs for export. The gold mines explain why Ghana was called the Gold Coast before independence.

The vast majority of the population lived in villages and worked on their farms, using a system of shifting cultivation. To create a farm it was necessary to clear part of the natural forest, although cocoa could be grown between existing trees.

There have been substantial economic and social changes in the years since independence. The major cities have grown very rapidly, as rural folk migrate to the towns, partly because of the decline of cocoa farming. Serious inflation and unemployment are ever present problems.

The Village

The village is a social as well as an economic unit. Everyone participates in the major ceremonies, the most frequent of which are funeral celebrations which typically last many days. Attendance at funerals is normally expected from everyone in the village and expenditure on funerals is a substantial part of the household budget.

In each village there are people of particular importance. The chief (odikro), together with the elders, maintains traditional customs and ceremonies and deals with disputes. The fetish priest (okomfo) and the herbalist (odunsi) provide a local medical service which can be partly paid for in local produce (a hen, eggs, etc.). In contrast, Western medicine which requires cash payment, and usually a considerable journey to the nearest hospital.

The fetish priest, when possessed by the gods, is particularly powerful in dealing with spiritual problems (e.g. protection from the witchcraft of enemies). The herbalist relies on local medicines to effect a cure.

The linguist (okyeame) has no corresponding role in western society. A man wishing to consult the fetish priest or the chief addresses his remarks to the linguist, who then passes them on and returns the reply (even though all three people are present together). The linguist is an intermediary, acting as a buffer to reduce the severity of utterances and so save delicate situations. If the chief should make a harsh pronouncement, it is the duty of the linguist to euphemise and clothe the statement in proverbs.

The Family

As in most developing countries, there is a strong extended family system in Ashanti. Poorer members may seek financial assistance from their better off relatives for school fees, medical expenses, etc. But visitors are always welcomed, even if their arrival may be a cause of financial concern.

In Ashanti, the family line (abusua) passes through the mother to her children. A man is strongly related to his mother's brother but only weakly related to his father's brother. This must be viewed in the context of a polygamous society in which the mother/child bond is likely to be much stronger than the father/child bond.

As a result, in inheritance, a man's nephew (sister's son) will have priority over his own son. Uncle-nephew relationships therefore assume a dominant position. (Legislation was introduced in 1984 to change this traditional pattern of inheritance.)

The Language and the Role of Proverbs

The official language in Ghana is English but this is not spoken by many villagers. Ashantis are part of the Akan tribes who speak various dialects of Twi. The language is very rich in proverbs, the use of which is taken to be a sign of wisdom. Euphemisms are very common, especially about events connected with death. Rather than say "the king has died", one would say "a mighty tree has fallen". Proverbs are often used to express ideas indirectly as can be seen from the following:

"Obi mfa ne nsa benkum nkyere n'agya amanfo". This is literally "Do not point to the ruins of your father's house with your left hand" - or: "Do not scorn culture inherited from your forefathers".

Religion

There is a universal god (Onyame) but this does not exclude gods associated with a particular region or spirits (obosum) by whom a priest may be possessed. (This lack of exclusiveness makes it possible for a fetish priest to be a Christian). There is no doubt about the existence of the Kingdom of the Dead (Samanade) so custom requires that great attention is paid to the proper conduct of burials and funeral celebrations. Death is the one great certainty.

Traditional religion does not require regular attendance at particular buildings. Religion is not something that is remembered for one hour a week; the Gods and the spirits of the ancestors are always present.

Transport









Most villages are reached only by laterite roads (often pot-holed) and are not served by any type of government transport. Privately owned mammy lorries (open-sided trucks) provide the only link with the towns and carry goods and animals as well as passengers. Many cases have arisen of crops being grown which cannot reach market for lack of transport. The mammy lorry is the creation of private enterprise and initiative, designed to meet the pressing need for rural transport.

Mammy lorries have a large slogan painted on the back and front to help them be recognised in the lorry park or at roadside halts. The slogans are often in pidgin English. Some examples are: "Sea Never Dry", "Fear Woman and Leave Snake", "Sweet Not Always", "Men Suffer Woman Don't Know". The slogan on a lorry reflects the personality of its driver.

Traditional Designs

Certain patterns have a particular religious or social significance. Some of these may be displayed on the cloth worn by particular officials. Incorrect personal use of some of these symbols would cause great offence.

A few of these symbols are shown on the back cover of this book. The literal translations of the Twi phrases are:

| | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| Ohene aniwa: |  | Nothing is hidden from the king's eyes |
| Nyame dua: |  | A place of worship or altar |
| Fofoo: |  | A symbol of jealousy |
| Adinkrahene: |  | The Adinkra king |
| Gye Nyame: |  | Except for God |
| Abete-toma: |  | The distribution of food |
| Nkyin Kyin: |  | Changing one's self |
| Ani ahun yaa: |  | Expression of sorrow |

As an example, if the symbol "Gye Nyame" is displayed by okyeame (the linguist), it implies that a decision has been taken which, "except for God's intervention", cannot be altered.

A TWI PROVERB

Bennedaw na wode to foforo ho sen
The old arrow is a model for making a new one

ACCEPT YOUR LOT

So Dee Wowo Mu Yie

A wealthy man lived in the city.
An all-night watch he had to keep.
Thieves were always robbing houses
And so at night he dared not sleep.

His house had a large verandah;
A shady spot with lots of air.
A passing tinker asked the rich man
If he could do his work out there.

The wealthy man gave his permission,
But wished he had not very soon.
Because he missed his sleep at night time,
He rested in the afternoon.

The banging of the tinker's hammer,
He found too terrible to bear.
He lent some money to the tinker
To start a business up elsewhere.

The tinker went off to his village
And bought some chickens and a truck.
As trade was good, he soon was wealthy.
He then began to curse his luck.

His poultry farm was often raided.
He had to buy himself a gun
To keep vigil with his watchmen.
He found that riches were not fun.

Missing all his sleep at night-time
Destroyed his peace of mind and health.
He always thought that cheats and robbers
Would try to steal his new-gained wealth.

So he resolved to pay the loan back
And soon he sold the poultry farm.
He returned the rich man's money
For it had only brought him harm.

He wanted to be just a tinker.
He had been happier before.
He asked the rich man one small favour -
That he might use the yard once more!

It does not help to envy others
However little you have got.
If you want to be contented
It pays you to accept your lot.

1. Security can be a serious problem for the rich. When no banks are available, money has to be kept at home, which attracts the attention of thieves.



AN OLD MAN PLANTS COCONUT

Akora Dua Kube

An old, old man dug in his garden,
Working hard to plant a tree.
His grandson said: "I beg your pardon.
What you're doing puzzles me.

"You're ninety now. Have you no fears
Of dying while your tree takes root?
A coconut takes many years
Before it ripens and bears fruit."

"My boy, I'm thinking of tomorrow,
And you must learn to do the same.
This land of ours is what we borrow
From those to come, who bear our name.

"I leave a legacy behind me
From which, myself, I will not gain.
There should be no need to remind me
My labour may have been in vain."

If a man of ninety's growing
Trees that he will never see,
The Youth should work to be sowing
The seeds of our prosperity.

THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE

Akyekyedee ne Adanko Ammirikatuo

The Tortoise challenged the Hare to a race.
The proud Hare refused and laughed in his face.
The angry Tortoise then said he would let
The Hare try to win all his goods in a bet.

A Tortoise was sent to a hiding place,
Near each of the staging posts used in the race.
Each of the Tortoises was told to run
To his post as soon as the race had begun.

When the race started - away went the Hare.
But at the first post, the Tortoise was there!
The Hare rushed off to the next staging post
Feeling a little ashamed of his boast.

The plan that the Tortoises had rehearsed
Worked well, and a Tortoise always was first.
The race went on in this wisely planned way.
The Hare lost his bet and he had to pay.

The Hare asked the Tortoise how he had won.
The Tortoise then told him how it was done.
"Wisdom and planning, and the help of friends.
These are my tools in achieving my ends."

WHEN FRIENDS INTERFERE

Obi awaresem

There was a man with a quarrelsome wife;
Their slightest argument led them to strife.
He despaired of leading a normal life.

Whenever one of their brawls occurred
Violent shouting and screaming was heard
Which could start from one unfortunate word.

The tenants found the noise too much to bear.
They made up a plan to solve the affair.

The tenants said that the man's proper course
Was to send his wife home and seek a divorce
And so stop the trouble right at its source.

The man did not want to do this at first
But his friends advice was too well rehearsed
In telling him that his marriage was cursed.

After a quarrel, the man had some drink
And said he would sever the marriage link.

With friends to support him, he drove in a car
Towards his wife's village, but stopped at a bar.
He realised he was going too far.

So he relented and would not proceed,
But friends urged him on to finish the deed.
A peaceful house was their urgent need.

The wife's father asked them why they had come.
Shamed by his mission, the husband was dumb.

His friends' accusations made his heart sink.
He realised he'd had too much to drink.
He just did not care what his friends would think.

He was going to spoil their spiteful game.
His wife should not bear the whole of the blame.
He wanted to speak and to clear her name.

The husband arose and addressed his friends:
"You have abused me for your selfish ends.

I swear to you all that I love my wife.
So it shall be for the rest of my life.
I must admit there has been some strife.

But friends should learn they must not interfere
In marital problems outside their sphere.
So leave us alone and get out of here."

The moral is plain. Never intervene
If husband and wife create a bad scene.

BUY WHEN DEATH SELLS

Owuo Ton Adee a to Bi

(This song, recorded in 1967, is Ko Nimo's signature tune)

Look! Here comes Death, on his fearful round.
See the tree's tangled roots rise from the ground.
See the moon's halo around every man,
Bringing the kiss of Death to all it can.

Death took away my Father and Mother.
If children talked of Death to each other
The old folk stopped them, for it brought to mind
The cruel blows Death had dealt to mankind.

When Death comes selling his wares down your way,
Pluck up your courage and buy some today.
Whatever may happen Death comes to us all.
In the end no one is spared his dread call.

The tadpole complained people had no wish
To keep him after they caught their first fish.
The Lion killed the Cock, despite a warning
And grumbled at waking up late next morning.

A woman marries the job that you do,
But if you are sacked she soon mocks at you.
If a young man is killed it is not by chance.
Somewhere involved is a broken romance.

I am resolved not to die in my bed.
A death in action is no cause of dread,
Protected by the god of my river,
To whose charge my soul I will deliver.

To serve our gods we were created,
But evil spirits have dominated.
Whatever man cherishes most of all
Is first on the list when Death comes to call.

Notes

1
2

A woman lamented her barren state.
The mocking of others made her irate.
A friend came by to console her one day.
"I had children, but Death took half away."

1. This refers to a tree with magical powers whose roots make potent medicine.
2. The halo of the moon embraces the world. It also embraces all men and is associated with death.
3. This refers to the discarding of the first wife of a polygamous marriage who complains of being treated like a tadpole.
4. The concept of an accident is not accepted. All events have a personal cause.
5. The god of the river surrounds warriors in battle and protects them from harm.
6. It is considered to be a disgrace for a woman not to have children.
7. Often half the children born die before they grow up.



THE KINGDOM OF THE DEAD

Asamando Wonko

Notes

If there exists a Kingdom after death,
Where my soul will live after my last breath,
Then let me die. I know I would rather
Remain there with my mother and father
Than endure pain and torment on this Earth.
Friends, seek my doom, because it is not worth
Living amidst this sin and greed and pain.
Send me to the Kingdom. There I shall remain.

1

1. Suicide is an offence against the Gods. Those guilty of it would not reach the Kingdom.

LET LOVE PREVAIL

Odonson

There was a young man who found that his wife
Was tempted by gossips to lead a bad life.
He asked her in earnest to mend her ways.
Marriage is taken too lightly these days.

"Because you receive chop money each day,
(Which is not for you to fritter away)
When I bring bush meat or fruit home to you
You should return all the balance that's due.

"You must find life's an easy affair
As I meet all bills; so please do your share.
Then I can put cash away for the day
When school fees are due and I have to pay.

"Before I was married, my friends would come in
For whisky, but now it's illicit gin.
Pay no attention when your friends advise
A divorce - for they are telling you lies.

"With patience and time, our wounds can all mend.
Life need not be bitter up to the end.
We should not fear Death. He comes without fail.
Be honest, my wife, and let love prevail."

1. Chop money is the daily cash allocation from husband to wife to meet household expenses. Disputes over chop money are a common cause of matrimonial quarrels.
2. Bush meat refers to game caught in the forest. The husband may feel his wife should return part of the chop money if he provides such additional items.

WHAT IS WRONG

Eden Asem Aba Na

What makes you want to run away?
What has happened to you today?
Remember Satan can destroy,
Only your flesh, so there is joy
Your soul is quite beyond his reach.
Have you the faith the Gospels preach?
To keep Gethsemane in mind
Is good advice for all mankind.
Christ told Peter: "Thou shalt deny me thrice,
This very night, ere the cock crows twice."

TECHNOLOGY

(Please see the explanatory note on page 36)

Sua Hunu

Lagos to Accra in less than an hour.
This shows us all the jet engine's power.
Dreaded malaria need never kill,
If you remember to swallow your pill.

Great buildings rise up where once there was bush,
With cranes lifting loads as bulldozers push.
Telephone wires bring your friends near
Telling you news that it's urgent to hear.

Many diseases we need not endure.
Water for drinking can all be made pure.
We can now banish the darkness of night,
Since we can switch on the electric light.

Technology can give us the power,
So we can make new industries flower.
Come then and join me in singing this tune,
Now men in a rocket have been to the moon.

Technology is also a local nickname for the workplace of Ko Nimo, namely Kumasi University of Science and Technology

BAD LUCK SPREADS AROUND

Obi Amane San Obi

A Bird was singing in a tree
And quite close by a Tortoise lay.
Some footprints let the Tortoise see
A Hunter had just passed that way.

"Be quiet, Bird", the Tortoise called.
But it was all to no avail.
The noisy shouting quite appalled
The senses of a far-off Snail.

The Snail crawled up to warn the Bird,
But he arrived there just too late.
For then the Hunter's shot was heard.
The three all met the same sad fate.

The wounded Bird dropped to the ground,
Near to where the Tortoise lay
Beside the Snail. All three were found.
The Hunter carried them away.

The poor Snail knew his life would end
When by the Hunter he was found.
He died because he helped a friend.
So bad luck spreads to all around.

BEWARE OF A FRIEND

Suro Wo Yonko

A small Bird needed some money one day.
He asked his friend Bushbuck: "How can I pay?"
"Go to the Lion", suggested his friend,
"For he has plenty of money to lend".

"When will you repay me?", the Lion cried.
"When I'm grown up", the young Bird replied.
So each year the Lion set out to see
If the Bird had grown to maturity.

20

Whenever the Lion spoke of the debt
The small Bird would say: "I'm not grown up yet."
The Lion was puzzled by the small Bird,
But knew that he had to keep to his word.

The Bushbuck then promised he would reveal
The Bird's cunning trick for part of the deal.
The Lion used a tape to find the size
Of all the small Birds. He got a surprise.

His measurements showed that the Birds did not grow.
The Bushbuck knew all the time this was so!
The Lion in anger declared a war
If the debt was not paid next year or before.

Relations, in panic, gave the Bird cash,
So the Lion gave the Bushbuck his dash.
The Bird saw the Lion, to offer thanks
And was tempted to play one of his pranks.

He knew that the Bushbuck had no teeth on top,
So food that was hard was awkward to chop.
The Bird took cola nuts and made his call.
The Bushbuck could not enjoy them at all.

We all have secrets that others don't know.
To live a good life, bad points must not show.
A friend knows your weaknesses, though they be few.
Beware of a friend who has turned against you.

1

1. The Bushbuck (owansane) is a large antelope-like animal with no upper teeth. It is traditionally held that before this incident, the other animals respected the Bushbuck. But when the Bird's trick revealed his secret (that he had no upper teeth) they no longer feared him. (Cola nuts, which are very hard to chew, are a common gift when visiting.)

LET LOVE PREVAIL

Odonson

There was a young man who found that his wife
Was tempted by gossips to lead a bad life.
He asked her in earnest to mend her ways.
Marriage is taken too lightly these days.

"Because you receive chop money each day,
(Which is not for you to fritter away)
When I bring bush meat or fruit home to you
You should return all the balance that's due.

"You must find life's an easy affair
As I meet all bills; so please do your share.
Then I can put cash away for the day
When school fees are due and I have to pay.

"Before I was married, my friends would come in
For whisky, but now it's illicit gin.
Pay no attention when your friends advise
A divorce - for they are telling you lies.

"With patience and time, our wounds can all mend.
Life need not be bitter up to the end.
We should not fear Death. He comes without fail.
Be honest, my wife, and let love prevail."

1. Chop money is the daily cash allocation from husband to wife to meet household expenses. Disputes over chop money are a common cause of matrimonial quarrels.
2. Bush meat refers to game caught in the forest. The husband may feel his wife should return part of the chop money if he provides such additional items.

WHAT IS WRONG

Eden Asem Aba Na

What makes you want to run away?
What has happened to you today?
Remember Satan can destroy,
Only your flesh, so there is joy
Your soul is quite beyond his reach.
Have you the faith the Gospels preach?
To keep Gethsemane in mind
Is good advice for all mankind.
Christ told Peter: "Thou shalt deny me thrice,
This very night, ere the cock crows twice."

TECHNOLOGY

(Please see the explanatory note on page 36)

Sua Humu

Lagos to Accra in less than an hour.
This shows us all the jet engine's power.
Dreaded malaria need never kill,
If you remember to swallow your pill.
Great buildings rise up where once there was bush,
With cranes lifting loads as bulldozers push.
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THE DRIVER'S LAMENT

Owusu se m'amma

Owusu quarrelled with a friend
About a boundary's location.
So to the Chief he had to send,
Demanding sheep in compensation.

Owusu drove a mammy truck.
He gained the sheep, but lost his luck.

His friend tapped palm wine and his pot
Solaced those with cares to drown.
Owusu stopped there quite a lot
And stole wine on the way to town.

Beside the pot, his wallet dropped;
It held his licence and his cash.
Police checks meant he soon was stopped,
And had no money for a dash.

His friend found what Owusu dropped.
The driver's wallet held ten pounds.
The cash he took, but there he stopped,
And went on with his daily rounds.

He took the wallet to the Chief;
He was no mean or common thief.

Owusu reported his loss to the Chief,
And learned that his wallet was found with relief.
But as only the licence had been left
He loudly accused the finder of theft.

He demanded with wrath the finder's name.
It was his enemy. Great was his shame.
A wise old man came up and said
"Be calm, Owusu, bow your head.

Notes

1

2

3

4

"Whenever a driver's licence is lost.
He must search all around, whatever the cost.
At home, in the lorry park, search the lot.
But should it be found at the wine tapper's pot?"

If you are offended in quarrels with a friend,
Although revenge is splendid, be moderate to the end.

1. This implies that as a result of litigation in a traditional court, Owusu was asking for sheep to compensate him for his loss.
2. A mammy truck is a covered lorry carrying both goods and passengers and is the normal method of rural transport.
3. The wine tapper's pot is left unattended and is at the mercy of any passer by.
4. The police may "ease the passage" of travellers after accepting cash - locally known as a "dash".



FANNING THE FIRE

Mesuro wo gya mu fite

A hunter called Ampon needed a wife.
He did not enjoy his solitary life.

A woman called Mansa, married five years,
Was not blessed with children. Great were her fears.
They both came to a wake-keeping one night.
They met, and then fell in love at first sight.

Now Mansa knew of her husband's affair
With another woman. It made her dare
To try out a wicked murderous plot
In which her hated husband would be shot.
She told Ampon to come and bring his gun
And wait in hiding for the setting sun.

FATE IS JUST

Nkrabea nmi Kwatibea

Notes
1

Her husband came late from his farm that night
And sat by the fire. It was not bright.
Mansa fanned the flames as hard as she could;
Soon there was a blaze in the smouldering wood.
The flames lit the scene as though it were day.
The husband sat down. Mansa went away.

Ampon is hidden behind a big tree
With his gun. As soon as he can see
The husband's face lit up by the flames
He picks up his gun and carefully aims.
They take the body and dispose of it,
Throwing it deep in an old mining pit.

Mansa told people her husband was lost
Whilst his body rotted where it was tossed.
His funeral was held. Then Mansa said
That she and Ampon planned to be wed.
They were quite happy together at first,
But soon it was plain their marriage was cursed.

She remained barren, and Ampon could tell
That in his new home, all was not well.
He came back quite late from hunting one night,
And seated himself in the fire light.
Mansa fanned the fire, to make the flames blaze
And Ampon remembered her cunning ways.

He cried: "Is someone hiding behind the big tree?
Is your lover hoping he can kill me?
I suspect you, Mansa, when you fan the flames
For then I remember your devilish games.
The threat of vengeance hangs over my head.
I shall not have peace until I am dead."

1. Ashanti (formerly part of the Gold Coast) has many disused gold mining pits

An old man and his only nephew dwelled
In a region where cocoa farms excelled.
The uncle supplied all the nephew's needs.
His nephew responded with evil deeds.

The nephew was lazy and gambled a lot.
He passed all his time at the wine tapper's pot.
He spent lots of money and got into debt
Which the uncle could neither forgive nor forget.

With such provocations, the uncle complained.
The nephew got mad and could not be restrained.
He beat the old man and caused him great harm.
Yet he never would work on the cocoa farm!

The old man fell ill and and left to be cured
For life on the farm could not be endured.
When he felt sure Death was on his track
He sent for his nephew to fetch him back.

The nephew ordered a coffin and drink
For the funeral. He rejoiced to think
That his uncle's farm would soon be his own
(Though the cocoa trees were now overgrown).

The nephew tried to keep callers away,
But by chance he was out gambling one day
When an old woman came to bring some good news
Of a herbalist. There was nothing to lose.

The uncle took treatment and found at length
He slowly recovered his former strength.
The next year the nephew was very sick.
He rapidly worsened. His death was quick.

2

The uncle suggested how they could save
The cost of a coffin for the new grave.
They had the one that the nephew had bought,
Whose selfish plans had thus come to nought.

The nephew who thought of nothing but wealth
Now lay in a coffin bought by himself.
It will pay a man not to put his trust
In the fruits of evil, for fate is just.

1. In Ashanti there was a system of maternal inheritance, under which a man is inherited by his nephew (sister's son) in precedence to his own children.
2. According to family custom, the uncle could not send his nephew away, as he was the only heir.



A HISTORY OF ASHANTI

Asante Abakosem Bi

When Osei Tutu came to rule
Down from heaven came the Golden Stool.
There was planted a mighty tree.
It grew, and so did Kumasi.

Think of Okomfo Anokye,
He who planted the mighty tree.
With passing years, the tree has died.
See the hospital, Ghana's pride.

The omen's were bad, the oracles said,
The spirits need a warrior's head.
Tweneboa said: "My life is done."
The battle was fought. Ashanti won.

Ashanti strength grew from day to day.
None could stand in their warriors' way.
The Ashanti's found they could refute
The Denkyiras' claim for their tribute.

Anokye drove his sword in the ground.
There to this day it can be found.
He sought to cure death, but did not succeed.
He served the state in its time of need.

Opoku Ware was the next to rule.
(To honour him there is a famous school.)
In thirty three battles he fought and won.
The fame of Ashanti had now begun.

The Ashanti soldier said with his last breath,
Better go on to face certain death
Than run away and face disgrace
And dishonour the Ashanti race.

The British came. They did not last.
In one man's life their rule has passed.
Yaa Asantewaa rallied the nation
In its time of tribulation.

Otumfuo returned. Let us rejoice.
The Ashanti people have a voice.
Let us pause to pour libation
To the spirit of the Ashanti nation.

The incidents and people mentioned played a significant role in the history of Ashanti.

THE WISE OLD WOMAN

Moma Yen Kobisa Aberewa

There was a proud Chief whose slightest desire
Was dealt with whatever it might require.
The Omens were bad; the Oracles said
That Fate would be hard till old women were dead.

"Kill all old women. Let no one be spared"
Was the Chief's order. A young man despaired.
He could not kill his own Mother. That night,
They fled to the bush and hid out of sight.

On one festive day, the Chief was obsessed
With how a great man was properly dressed.
"Capture a lion and skin it alive."
Many men died, but the beast did arrive.

The fresh lion skin was wrapped round the Chief,
Whose pride in the garment was to be brief.
The skin set hard with the heat of the day.
The Chief was trapped and could not get away.

The skin get getting harder and stronger.
The Chief could not endure it much longer.
"Whoever saves me will get a reward."
Many men failed and were put to the sword.

The young man went to his Mother that night.
She told him at once how to set things right.
"Pour water over the skin and the Chief.
The skin will become as soft as a leaf."

The man told the Chief: "My Mother lives;
Now listen to the advise that she gives.
For no one else knows just what to do.
She says "pour water", which will release you.

The Chief escaped from the trap he had made,
Because his order had been disobeyed.
Because the old woman still lived in the wood
She was able to save him when no one else could.

Arrogant pride can soon lead to grief,
But a wise old woman can save a great Chief.
When disputes are deadlocked, do not think twice.
Consult an old woman and heed her advice.

The advice of old women is very much respected.

THE BARIKESE DAM

(Please see the explanatory note on page 36)

Will water still be here for us to drink
When dry harmattan dust begins to fall?
The engineers have heard our urgent call.
With sweating men and bulldozers they sink
Concrete foundations and lay plans to link
Kumasi to the dam. The rock-fill wall
And concrete towers make dwarfs of us all.
Yet they exist because the brain can think.

There where the Offin flows are blown up trees.
A wilderness to be changed to a lake,
Stretching away as far as the eye sees.
From it our daily water we will take.
Yes, fifty million gallons every day.
Hard to achieve, but very quick to say.

The Barikese dam was built in the 1960's to improve the water supply for Kumasi, the capital of Ashanti and Ghana's second city.

The harmattan is a dusty wind that blows from the Sahara desert during the worst part of the dry season (December-January)

OVERSEAS LIFE

Aburokyire Abrabo

Mother, Oh Mother, your son has made a terrible journey.
Now I am stranded overseas.
Darkness has encircled me.
There can be no witness to what I endure alone.

An unsuccessful mission is a disgrace,
So how can we come home?
If you fail, no child is named after you.
Death is preferable to shame.

Everyone has reasons for leaving his native land.
Some travel to study, or to marry.
Some go as tourists, some look for jobs.
Some seek medical treatment.

Some return, but others die overseas.
What a tragedy that is.
Why should this be?
It is our individual destiny.
Life has its bad times we have to pass through.

The cold weather gets so bitter men lose their senses.
Poverty, family problems, illness and accidents
All aggravate the stranger's sad state.
Married or single, life is not pleasant in a foreign land.
Bad company, gossip, rumours, misunderstandings,
So many troubles could be settled by speaking to the family.
There is but one consolation:
Namely that travel brings wisdom to men.

Spirits of our Ancestors,
Gods of our Ancestors,
Watch over our brothers abroad.
Let them return home safely.
To live in Europe is to understand this lament.

SUCH IS LIFE

Abrabo

It is experience that makes
Us wiser from our past mistakes.

A friend of mine was deep in debt.
He asked my help so he could get
Post-ponement of the time to pay,
Enabling him to run away.
I had no cash to meet his bail,
So I was led off into jail!

It is experience that makes
Us wiser from our past mistakes.

Two friends, by trading, had grown rich.
The elder had eye trouble which
Led the young friend some herbs to find
To treat the eyes - and make them blind.
The young friend acted in this way
To take the cash and run away.

It is experience that makes
Us wiser from our past mistakes.

A friend called at my house one day
And asked me for a place to stay.
But he had come for wicked ends.
At night, he woke and let in friends
Who stole my clothes and goods from me.
In fighting them, I sprained my knee.

It is experience that makes
Us wiser from our past mistakes.

PRIDE HAS ITS PRICE

Ahantan Nye

There was a man who was very proud.
He had no time for the common crowd.
His wife and children were also aloof;
Friends never sought refuge under his roof.

He had to attend a function one day.
In which an important role he would play.
His very best cloth was to be worn,
But to his horror, he found it was torn.

There was in the house no needle or thread,
So another plan came into his head.
An itinerant tailor lived next door:
An ordinary man, the father of four.

The proud man sent out his little boy,
To play at the tailor's house with a toy.
The boy was instructed to make a tear
And borrow a needle for the repair.

The boy ripped his cloth, and asked for the loan
Of needle and thread for him to take home.
But the tailor, not knowing of the plot,
Insisted on mending the tear on the spot.

The tailor was very surprised to find
He received no thanks for being so kind.
"My father told me", the little boy said,
"That I must come home with needle and thread."

"My boy," said the tailor, "go home and say
No man can keep to himself in this way.
At times we all need the help of our friends.
It does not pay to pursue selfish ends."

To live in peace we must try all we can,
To fear our Gods and respect every man.
Avoiding your friends is almost a vice.
Man can live alone, but pride has its price.

An itinerant tailor walks through the villages and towns carrying a sewing machine on his head, and all the local news and gossip on his tongue. He uses his machine in customers' houses.



MISFORTUNE BRINGS ITS OWN REWARD

Amma Saa a Ankye Nye

There lived in a village a wise old Chief
Who strongly adhered to a strange belief.
Bad luck is something we all can afford,
For misfortune brings us its own reward.

A rich man died in the village one day.
His wealth was shared the traditional way.
Each nephew, but one, had a good cocoa farm.
The odd one out had been left some oil palm!

This nephew had helped the uncle a lot,
Yet a palm-wine farm was all that he got.
He took his complaint to the wise old Chief
Who, as always, told him to welcome his grief.

But the nephew, still feeling very upset,
Instructed a palm-wine tapper he met
To fell all the trees and collect all the wine.
But then he found out his uncle's design.

The cutlass blade broke a jar which was found
To have been buried just under the ground.
The nephew recalled what the Chief had told
When they found nine more pots - all filled with gold!

The Chief lived happily until one day
Misfortune happened to come his own way.
He lost the friendship of some whom he ruled
When a local Chief had to be de-stooled.

The day had arrived for celebrations.
The Chief was about to pour libations.
Palm-wine, as usual, was being passed round.
The pot dropped and broke. Wine spilt on the ground.

A dog lapped the wine, then fell as though shot.
So the Chief was saved from a poisoner's plot.
He looked at the dog and gave thanks to the Lord.
Misfortune had brought him its own reward.

The stool is the symbol of authority of a Chief.

Before drinking, a small libation is ritually poured on the ground as an offering to the ancestors.

COMING TO GHANA

I came to Ghana from the winter snows
Of cold but festive England in December.
Yet now it seems I hardly can remember

The touch of frost that bites at ears and toes;
The scarf and hat and muffler when one goes
Into the street. No need here to worry
About the time, or if one should hurry.
Here is the quiet peace the mystic knows.

Far from the diesel fumes, the warming sun
Makes gorgeous flowers bloom amongst the trees.
Here I can see a gentle lizard run
And sometimes feel a welcome cooling breeze.
Life is unhurried. As day turns into night

The crickets chirp and drive away the light.

This sonnet has no direct connection with Ko Nimo, but reflects the author's feelings on arriving in Ashanti, where the partnership with Ko Nimo started.

THE TECHNOLOGY SONG

The University of Science and Technology in Kumasi has the local nickname of "Technology". If you ask a taxi driver in Kumasi to take you to Technology, there will be no doubt about where you want to go.

The University has the aim of promoting technology. Could this aim be promoted by a Ko Nimo song?

To find out, I wrote the words to the Technology song (shown in full on page 19) and Ko Nimo wrote the music. The traditional music that he usually plays cannot be written down in this way.

As far as I know, this experiment is the only example of Ko Nimo writing western style music to English words. He himself always sings in Twi.

The Barikese Dam is another massive piece of modern technology, providing clean drinking water to the inhabitants of Kumasi. The sonnet on page 29 was written after a visit to the dam, accompanied by Ko Nimo. So, like "Technology", "The Barikese Dam" is not a traditional Ashanti Ballad - but it is very relevant to modern day Ashanti.

Handwritten musical score for two songs. The first song is titled "Technology" and the second is "La-gos to gy". Both are written in a Western staff notation with treble and bass clefs. The lyrics are written below the notes. Chords are indicated by letters like F, C7, F6, F+, Bb6, and F. The music consists of a single melodic line with a simple harmonic accompaniment.

Technology
 Technology

La-gos to gy
 Where would we be without Techno lo-gy

Handwritten musical score for the song "Accra in less than an hour". It features a single melodic line with a simple harmonic accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the notes. Chords are indicated by letters like F7, Bb6, and C7.

Accra in less than an hour This shows us all the jet engines

Handwritten musical score for the song "power Dreaded ma-la-ri-a need never kill". It features a single melodic line with a simple harmonic accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the notes. Chords are indicated by letters like F6, Bb6, F, C, F7, Bb6, and C7.

power Dreaded ma-la-ri-a need never kill if you re-

Handwritten musical score for the song "mem-ber to swallow your pill". It features a single melodic line with a simple harmonic accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the notes. Chords are indicated by letters like C7, Gm, C7, F, F7, Bb, Am6, and Abdim.

mem-ber to swallow your pill

Handwritten musical score for the second system of the song "mem-ber to swallow your pill". It features a single melodic line with a simple harmonic accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the notes. Chords are indicated by letters like Gm, C7, G7, and C7. There are first and second endings marked with '1' and '2'.

Ghana

WEST AFRICA

