

THE INFLUENCE OF KWAME NKRUMAH'S PAN- AFRICANISM ON GHANA'S LIVE SOUND REINFORCEMENT SCENE (1950s – 1970s): RALF QUIST IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

In recent times, there has been an interest in sound studies and how sound affects individuals and performers. This interest has led to researchers working on different aspects of sound studies. One of such interests of sound studies has to do with theories and philosophies. This article looks at how one theory, Pan Africanism as propagated by Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, and its interpretation helped shape the live sound industry in Ghana under the year under review. This article further looks into the rise of Raff Quist amps and its decline. Finally, it suggests how Pan Africanism can help develop the live sound industry especially in Ghana.

Keywords: Pan Africanism, Live sound reinforcement, Kwame Nkrumah, Live performance.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Amusan (2010) the genesis of Pan-Africanism can be traced to the events of 1887 in Boston that transformed into the Free African Society and the free African Lodge. The idea of Africans coming together for a common good was muted around this time although the idea has been around since the days of slavery. The Pan-African movement was formed towards the end of the 19th century. The idea of Pan Africanism intensified around 1919 and 1945 where five Pan-Africanist conferences were organized by W.E.B. Du Bois who is regarded as “The father of pan-Africanism” Amusan (2010). Nkrumah (1970) states that “The expression of ‘Pan-Africanism’ did not come into use until the beginning of the twentieth century when Henry Sylvester-William of Trinidad, and William Edward Burghardt DuBois of the United States of America, both of African descent, used it at several Pan-African Congresses which were mainly attended by scholars of African descent of the New World. (p132) .this new term Pan Africanism has become the watch word for most Pan Africanist and this has culminated into different theories of its relevance in nation building in particular and the black race in general.

Researchers such as Roger (1955), Nima (1961) Okon (2014), Girma (2015) Okhonmina (2009); Olaosebikan (2011); Panford (1996); Biney (2008); Adogamhe (2008); Afari-Gyan (1991). Have all studied Pan Africanism looking at the idea from the nation building perspective. Although all these researchers have written a lot on pan Africanism, research on the idea of Nkrumah's Pan Africanism on live sound practices and how it helped engineers such as Raff Quist is none existent and it's a gap that this paper hopes to bridge. Using interviews and literature review, this paper hopes to throw light on how the idea of Nkrumah's Pan Africanism helped with the assembling of amps and other live sound equipment and how this helped to grow the live sound industry in Ghana under the year under review.

PAN AFRICANISM IN GHANA FROM 50s TO 70S

William (2005) defined Pan-Africanism as “A global movement to unite Africa and its people against racial oppression and exploitation associated with European hegemony” (p.173). Other African Scholars such as M'bayo (2004), Okhonmina (2009) are of the view that Pan-Africanism involves efforts to mobilize continental Africans against colonialism and racism as well as recognizing the concept as the philosophical grounding for the unity of Africa through the African Union. Kodjoe (1986) keeps it simple by describing Pan Africanism as the acceptance of oneness of an African people and the commitment for the betterment of all people of African descent. However, the African Union (A.U) which is the mother body of African continent states defines Pan-Africanism as

“An ideology and movement that encourages the solidarity of Africans worldwide. It is based on the belief that unity is vital to economic, social and political progress and aims to unify and uplift people of African descent. The ideology asserts that the fates of all African peoples and countries intertwined. At its core Pan-Africanism is a belief that African peoples, both on the continent and in the diaspora, share not merely a common history, but a common destiny” (AU Echo 2013:1).

The 1945 Pan African conference was of particular importance because some of the later nationalist in Africa participated and it influenced their work towards Western colonialism. According to Davies (1989), some of the participants from Africa were Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Obafemi Awolowo H.O. Davies who were very influential in their various countries' independence struggles.

Although Pan-Africanism did not start from Nkrumah, he was the embodiment of the term as Marzui (2004) is of the view that. “Nkrumah's greatest bequest to Africa was the agenda of continental unification. No one else has made the case for continental integration more forcefully, or with a greater sense of drama than Nkrumah”(p.22).

Since Pan-Africanism is a broad word Wallestein (1961) is of the view that, Pan-Africanism addresses three major issues: “first as an avenue for the Black Americans and West Indies to fight against racial discrimination and to trace their roots back to Africa; second, it was used to support the political agitations of Africa nationalists immediately after the World War II; and thirdly, it was used as a weapon to fight against racial subjugation in the southern African states and to establish a supranational state. However Nkrumah (1963) added economic liberation to Pan Africanism when he stated that “African leaders realized quite early that the nominal political independence of the continent should be backed by genuine economic independence to bring about sustainable economic and social development in Africa”. He further stated that the new leadership had the urgent task of establishing inclusive institutions for sustainable economic development.

However, from my correspondence it was clear that to the average Ghanaian¹, Pan Africanism had nothing to do with Africans in the diaspora but rather the coming together of the nation Ghana. This interpretation of Pan Africanism runs deep even to the extent that some Ghanaians decided to change their western name to take on an African name as a way to show their Ghanaians. As Appiah- Menka² (2010) who changed his name from Samuel Stephen Appiah to Akenten Appiah-Menka as he states “The younger generation had been possessed by the nationalist rhetoric of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah why use Christian name or “Whitman's” name hence I changed my name”(p.18). In an interview with Jane Amankwah³, she states “for us, we understood it as a way to develop Ghana and not to help other Africans to unite and prosper that is why we were not happy when Nkrumah gave our money to Guinea”. To the average Ghanaian, Nkrumah was the messiah to take Ghanaians to the “promised land” not to unify the whole Africa. As Raff Quist discusses Kwame Nkrumah he states that “is our father, teacher, our brother, our friend, indeed our very lives, for without him we would no doubt have existed, but we would not have lived; there would have been no hope of a cure for our sick souls, no taste of glorious victory after a lifetime of suffering”⁴

To most ordinary Ghanaian under the year under review, Pan-Africanism has to do more with the economic liberation and the ability for the African to achieve whatever height without the influence of the West. In an interview with Ralf Quist he stated “when I returned from England, Ghana had already gotten their independence and the spirit of Pan Africanism was everywhere. For us, Nkrumah was the embodiment of Pan Africanism. Pan Africanism was all about what the Ghanaian can achieve economically without the help of the West”. In another interview with Osei Tutu he supported Ralf statement but he added, “As for Nkrumah we literally worshiped him as we saw him as the embodiment of African liberation especially economically. For us, it was not only philosophical but we saw the practicality of his Pan-Africanism because we saw the drastic changes in all the facets of our lives that was why we composed songs for him”.

NKRUMAH'S CONTRIBUTION TO HIGHLIFE MUSIC AND ARTS IN GENERAL FROM 1950'S TO THE 70'S

After independence, the new nation, led by Kwame Nkrumah needed to forge a new identity and a new path. The first problem of the new nation was how to unite the whole nation which is made up of different ethnic groups which had their own traditions and ideals. As Addo (1999) states underlying the process of nation building in

¹ Most of my correspondents were in their youth during the independence of Ghana.

² He was a deputy minister under the second republic of Ghana

³ She used to go to C.P.P organized events.

⁴ From an interview I had with Raff Quist

Africa is a problem that has haunted virtually all post-independence African leaders including Nkrumah. The problem can be stated as; how can we unite a nation of immensely diverse groups without resorting to repression and dictatorship? In view of the above, Nkrumah settled on the arts, especially highlife music as one of the ways to unite the nation. Nkrumah used certain mediums to unite the nation and one of such mediums is the Arts.

Nkrumah promoted country wide cultural festivals by establishing the Regional Arts Councils, and Ghana Dance Ensemble. Through these he promoted and encouraged the teaching of Traditional African music in schools and departments in Universities. Through this, he set up The School of Music and Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. According to Yankah (2012) Nkrumah sort to Africanize arts-music and Western type theatre through setting up a National Symphony Orchestra and the National Drama Studio and supporting composers such as Ephraim Emu and Philip Gbeho, Mawere Opoku, Efua Sutherland and among others to see how best the Ghanaian and the African can showcase more of its culture through the lenses of a National Theatre Movement. As a president, he endorsed numerous state and para-statal highlife bands, cultural troupes, and concert party groups in their activities. These groups toured the various communities of the country to perform in local languages so as to help spread the message of good citizenship and other themes they found interesting and worthy of sharing.

Nkrumah projected highlife using tools such foreign field trips, highlife competitions, educational scholarships to help project highlife. Nkrumah's love to develop the arts propelled him to give scholarships to artists and bands such as Teddy Osei, Eddie Quansah, and Ebo Taylor, to study music at the Eric Guilder School of Music in London. He further sent bands such as Broadway, George Lee's Messengers and the Farmers Council Band for a three month course in traditional drumming and dancing at the Ghana Arts Council for three months course. (Collins, 2009, Yirenkyi, 2018).

Collins (2009) outlined three main reasons why Nkrumah used highlife as a mobilization tool;

1. First despite the name 'High life' it was actually the product of the urban masses and rural people involved with the cash crop economy precisely the layer of society that C.P.P. drew its support from.
2. Highlife is historically a product of the Akan's, Gas and to some extent the Ewe. Being a trans-ethnic art form compared to traditional ethnic music and dance, it was the perfect home grown music for projecting national rather than tribal ideas.
3. The popularity of Highlife in other African countries, highlife had become to some extent Pan African and could therefore project Ghana on the continental level.

To Nkrumah, the arts were a very important tool for national development and unity. During the time of the independence struggles, highlife had permeated all the levels of the Gold Coast society. Highlife performers and concert parties had galvanized support for Nkrumah through their music and plays. Collins (2009) states that "Highlife artists like E.K. Nyame, Kwaa Mensah, and E.T Mensah released pro-independence records and played at CPP functions (p. 1). In the years leading up to 1957, the C.P.P. employed highlife to mobilize broad publics and perpetuate its popularity among diverse groups of people (Plageman, 2013). In an interview with Slim Bright he states "Eiii C.P.P rally was like a music jamboree you know, the bands used to play for hours before the real rally would start. In fact as a young boy, that was one of the events I used to look forward to and it ignited my passion to learn music to the highest level". Bands like the Tempos international band were not only active during the political campaigns but recorded pro-C.P.P. Highlife's songs with their brilliant blend of highlife and Jazz and the use of sophisticated up-to-date imported instruments to play African songs became the Sound Symbol" (Collins. 2009. p.91).

In an interview with Slim Bright he remembers so well the national dance band competitions which were held in preparation for the Queen's visits. He narrates "during 1959, in preparation for Queen Elizabeth's visit to Ghana then, a national dance band competition was held. This was to bring out the best band to play for a banquet of the Queen. The competitions were started from the regional level. During those days Broadway, of which I was a member, had become so busy with engagements that we divided the band into two. The original Broadway band which was led by Sam Obot an Igbo man was based in Takoradi and the second band were called Revelers which was led by Sam Lartey an Akuapim man and was based in Kumasi. One Agyapong who was the owner of Prempeh cinema asked the Revelers band to be stationed in Kumasi so that they can play for him. During the regional level of the national dance band competitions, we (Broadway band) won at Takoradi and our sister band Revelers also won in Kumasi. We had to come to Accra for the final. The competitions were designed in such a way that each band was at liberty to play their own music but the Yaa Amponsah tune was compulsory. We were

allowed to rearrange the Yaa Amponsah tune. I remember in the final, there were about five bands. I remember very well our first song was “Ghana y1 adehye man” which was originally composed by Kakaiku. My son, when it was time for our Revelers band to play, it was not easy, they played very well to the extent that it even scared us. But you know “Panyin de panyin”. We won the competition and the Broadway dance band became known as “the Queen's own band” because we played for the queen at the state banquet hall.

The Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC), a state-owned company located in Kanda was established in 1964 to promote the arts. According to Tamakloe (2013) The Company produced Ghanaian movies such as *I Told You So*, *You Hide Me*, *Do Your Own Thing*, *They Call It Love*, *Struggle for Zimbabwe*, and many others. Owusu-Poku (2021) states, “Apart from film production which was the core operation of the agency, there were also music recordings alongside. Bill O’Neill, Canadian sounds expert, established the music recording section as part of the activities of the sound department under the directive of President Nkrumah” (p.8). As a new nation, it is clear that Nkrumah not only saw the arts as a form of entertainment but rather a tool to articulate what it meant to a Ghanaian. Furthermore, The C.P.P used the arts as a political tool to mobilize the nation towards independence.

The support for the arts by Nkrumah was to foster national unity. I posit that all of this investment in the arts was due to the underlying belief of a new identity of a new nation. The mantra “The Black man is capable of managing his own affairs” runs deep in the socio-economic fabric of the Ghanaian society and to the ordinary Ghanaian, that was Pan-Africanism.

Live sound reinforcement and Pan Africanism the year under review.

Human beings have tried as much as possible to reach sizable audiences using different mediums. In its earliest inceptions, humans tried to use props such as nose masks and architecture to achieve this purpose (Schwertly, 2014 and Vovolis, 2011). As time went on, singers began to train their voices so they could project their voices to reach as many people as possible. The training was so successful that a well-trained singer could produce sounds that could be heard distinctly in a large opera house even over a high level sound from an orchestra (Sundberg, 1977). This type of training and voicing were peculiar in the western classical genre. However, with the inception of popular music in the 1860s, musicians in this genre developed their own style of singing. In an interview with Collins, he stated that “in those early years of pop music, the singers had to train their voice using the chest voice. So what they did was, the males will use a higher register voice which could pierce through the instruments. The genre was mostly American Jazz and blues and the instrument was not as complex as now.

He further went on to suggest that in Ghana, most of the early bands such as E.T. Mensah and the Tempos band and the ballroom bands never focused on the voice. This may be due to the fact that they didn’t have outstanding singers, and most of the singers in the bands couldn’t train to get the high register voices which could cut through the bands.

In view of this challenge, King Bruce formed the Black Birds which were a three member vocal team who will sing in close harmony⁵. This close harmony vocal group was able to somehow overcome the weakness of the voice in the band. In an interview with Collins, he stated that King Bruce was the band that really focused on voices. This practice became the norm in the 50s due to the band's accessibility to amps.

The accessibility of microphones and amps give birth to solo musicians. With the invention and accessibility of microphones, the focus became more of an individual being backed by a band. It now became showmanship with the leader being the lead singer who always had the lead microphone. This tradition has continued till today.

In the Gold Coast from the 1940s to the 1950s, the main amp that was used for amplification was the Vortexion amp which was British made. Kwasi G., et. al. (2022) posited that, The Vortexion amplifier CP20, manufactured in 1937, became an instant hit for public speaking and bands in Ghana. This amplifier, which could also operate from the mains or off a 12V battery and draw some six Amperes with a total output of 15W, became the new trend in sound reinforcement of the 1940s and 1950s bands in the Gold Coast. With the wind of independence blowing in the Gold Coast spearheaded by Kwame Nkrumah and his Convention Peoples’ Party (CPP) and the Pan African spirit which the ordinary Ghanaian understood as the black man can manage his own affair, the quest for home grown technology and solutions to the daily challenges of the nation was of paramount to the political class as well as technicians. One such technician was Ralf Quist. In an interview with him, he stated

⁵ This was from an interview I had with John Collins

“When I came back to Ghana in 1957, the independence movement and the notion that the black man was capable of managing his own affairs was at its peak. So I asked myself, what I can also do since I have been trained as a technician in Britain. So when I returned I was posted at GBC. Over there I started building amps and high end equipment for broadcast such as mixers”.

The amps that were assembled locally became a symbol of independence from foreign technology. He further went on to state “at first, the GBC where the only place that used my amps, so I think word went out that there was a Ghanaian technician who was building amps so one day I was at my workshop at GBC when I had a visitor from Adabraka Methodist Church, their mission was they wanted me to build an amp for them. I did and they were very happy. So Adabraka Methodist Church became the first church that used my amp in Ghana.

Typical Raff Quist setup

Borgerson (2003) postulated that public address systems (P.A) are used for the production of speeches and recorded music in buildings and institutions. Public address systems usually consist of a distribution of microphones, amplifiers and loudspeakers. It is used purposely to address a large public gathering, such as announcements in large auditoriums, seminar presentations, and lectures (Gyebi-Tweneboah et.al. 2022). Although Raff was interested in anything electronics, his main focus was building P.A. for the use of bands and other purposes they were needed for. In an interview with Raff he stated as follows

“Those days, my setup consisted of a mixer, an amp, and speakers which I built locally. My mixer was usually 3 to four channels and one thing that I did that was very unique was, I usually made the frequencies for the 1st channel specifically for guitar and the other input for microphones. This was so unique that the bands literally only needed my setup and they are good to go”.

This evolution helped the band both economically and time saving because they didn’t have to buy a separate amp for the guitar for the bands. He further stated, “I built custom amps and speakers to power the Accra sports stadium during a concert organized by Faisal Helwani and it was such a success I was so proud of what I accomplished”. The building of custom sound was what was practiced in the West with sound engineers like Charlie Watkins who is considered the father of British P.A. and Bill Hanley who is considered as the father of festival sound (Coules, 2021). These custom built P.A. were technically not for sale but were designed for specific events. In an interview with Casely Hayford⁶ he states “In fact, it was this setup that made my interest in sound engineering skyrocket and I decided to go close to the man to learn from him”

The rise of Raff Quist P.A

As already documented by Plageman (2013) night life was both popular in the cities and also in the hinterlands of the then Gold Coast. These phenomena, however, presented entertainers with a new challenge of reaching more audiences with their performance (Gyebi-Tweneboah, et. al. 2022) these phenomena continued into the independent Ghana.

According Mr. Osei Tutu, “we used to go on ⁷trek for about 3 months playing all over the country with our band” With the inception of independence and with Nkrumah idea of liberating Ghana from neo colonialism, big band dance bands adopted African rhythms and fashion as Slim Bright puts it “We used to wear suite with our tie just like the whites did but with Nkrumah’s idea of Pan Africanism and the promotion of our culture and national unity, we started wearing ⁸fugu when we performed. We went further to incorporate traditional Ghanaian dance whenever we played”. The gradual change of appearance of highlife music both rhythmically and esthetically meant the live sound equipment that was being used would have to change from the Vortexion amps to locally assembled equipment. According to Zapp Mallet⁹, “in the early 60s most bands in Ghana started using the Raff Quist P.A equipment. He further went on to say “I remember very well people like E.T Mensah used to really use it and I used to repair them for him whenever there was a problem”. Slim Bright further states that “we at Uhuru international band also switched from using the Vortexion amp to using Raff P.A. because all the bands were using it. Moreover unlike the Vortexion amps which sometimes had issues with spare parts, since Raff assembled his equipment locally, the parts were readily available and whenever there was a problem he would fix it himself”. One major advantage that Raff Quist had over the other P.A. equipment was its cleanness

⁶ He is a sound engineer who practices from the 70s to date

⁷ That was the term used in Ghana for touring

⁸ Is a tradition dress from the Northern part of Ghana.

⁹ Was a bands man and also did electronic repairs in to late 60s

of sound and its ability not to distort as the other P.A. were. The use of home grown equipment was symbolic to the fact that the black man is now managing his own affairs which was the mantra of the day. The ingenuity of Raff Quist's manufacturing did not only end with P.A. According to Raff Quist "when I came back from Britain, I was posted to G.B.C. over there they had a workshop. G.B.C wanted to build studios so I was tasked to build both the amps and the mixer. All the mixers and the amps that were used were built by me in the workshop right here in Ghana. My workshop was so impressive that dignitaries visited me at the workshop. One famous dignitary that visited me was the Duke of Edinburgh when he visited Ghana in 1959. He came to my workshop with Kwame Nkrumah and must I say, I was so proud to be an African."

The setup of live sound reinforcement equipment were not so different from what was happening in the 50s though. As Gyebi-Tweneboah et.al. (2022) have already stated "the basic setup was the amplifier, with two speakers and a microphone. However one distinct feature of Raff's equipment was the addition of mixers. This was a tremendous leap from the 50s where the P.A was amp and speaker. The inventions and assembly of live sound equipment by Raff Quist was not only limited to amp but extended to speakers. As stated by Osei Tutu during an interview "when we go to Raff, we would get everything from him except microphone. He manufactured the things himself so there was no need to go for anything foreign. This helped the bands to perform yearlong because of availability of P.A. throughout the year. According to Zapp Mallet "you see, the Voterxion amps although we're OK, had a small problem, since it was imported in the country by CFAO, sometimes the parts were not readily available. So when the amp of a band becomes faulty, they had to wait till they got the part. This waiting period could be as long as 2 to 3 months. But with Raffe's P.A., the parts were always available so the bands really liked it. The best part was that it was from our own guy so we were very happy" I posit that, to the musicians, the acceptance of Raff amp was a testament to the acceptance of "Pan Africanism" and the general acceptance of Nkrumah's mantra of the 'black man black man is capable of managing his own affairs'. This acceptance also meant that, the philosophy of Pan Africanism as understood by both musicians and Raff Quist, propelled the assembling and usage of live reinforcement by the local bands. This acceptance of Raff Quist amps and his other live reinforcement was underpinned by Nkrumah's Pan Africanism not necessarily the quality.

The fall of Raff Quist P.A.

The manufacturing and assembling of live sound equipment at its peak was spearheaded by Raff Quist. According Raff Quist "A time came in Accra, anything electronics, people were mentioning my name. I supplied live sound equipment not only to the bands, but also to churches, schools and clubs. I even supplied discos lights all over the country including Paul Egans disco". Certain factors contributed to the decline of manufacturing and assembling of local amps and speakers.

The overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah had a tremendous effect on big band highlife music and nightlife in general. Most of the music competitions that were organized for bands ceased. As the demand for live performance dwindled, so did the demand for live sound equipment also dwindled.

Another factor was the over orders that were made on Raff Quist as he puts it "the demand was too much so I couldn't keep up which created a vacuum. Remember during all this time I was still working at GBC as their chief technician so I used to work at my workshop on part time bases although I trained other people. To be honest it even affected my health and I attributed my blindness¹⁰ to the over work and the too much soldering that I did"

The introduction of funk into mainstream Ghanaian contributed to the slow patronage of big band highlife. This led to a change in music taste of most of the middle class in Ghana. This music taste was that, people did not patronize live performance as they used since now they had access to records which sometimes were cheaper than actual concert tickets. This directly affected the live band scene in Ghana which had a direct effect on live sound reinforcement equipment.

According to Raff Quist "The Soul to Soul concert which was held in Ghana tremendously affected my business in a negative sense. This concert hosted some of the best musicians in the world in the 70s. They brought heavy equipment that could even play at the independence square and the stadium. After the show, all the bands wanted equipment which was equivalent to what they brought which I couldn't supply so they started importing the equipment eventually leading to the collapse of my business.

¹⁰ At the time of interview, Raff Quist was blind

The exodus of live musicians in the 70s had a devastating effect on live performances which was a very important part of nightlife. The decline in live performance resulted in a direct decline in demand by the bands for live sound equipment. This affected Raff business in the negative sense.

Moreover, the lack of innovation on the part of the manufacturer made the Raff Amp Obsolete. In an interview with Mr Osei tutu he was of the View that will time in the late 70's and 80s more sophisticated amp which had more channels and even more equalization came into the system but Raff amps still remained the same so we all changed to the more sophisticated ones”

Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have discussed the impact of “Pan Africanism” on the live sound reinforcement industry in Ghana under the year under review. It has been clearly shown in this article that, although the ordinary person misinterprets the term, it had a very positive impact on the live sound and live performance in general. It has also been shown clearly that Nkrumah did just love the arts; he used it as a tool for national development and national unity. The evolution of highlife music rhythmically and aesthetically was very instrumental to the rapid growth of the genre.

It is my view that, government must have a second look at present day highlife. The genre as used by the Nkrumah government should be used now as a way of unifying the nation and not only for its entertainment value.

Lastly, local manufacturing and assembling must be encouraged to help the live sound industry in Ghana which will directly impact the live performance industry.

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