

General News of Wednesday, 13 March 2019

Source: asemapanews.com

Ghanaian composer Prof. Kwabena Nketia is dead



Emeritus Professor Joseph Hanson Kwabena Nketia

Ghanaian ethnomusicologist and composer, Emeritus Professor Joseph Hanson Kwabena Nketia has died.

The renowned writer died at the Legon Hospital in Accra, Wednesday morning after short illness, asemapanews.com can confirm. He was 97.

Kwabena Nketia was born (June 22, 1921) at Mampong, then a little town in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. He received his first musical education, and eventually trained as a teacher at the Presbyterian Training College, Akropong Akwapin – where he later taught and was appointed Acting Principal in 1952.

At 23, a very young age to go abroad in those days, Kwabena, through a Ghanaian government scholarship, went to the University of London to study for a certificate of phonetics at the School of Oriental and African studies.

He went on (1949) to Birbeck College, University of London, and Trinity College of Music, London, to obtain his Bachelor of Arts degree.

In 1958 he came to the United States, attending Columbia University, Julliard School of Music, and Northwestern University to do courses in musicology and composition. After a year in the United States, he returned to Ghana where he rapidly rose through the ranks at the University of Ghana, Legon – from Senior Research Fellow (1962), to Associate Professor, and finally a full professor in 1963. Two years later, he was appointed Director of the Institute of African Studies.

Prof. Nketia is world-renowned as musicologist and composer. He is to African music what Bartok is to

Western music. Of all the interpreters of African music and aesthetics, Nketia sets the pace.

His concept and interpretation of time and rhythmic patterns in Ghanaian and other African folk music were revolutionary, and became standard for researchers and scholars around the world.

For example, Nketia introduced the use of the easier-to-read 6/8 time signature in his compositions as an alternative to the use of duple (2/4) time with triplets used earlier by his mentor, Ephraim Amu. Although this practice undermined Amu's theory of a constant basic rhythm (or pulse) in African music, and generated some debate, Nketia maintained that the constant use of triplets in a duple time signature was misleading.

Today, many scholars around the world have found Nketia's theory very useful in transcribing African music. Prof. Nketia's work to reconcile the melodic and rhythmic elements of folk music with contemporary music spurred a new kind of compositional technique for African musicians and academics, worldwide.

Other pioneering work include the transcription of many Ghanaian folk songs in a manner virtually free from Western influences.

Kwabena Nketia studied with the Rev. Danso, who was a pupil of Ephraim Amu. It is, therefore, no surprise that his earliest choral works were deeply influenced by the pioneering work of Ephraim Amu.

Some of his well-known choral works include Adanse Kronkron, Morbid Asem, Monna N'Ase and Monkafo No. Other vocal works with piano accompaniment include Yaanom Montie, Onipa Dasani Nni Aye, Onipa Beyee Bi, Yiadom Heneba, Mekae Na Woantie, Maforo Pata Hunu, Obarima Nifahene and Asuo Meresen.

He also wrote extensively for Western orchestral instruments, like the flute, violin, cello, percussion and piano. But it is through Nketia's pace-setting works for traditional African instruments that his genius is acclaimed.

He wrote for a variety of combinations of modern and local African instruments. Works in this category include the Builsa Work Song (1960), Dagarti Work Song (1961), At the Cross Roads (1961), Owora (1961), Volta Fantasy (1961) and Contemplation (1961).