



## Journeying with Anumnyam: A Cultural Icon and Catalyst in Ghanaian and Pan-African Artistic Renaissance

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### Abstract

This interview explores the life and contributions of Anumnyam Anumnyam, a prominent Ghanaian cultural figure whose diverse pursuits include music, literature, performance arts, art curation, and cultural activism. Drawing on his collaborations with legendary personalities such as Kofi Ghanaba (Warren Gamaliel Akwei), Anumnyam exemplifies a vibrant blend of traditional African rhythms and modern artistic expressions. His association with Ghanaba, renowned for integrating African talking drums into jazz and spiritual practices, underscores his connection to Ghanaian cultural revival and Pan-Africanist ideals. Anumnyam's multifaceted role extends beyond the arts into national cultural development, demonstrated by his involvement in national committees and his leadership within arts organisations such as the Ghana Association of Writers (GAW) and the Pan-African Writers Association (PAWA). His literary works, which include poetry, children's folktales, and biographical narratives, further confirm his dedication to cultural preservation and innovation. This paper about the interview with Anumnyam analyses his contributions within the wider context of Ghanaian and Pan-African cultural renaissance, emphasising his role as a custodian and innovator who bridges the artistic and political facets of African identity.

**Keywords:** Anumnyam; artistic expression; artistic renaissance; performance arts; talking drum; art curation.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The interview features an exclusive, in-depth conversation with Anumnyam Anumnyam, formerly known as Nii Anum Telfer and also Anum Anumnyam. He is a prominent Ghanaian cultural icon with a diverse career spanning music, literature, performance arts, and cultural activism. This interview marks the second in a series of four dialogues with influential figures in Ghana's performance arts, covering theatre, film, and television, as well as cultural and historical spheres. The inaugural interview was conducted with Ernest Kofi Abbeyquaye, a pioneer in Ghanaian acting and directing, for both theatre and film. The series aims to uncover deeper insights into Ghana's cinema and theatre scenes, going beyond what is typically documented in academic writings.

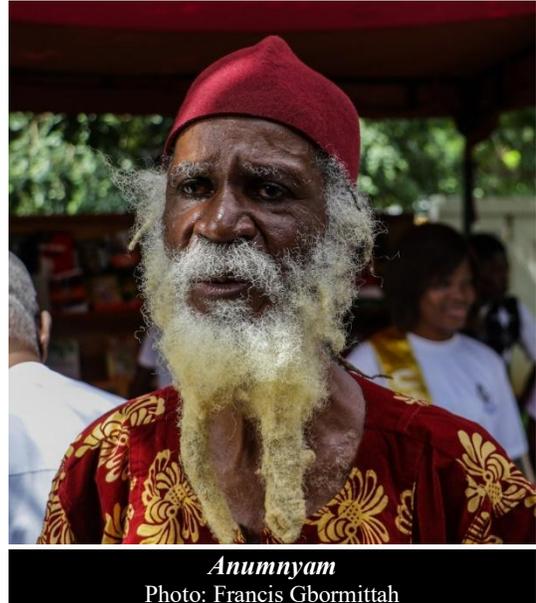
Anumnyam holds an important role in Ghanaian and Pan-African culture as a versatile cultural figure. Through his involvement across multiple disciplines, he demonstrates the interconnectedness of African artistic expression. As an art curator and performer, he creates spaces for dialogue between traditional and contemporary arts, enhancing understanding of African aesthetics and cultural stories. His multidisciplinary approach advances cultural conversations beyond isolated art forms, making him a connector that links diverse artistic expressions within Ghana and across the African continent.

The interview is divided into two sections: the first focuses on Anumnyam's life, work, and various contributions as a prominent Ghanaian cultural icon who embodies the integration of traditional African arts, contemporary artistic expressions, and political awareness. It aims to highlight his role in promoting Ghanaian and Pan-African cultural revival by examining his involvement across different artistic fields and his influence on national development efforts. The second section seeks to explore how Anumnyam's collaborations with legendary figures like Ghanaba have helped preserve and innovate African cultural practices and identity. He shares firsthand insights into Ghanaba's character and artistic vision.

It is hoped that this interview with Anumnyam will act as an academic reference for future research, encouraging further exploration and discussion on Ghanaian music, literature, performing arts, art curation, and cultural activism. The inquiry begins with a biographical overview that highlights key milestones in his career, followed by an outline of the methodological approach. The following sections consist of a combination of a transcribed interview and thematic analysis, ending with a conclusion. This structured format aims to provide a thorough understanding of Anumnyam's contributions, influence, and enduring legacy in the arts.

## 2. BRIEF PROFILE OF ANUMNYAM

Anumnyam received his education at Adisadel College in Cape Coast, Oda Secondary School in Oda, the Ghana Institute of Languages (GIL), and the School of Performing Arts (SPA) at the University of Ghana, both located in Accra. He initially worked with the Ghana Customs, Excise and Preventive Service, where he advanced to the position of Senior Collector before resigning to manage his own enterprise, The Telfer Art Gallery. He also collaborated with Kofi Ghanaba (also known as Guy Warren of Ghana and the Divine Drummer), renowned for pioneering the infusion of traditional African rhythms into jazz. During his tenure as a Customs Officer, he participated in numerous national trade fair planning committees, including the Pan-African Arts and Music Awards, dubbed "PAFAM 1990," the first Pan-African fair for art and culture held in Accra. He also served on the Technical Implementation Committee for the National Theatre Project. As a performing artist, Anumnyam participated in several student productions organised by the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), now the Institute of Film and Television (IFT) at the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC) in Accra. He is a pioneer in the art of mime, a discipline he began exploring as a student. In the literary realm, he was an executive member of the Ghana Association of Writers (GAW) and took part in the first writers' workshop organised by the late Professor Atukwei Okai under GAW during the 1980s. Anumnyam is a founding member of the Pan-African Writers Association (PAWA), established in November 1989 as part of the broader Pan-African movement, an umbrella organisation representing writers' associations across Africa and the diaspora. His published works include the poetry collection, *Poems with Music from Africa* (2014), which features musical accompaniment, and other poems available online. He is also the author of *Azuma Nelson: 12 Rounds of Boxing and Life and Olewu: An African Folktale* (2019). Currently, he is working on the archives of John Buckman, a talented Ghanaian artist and calligrapher known for introducing the art of illuminating addresses, texts, and quotations into Ghana upon his return from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1901 after his studies.



*Anumnyam*  
Photo: Francis Gbornittah

Anumnyam's background and significance derive from his role as a guardian and pioneer of Ghanaian and African cultural traditions, using art to connect the spiritual, artistic, and political spheres. His work emphasises the transformative power of culture in shaping identity, fostering unity, and promoting political awareness across Ghana and the wider African continent. He is, unapologetically, a proud Pan-Africanist who lives in Osu, Accra.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly examination of African cultural figures often emphasises their diverse roles in shaping national identity and fostering Pan-African solidarity (Appiah, 2011). This paper on an interview with Anumnyam demonstrates this by positioning him as a quintessential figure

embodying the convergence of traditional African arts, contemporary artistic expressions, and political activism. His life and work are set within a broader scholarly discourse that recognises cultural icons not merely as artists, but as catalysts for socio-political transformation and cultural revival.

Drawing from the intersection of music, literature, performance arts, and activism, the paper aligns with existing studies that emphasise the importance of multidisciplinary engagement in African cultural renaissance. Scholars such as Asante (2020) and Appiah (2011) have previously highlighted how African intellectuals and artists serve as custodians of cultural heritage, while simultaneously innovating within modern frameworks. Anumnyam's collaborations with legendary figures like Ghanaba affirm this synthesis, confirming previous analyses of Ghanaba's role in integrating African rhythms into jazz, thus, bridging traditional and modern musical practices (Collins, 2022).

Also, by combining traditional arts and philosophies with contemporary expressions, Anumnyam exemplifies "cultural decolonisation," a process highlighted by scholars like Mafe (2015) and Fanon (1961), who argue that reclaiming indigenous epistemologies is vital for authentic liberation. Anumnyam's call upon spiritual power and ancestral energies shows a refusal to accept Western paradigms of modernity as the only measure of cultural value.

Furthermore, the paper's focus on Anumnyam's involvement in cultural activism and arts management connects with existing literature on the politicisation of African arts. Scholars like Mbembe (2001) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1997) have explained how cultural figures actively take part in nation-building and identity politics through literature and performance. Anumnyam's leadership roles within organisations such as GAW and PAWA reflect this tradition of cultural advocacy, supporting the idea that arts act as tools for political awareness and social unity.

The thematic analysis of Anumnyam's works uncovers recurring motifs such as cultural identity, political consciousness, and spiritual heritage, drawing parallels with postcolonial theories that examine the reclamation of African heritage amid colonial legacies—ideas clearly expressed by Ngũgĩ (1986) and Nkrumah (1964). Additionally, Mafe (2015) and Nketia's (2007) vision of integrating traditional arts into modern society aims to promote socio-cultural revival. Anumnyam's literary works, including poetry, folktales, performances, and others, serve as mediums for cultural transmission and innovation, highlighting the scholarly focus on storytelling as an essential tool for preserving culture in Africa.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

This inquiry employed qualitative research methods, including semi-structured, open-ended interviews, archival analysis, and content review. These provide a flexible, yet structured framework (Smith, 1999) for examining Anumnyam's perspectives on Ghanaian music, literature, performance arts, art curation, and cultural activism, which helped in developing questions for interviews. These approaches facilitated a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of his multidisciplinary contributions.

The interviews were a key method of data collection, focusing on his artistic collaborations, political activism, and cultural initiatives. They gave him the chance to expand on his experiences and insights, while ensuring that important topics were thoroughly covered during the discussion (Creswell, 2014). Additional sources included a review of his literary works, recordings of his performances, official records from arts organisations such as GAW and PAWA, as well as media archives containing interviews, documentaries, and coverage of his activities.

At Anumnyam's request, the primary interview took place on 14 June 2025 at his residence in Osu, a well-to-do suburb of Accra, Ghana's capital city. The interview was conducted in his living room, compound, and garden. These locations were not deliberately chosen but became necessary as the interview developed into a mobile format initiated by Anumnyam, allowing for a thorough discussion without causing fatigue. The session lasted around two and a half hours. Before this interview, he visited me in my office at the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana, Legon, on 3 June 2025, which led to a brief interview. The coincidental WhatsApp conversation prior to his arrival is noteworthy.

[03/06/2025, 9:48 am] *Francis*. [...]. In relation to our discussion for you to serve as a resource person in my [African Arts and Ideas] class, can you please supply me with a brief profile of yourself? [...]. *Anumnyam*. [...], I am stepping out presently. [...]. Actually I am coming your way going to Agbogba. I can stop by if it is okay with you.

In both interviews, I aimed to record with a high-definition Black Magic 4K video camera and various accessories to capture multiple angles, alongside advanced audio equipment, including microphones and an audio mixer, to ensure superior sound quality (Cohen, 2016; Creswell, 2014).



*Fig. 1: Anumnyam in performance during the late Prof. Kofi Awoonor's memorial evening, PAWA House, Nov. 7, 2013.*

Photo: Francis Gbormittah

Before these formal interviews, several informal discussions, including conversations via WhatsApp, took place. For instance, regarding a VHS tape with recorded performances, the WhatsApp message read as follows:

[10/06/2025, 5:00 pm] Anumnyam: Good evening, Francis. There is a VHS tape in my collection labelled Nii Anum Telfer: Mime 1990. I took it to the studio this morning to have the material transferred onto a pen drive. Unfortunately, the studio's equipment has malfunctioned some time ago. I can't remember this VHS tape, who shot it, when or where. I am sure I have not even watched it since it was given to me. Do you have any idea where we can get it transferred onto a pen drive? It may prove useful to our exercise. Francis: I think we have a VHS player at our audio-visual centre on campus. We can do the transfer there.

Subsequently, the tape was digitised at the J.H. Kwabena Nketia Archive of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon. As Anumnyam anticipated, the VHS tape proved valuable for viewing and developing questions related to its content for the interview, particularly concerning two of his previous performances: two mime performances in 1990. Anumnyam supplied me with personal archival materials, such as documents from performances and exhibitions (Figures 2 and 3), as well as a photograph I took of him in 2013 related to his work with GAW and PAWA. Additionally, he provided media coverage (Figure 1), interviews, and documentaries featuring him, all in preparation for his role as a guest lecturer in my "African Arts and Ideas" class in the Department of Theatre Arts. The following chat took place between us on WhatsApp, regarding sharing his songs and biography:

[09/06/2025, 1:23 pm] *Anumnyam*: [...]. This music is just an introduction [three of his songs sent via WhatsApp]. I'm aware of the ones you want. [...]. I don't remember ever sending my brief to any institution. *Francis*: The brief (your bio), about 5 lines only, talking about your training, past works, current works and future projects.

[05/06/2025, 7:57 pm] *Anumnyam*: We have to start putting together documents to illustrate the story. My computer was damaged, but quite a lot are on my telephone.

[03/06/2025, 9:48 am] *Anumnyam*: I've got some really good books here I wish I could go through before our program, if not for my eyes. But no fears it's my experience I will be sharing. The coming days I let you have the music you requested for.

[06/02/2025, 11:37 am] *Anumnyam*: [...]. I am eagerly looking forward for the interaction with your students on the subject of mine and improvisation we discussed.

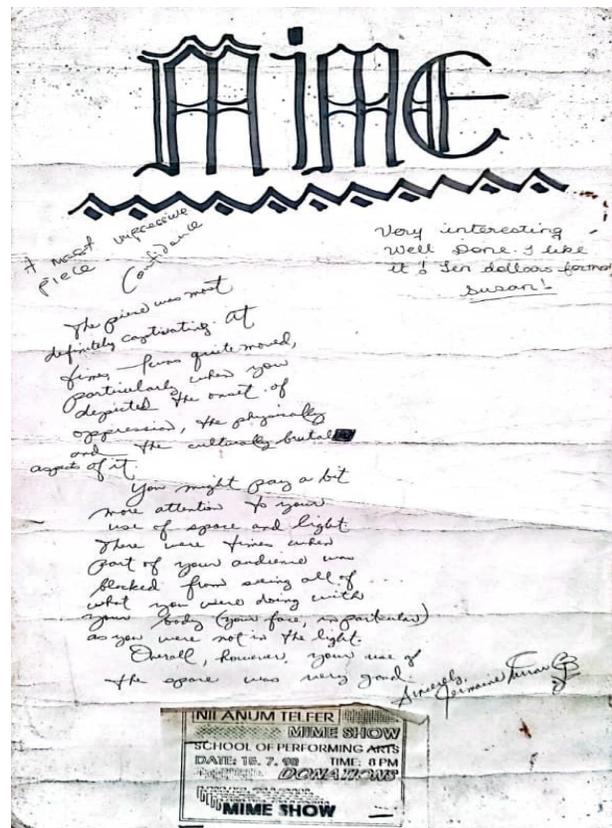
[22/12/2024, 11:41 am] *Anumnyam*: [...]. This short note is just to say that it will be great if we can meet before this year passes.

[29/12/2024, 1:16 pm] *Anumnyam*: Francis, sometime next year I will like to come and share my experiences as a mime actor with your students. If you will arrange it.

These conversations showcase Anumnyam's passion, enthusiasm, and dedication to my students, especially the younger generation, as he strives to share his knowledge and support them in pursuing their career goals.

The secondary data sources included digital and online resources such as the GAW website, as well as documentaries and performances accessible on YouTube. Additionally, a review of relevant scholarly literature on music, literature, and performance arts, especially within Ghana and Africa, was undertaken to provide a thorough and contextualised analysis of his influence in Ghanaian and Pan-African cultural contexts. To analyse his literary, artistic, and performative works, I conducted content analysis of his poetry, folktales, biographical narratives, and recorded performances like Nii Anum Telfer: Mime (Jan. 1990, Accra). Furthermore, a thematic analysis was carried out to identify recurring motifs related to cultural identity, political consciousness, and spiritual heritage. These materials form the basis of an upcoming comprehensive documentary project, currently in production alongside this paper, which will explore his life, philosophy, and influence.

Ethical considerations were prioritised throughout the entire process. Before the discussion, I provided Anumnyam with a comprehensive briefing regarding the purpose of the interview and obtained his informed consent. He was made aware of his voluntary participation and his right to withdraw at any time without penalty. I informed him about the publication of relevant WhatsApp chats between us. Furthermore, I assured him that all data collected would be used solely for academic purposes (Creswell, 2014).



Left (Fig. 2): Poster of Anumnyam’s Mine Show, School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, July 15, 1990.

Right (Fig. 3): Audience comments on the July 15, 1990, show: “Very interesting. Well done, I like it!” “This piece was most definitely captivating.”

The background and results of the various methodological approaches outlined above provided insights and served as a foundation for formulating questions and guiding the line of inquiry. Initially, the transcripts from the recordings were produced verbatim to ensure accuracy. The interview is organised thematically under the following sub-headings: Prologue, Personal and Educational Background, Artistic and Cultural Contributions, Cultural and Political Engagement, Literary and Artistic Innovation, Vision and Future Perspectives, Ghanaba from the Perspective of Anumnyam, and Wrapping Up the Interview.

This initial segment explores the life, work, and diverse contributions of Anumnyam as a distinguished Ghanaian cultural icon who represents the fusion of traditional African arts, contemporary artistic expressions, and political awareness. It seeks to emphasise his role in promoting Ghanaian and Pan-African cultural revival by examining his involvement in various artistic fields, including music, literature, performance arts, and art curation, as well as his impact on cultural activism and national development initiatives.

## 5. INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT AND THEMATIC NARRATIVE

**Francis Gbormittah (FG):** *Good afternoon, Anumnyam. I'm honoured to have the opportunity to speak with you today about your career, cultural impact, and your vision as a Pan-Africanist.*

**Anumnyam Anumnyam (AA):** Good afternoon, Francis, and thank you for having me.

**FG:** *Can you share your journey from your early life in Accra to your educational experiences at Adisadel College, Oda Secondary School, and the University of Ghana?*

**AA:** Thank you for the question. My journey began in Accra, where I was born and raised. Growing up in a vibrant and diverse city exposed me to a variety of cultures, ideas, and challenges that shaped my worldview. I attended Adisadel College in Cape Coast, a school renowned for its academic rigour and rich history. There, I developed a deep appreciation for education and leadership. After completing my secondary education at Oda Secondary School, I pursued higher studies at the School of Performing Arts in the University of Ghana, where I specialised in the performing arts and African studies. My educational experiences were instrumental in fostering my passion for African development, cultural identity, and Pan-Africanism, which continue to influence my work and vision today.

**FG:** *How did your educational background influence your artistic and cultural pursuits?*

**AA:** My educational background played a significant role in shaping my artistic and cultural pursuits. Studying at the University of Ghana exposed me to a rich array of African history, philosophy, and contemporary issues that deeply resonated with my desire to promote African culture and identity. The academic environment encouraged critical thinking, research, and a deeper understanding of our societal challenges and strengths. This fostered a strong sense of pride and responsibility to use art and culture as tools for social change and cultural preservation. Additionally, exposure to diverse perspectives among students and faculty broadened my horizons, inspiring me to incorporate traditional African motifs, narratives, and languages into my artistic expressions. On the whole, my education provided both the intellectual foundation and the confidence to pursue my cultural work with purpose and genuineness.

**FG:** *You have worked extensively in music, literature, performance arts, and curatorial work. How do these disciplines intersect in your creative vision?*

**AA:** Thank you for that insightful question. In my creative journey, I see music, literature, performance arts, and curatorial work not as separate disciplines, but as interconnected avenues that collectively serve my broader vision of cultural expression and Pan-Africanism. Music allows me to evoke emotion, tell stories, and celebrate our rich heritage through sound. Literature provides the narrative and intellectual depth; it's about capturing our history, struggles, and aspirations in words that inspire reflection. Performance arts bring these elements to life, creating immersive experiences that engage audiences on an intuitive level and foster a sense of community and cultural pride. Curatorial work acts as the bridge that contextualises and preserves our cultural artifacts, ensuring that our stories are presented faithfully and meaningfully. When these disciplines intersect, they create a holistic approach to cultural activism, where each art form amplifies the other, creating a powerful platform for dialogue, identity, and transformation. My vision is to harness this synergy to elevate African voices, challenge stereotypes, and foster a deeper understanding of our shared heritage, eventually contributing to a Pan-African consciousness that unites us across borders.

**FG:** *Your collaboration with Ghanaba is well-known. Can you describe how his pioneering work influenced your own artistic journey?*

**AA:** Collaborating with Ghanaba was truly transformative for my artistic journey. As a pioneer who revolutionised African music by blending traditional rhythms with jazz and other contemporary styles, Ghanaba exemplified innovation rooted in cultural depth. His fearless approach to challenging musical conventions and his dedication to preserving and celebrating African musical heritage deeply inspired me. Working with him opened my eyes to the importance of pushing artistic boundaries while staying true to our cultural roots. His pioneering spirit encouraged me to explore new creative territories, whether through experimenting with sounds, storytelling, or performance, always with a conscious effort to honour our traditions. Ghanaba's emphasis on spiritual and cultural profundity tied in with my own vision of using art as a tool for cultural affirmation and social change. His work taught me that embracing innovation and tradition simultaneously can create powerful, meaningful art, something I strive to embody in all my pursuits.

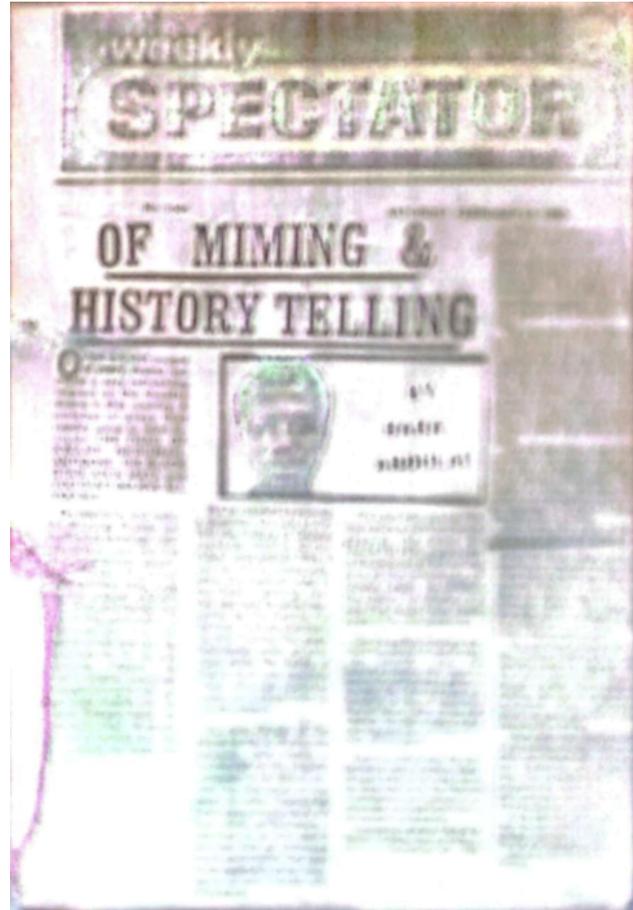
**FG:** *Ghanaba's reinterpretation of Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" with African talking drums is iconic. What does this fusion symbolise for you and for Ghanaian culture?*

**AA:** It is a profound symbol of cultural resilience and artistic self-determination. It challenges the notion that Western classical music is the sole standard of musical excellence, asserting instead that African rhythms and our ancestral sounds are equally divine and expressive. For me, this fusion represents the idea that our cultural identities are not separate from global traditions, but can be harmoniously integrated to create something uniquely ours. It's a bold statement that African musical elements, such as talking drums, are not just traditional artifacts, but living, dynamic voices capable of engaging with and reinterpreting universal themes. In the context of Ghanaian culture, this act signifies pride in our heritage and a refusal to be marginalised or confined by colonial narratives of cultural superiority. It encourages a reclaiming of our musical language, asserting that our music is powerful, sacred, and deserving of global recognition. It's a

celebration of our ability to innovate without losing sight of our roots, a message of cultural affirmation and artistic independence.

**FG:** *As a performer and actor, how has your experience in theatre and the performing arts shaped your understanding of traditional and contemporary African storytelling?*

**AA:** Theatre is a living, breathing art form that demands a deep engagement with narrative, culture, and emotion. Through performance, I've learned to embody stories that have been passed down through generations, appreciating the intricate ways in which African oral traditions, proverbs, music, dance, and symbolism are woven into our storytelling fabric. Working on stage has also allowed me to explore the evolution of these stories in contemporary contexts. I see how modern themes such as identity, social justice, and resilience are rooted in our cultural heritage, but also respond to current realities. Theatre has given me a platform to bridge the old and the new, emphasising how traditional stories can be reinterpreted to appeal to today's audiences, promoting a sense of continuity and relevance. Also, performance has taught me the importance of community, rhythm, and collective memory in African storytelling. It's more than recounting tales; it's about creating an experience that connects us to our roots while inviting dialogue and reflection. Theatre has deepened my appreciation for storytelling as a vital, dynamic force that sustains our culture and inspires change.



*Anumnyam's was featured in the Weekly Spectator newspaper highlighting his brilliant mime performances, Accra, Ghana, 1991.*

**FG:** *You served on several national committees related to trade fairs and the arts, including PAFAM 1990 and the National Theatre Project. How do you see the role of cultural policy in national development?*

**AA:** Serving on committees like PAFAM 1990 and the National Theatre Project has reinforced my understanding that cultural policy plays a crucial role in shaping national development. Culture is not just about preserving our heritage; it is a vital driver of economic growth, social cohesion, and international diplomacy. Effective cultural policies can foster a vibrant arts sector that creates jobs, stimulates tourism, and promotes local craftsmanship. For example, initiatives like trade fairs showcase our cultural products to global markets, opening avenues for economic empowerment of artists and entrepreneurs. Similarly, supporting the arts through policy ensures that our stories, music, dance, and visual arts are sustained, celebrated, and integrated into national identity.

Beyond the economic benefits, cultural policy can serve as a unifying force that strengthens the social fabric and national pride. It provides platforms for dialogue, education, and inclusion, helping to address social issues and promote unity across diverse communities. A well-crafted cultural policy positions a nation on the global stage, advancing soft power and cultural diplomacy. It signals that we value our heritage and innovation, which in turn attracts international partnerships and investments. In essence, cultural policy is a strategic tool for holistic development, balancing economic, social, and diplomatic objectives, eventually contributing to a resilient, vibrant, and self-defined nation.

**FG:** *You had mentioned to me before that people connected to President Kwame Nkrumah, or his secret Inner Cabinet, used to meet in your father's house. Could you share insights into how cultural and spiritual knowledge influenced political decision-making during President Nkrumah's era?*

**AA:** During President Kwame Nkrumah's time, cultural and spiritual knowledge played a subtle, yet profound role in shaping his approach to independence, nation-building, and governance. Nkrumah was deeply aware of the power of cultural identity and spiritual beliefs as tools for uniting Ghanaians and fostering a sense of pride and sovereignty. He recognised that colonial rule had often marginalised indigenous cultures and spiritual practices, which were vital sources of resilience and community cohesion. By emphasising an African cultural renaissance through the promotion of traditional arts, languages, and philosophies, Nkrumah sought to reinforce a collective identity that could underpin political unity and resistance to colonial domination. Spiritually, Nkrumah was influenced by Pan-Africanist ideals and philosophies rooted in African spiritual traditions, which emphasised interconnectedness, communal responsibility, and the pursuit of liberation. These ideas informed his vision of a united Africa and his efforts to foster solidarity among African nations. Nkrumah's policies often reflected an understanding of the importance of cultural symbols and spiritual values in inspiring national pride and political stability. For instance, state-sponsored cultural festivals and the promotion of traditional arts were strategic moves to entrench cultural consciousness within the political narrative. Nkrumah's leadership exemplifies how cultural and spiritual knowledge can serve as foundational elements in political decision-making, providing moral authority, fostering unity, and inspiring a shared vision for independence and progress.

**FG:** *As a Pan-Africanist, how do you view the relationship between art and political activism in contemporary Africa?*

**AA:** As a Pan-Africanist, I see art and political activism in contemporary Africa as deeply intertwined, serving as powerful tools for social change, cultural affirmation, and political resistance. Art, whether visual, literary, musical, or performative, acts as a mirror to society, revealing underlying issues, celebrating cultural identity, and mobilising communities around shared goals. In the contemporary African context, artists often use their work to critique political injustices, highlight social inequalities, and advocate for national and continental unity. For example, through murals [Chale Wote Street Art Festival of Accra], poetry [PaGya! A Literary Festival in Accra], and music, artists address issues like corruption, human rights, and environmental challenges, inspiring activism and public discourse. Furthermore, art functions as a form of cultural resistance, reclaiming indigenous identities and histories that colonial narratives

sought to marginalise. It fosters a sense of pride and resilience, both essential to collective empowerment and nation-building. From a Pan-Africanist perspective, art also bridges borders, emphasising continental solidarity. For instance, PANAFEST, the Pan African Arts Festival, previously called the Pan African Historical Theatre Festival, is a landmark biennial event initiated in Ghana for all Africans in the spirit of reuniting the African Family, Pan Africanism and the African Renaissance. Artists collaborate across nations, sharing stories of resistance, resilience, and cultural richness that reinforce a collective African identity beyond individual nations. Art in modern Africa is not merely aesthetic; it is a vital component of political activism that energises movements, sustains cultural revival, and promotes a shared vision of sovereignty, unity, and social justice across the continent.

**FG:** *Your literary works include poetry, children's folktales, and biographical narratives. What motivates your storytelling and poetic expressions?*

**AA:** I aim to reflect the rich insights of human experiences, celebrating cultural heritage, illuminating social issues, and fostering empathy across diverse communities. In poetry, I seek to evoke emotion, provoke thought, and inspire action, using rhythm, metaphor, and imagery to capture moments of joy, struggle, or hope, for example, in *Poems with Music from Africa*. It is a way to give voice to the unspoken and to honour the beauty and complexity of life. Children's folktales serve as vehicles for transmitting cultural values, wisdom, and history to younger generations. They motivate me to preserve and share indigenous stories that carry moral lessons and cultural identity, ensuring that these stories remain alive amidst changing times. These are the energies *Olewu: An African Folktale* fosters. Biographical and autobiographical narratives are driven by a motivation to honour individual journeys, highlight resilience, and shed light on extraordinary lives that can serve as sources of inspiration. They remind us that personal stories are integral to understanding collective history and social progress. A case in point is my book, *Azuma Nelson: 12 Rounds of Boxing and Life*. By and large, my motivation centres on using storytelling and poetry as tools for empowerment, drawing from cultural roots, fostering understanding, and promoting a shared sense of humanity and purpose.

**FG:** *The compliment from Professor Ama Ata Aidoo about your children's book "Olewu" highlights your innovative approach to African folklore. How do you see your work contributing to African literary traditions?*

**AA:** Receiving praise from Professor Ama Ata Aidoo for *Olewu: An African Folktale* is profoundly meaningful as it affirms the significance of innovative storytelling within African literary traditions. I see my work contributing in several ways. First, revitalising folklore by reimagining and adapting African stories for contemporary audiences aims to preserve and breathe new life into traditional narratives. This guarantees that cultural stories remain vibrant and relevant in a rapidly evolving world. Second, creating innovative narratives through blending traditional themes with modern storytelling techniques allows me to push the boundaries of African literature. This approach inspires other writers to explore creative avenues, fostering a dynamic literary landscape that respects tradition while embracing innovation. The third relates to cultural representation. My work strives to showcase the richness and diversity of African cultures, making folklore accessible and engaging for children and readers worldwide. This promotes a broader appreciation of African heritage and fosters cultural pride. The fourth contribution of *Olewu* to African literary traditions

is its educational impact. By presenting folklore through captivating narratives, I hope to inspire curiosity, moral reflection, and cultural understanding among young readers. This helps cultivate a new generation that values and continues African storytelling traditions. The fifth contribution Olewu and similar works offer is bridging generations. Olewu acts as a link between elders who preserve oral traditions and the youth who consume literature in written form. This supports the preservation of oral heritage within a literary framework, ensuring its transmission into the future.

**FG:** *You have also produced a CD of poetry with musical accompaniment. How important is the integration of music and poetry in your artistic philosophy?*

**AA:** The integration of music and poetry is central to my artistic philosophy because it enhances the emotional and cultural importance of both art forms. As I mentioned earlier, music has a special ability to evoke feelings, trigger memories, and create a shared experience, which complements the expressive power of poetry. By combining poetry with musical accompaniment, I aim to achieve several goals. Music elevates the mood and tone of poetic words, enabling listeners to connect more deeply with the themes, whether they evoke joy, longing, hope, or reflection. Many African oral traditions naturally blend music and poetry, such as praise songs, proverbs, and storytelling. Incorporating them into my work honours these traditions and keeps them alive in modern formats. This fusion engages multiple senses, making the poetic message more memorable and accessible to diverse audiences, including those who might relate more easily through sound and rhythm. Music and poetry together foster a sense of communal participation, celebration, and cultural pride. They transform individual expression into a collective experience. The musical element allows my work to go beyond the page, reaching audiences through performances and recordings, thereby broadening the reach and impact of African poetry. It's about creating art that moves both the heart and the body, fostering connection and cultural continuity.

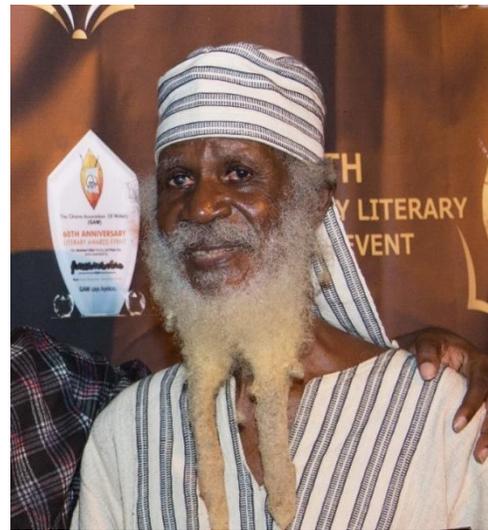
**FG:** *As a cultural custodian and activist, what are your hopes for the future of Ghanaian and African arts?*

**AA:** My hopes are rooted in the belief that our creative expressions can be powerful catalysts for cultural pride, social cohesion, and positive change. I wish for African arts, be it music, dance, literature, visual arts, or oral traditions, to receive the recognition and support they deserve from governments, institutions, and the international community. This includes safeguarding our cultural heritage against erosion and commodification. I hope to see African artists empowered through platforms, funding, and education that allow them to innovate boldly while staying rooted in their cultural identities. Supporting young and emerging artists is crucial for sustaining vibrant creative networks. I envision a future where arts and cultural education are, unapologetically, integral parts of our curricula, fostering pride and awareness among our youth about their history, languages, and traditions. This will nurture a new generation of culturally conscious citizens and creators. I aspire for African arts to gain greater visibility and respect on the global stage, fostering meaningful collaborations that showcase our diversity and richness. This can lead to cross-cultural dialogues that benefit all parties. I see arts increasingly serving as tools for activism, social justice, and community development, addressing issues like inequality, environmental sustainability, and identity politics through creative expression. I hope for a thriving arts sector that contributes substantially to local economies, creating jobs, tourism opportunities,

and sustainable livelihoods for artists and cultural entrepreneurs. Embracing technology and digital platforms can democratise access to African arts, allowing our stories, music, and visual arts to reach a global audience while empowering local creators. I believe that the future of Ghanaian and African arts lies in a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation, preserving our roots while boldly exploring new creative frontiers. This will not only enrich our cultural setting but also serve as a powerful means of asserting our identity and agency in the world.

**FG:** *How do you envision the role of young artists and writers in advancing Pan-African cultural ideals?*

**AA:** Young artists and writers serve as torchbearers and innovators who will shape the future of Pan-African cultural ideals. They are uniquely positioned to bridge tradition and modernity, fostering a shared sense of identity, solidarity, and pride across the continent. Their roles are numerous. Young creators must reclaim, reinterpret, and reimagine heritage in contemporary forms by exploring our diverse histories, languages, and oral traditions. This act of cultural reclamation strengthens our collective identity and counters cultural marginalisation. They must also promote Pan-African solidarity. Through art and literature, they can highlight common experiences, struggles, and aspirations such as anti-colonial resilience, social justice, and unity, thereby reinforcing a shared Pan-African consciousness. Younger generations are skilled at blending genres, collaborating across disciplines, and utilising digital platforms. Their innovative approaches can make Pan-African themes accessible, crossing boundaries, relevant, and engaging to diverse audiences both within and beyond the continent. They have the power to elevate stories and perspectives that are often underrepresented, such as those of women, rural communities, and marginalised groups, contributing to a more inclusive and authentic Pan-African narrative. Young artists and writers can critically engage with issues like neo-colonialism, globalisation, and identity, fostering dialogue that advances progressive and transformative ideals within Pan-Africanism. They can establish transnational partnerships, festivals, and platforms that promote cultural exchange, mutual learning, and solidarity among African nations and the diaspora. Through their work, they serve as role models and educators, inspiring young Africans to take pride in their heritage and actively participate in shaping their cultural and social landscapes.



**Anumnyam at the Ghana Association of Writers (GAW) Literary Awards 2017, Pan-African Writers Association (PAWA) House, Accra.**  
Photo: Francis Gbormittah.

**FG:** *Are there upcoming projects or initiatives you are excited about that continue your mission of cultural preservation and innovation?*

**AA:** Projects such as the African Digital Heritage, a Nairobi-based non-profit organisation, and the Pan-African Heritage Museum (PAHM), initiated by Kojo Yankah of Ghana, aim to digitise and make accessible Africa's rich cultural artefacts, oral histories, and traditional knowledge. These platforms ensure that invaluable cultural resources are preserved for future generations and

remain accessible globally. Events like the National Festival of Arts and Culture (Ghana), the Contemporary African Arts Fair (Morocco), Art x Lagos (Nigeria), the National Arts Festival (South Africa), and others bring together artists, writers, musicians, and performers from across the continent and the diaspora to celebrate and showcase African creativity, fostering unity and exchange. Organisations such as Bantaba Africa focus on nurturing young talent through residencies, workshops, and funding. These hubs emphasise innovation while grounding work in cultural roots. Platforms like the African Writers' Trust and your own initiatives at GAW, including the Writers' Enterprise Fund and the Young Writers Forum, support emerging writers and promote stories that reflect contemporary African realities, histories, and aspirations. These projects are vital in ensuring that African art, history, and identity remain dynamic, relevant, and celebrated worldwide.

**FG:** *Is there anything else you would like to share about your journey, philosophy, or vision for Africa's cultural renaissance?*

**AA:** Certainly, I have several points to share. Embracing heritage while innovating, decolonising narratives, building inclusive and collaborative platforms, using technology as a catalyst, promoting education and intergenerational dialogue, and establishing global engagement rooted in local traditions. Let me elaborate on these ideas. Africa's rich histories, languages, and traditions form the foundation of its cultural renaissance. The journey involves honouring and preserving this heritage while embracing innovation, utilising modern tools like digital media, AI, and global connectivity to amplify African voices and stories. It is also crucial in re-centering African perspectives in global narratives, challenging stereotypes, dismantling colonial legacies, and fostering authentic representations of African identities, achievements, and aspirations. The renaissance depends on inclusivity, empowering marginalised voices, supporting young artists, and encouraging collaborations across borders, disciplines, and generations. Collective effort is vital for a resilient and vibrant cultural environment. The use of AI, virtual reality, and other emerging technologies can revolutionise how African culture is documented, shared, and experienced—making it more accessible, participatory, and innovative. A sustainable cultural renaissance relies on education, integrating African histories and arts into curricula, and fostering dialogue between elders and youth to ensure cultural knowledge is transmitted and evolves. Africa's cultural renaissance is both local and global. It entails sharing African stories worldwide and learning from global influences, all whilst maintaining a strong connection to local roots and identities.

**FG:** *Ghanaba's work revolutionised the incorporation of African rhythms into jazz, especially with his introduction of the African Talking Drum to the U.S. Do you know how his early experiences shape this groundbreaking approach?*

**AA:** Yes, I do. Ghanaba's formative years profoundly shaped his innovative fusion of African rhythms with jazz. Born in Accra on May 4, 1943, during a period marked by cultural colonialism, he was named Warren Gamaliel Akwei, after U.S. President Warren Gamaliel Harding. According to him, growing up in Accra, he developed a keen interest in music, leading his school band at the Government Elementary Boys' School and participating in performances that laid the groundwork for his distinctive style. He told me that he took part in the pantomime *Zachariah Fee*, produced by Governor Sir Arnold Hudson, during the Christmas season. And that his decision to leave

Achimota College was driven by a desire to preserve his African identity, fueling his dedication to authentic African musical traditions. He once explained that dropping out in 1943 was because he was bored stiff with his studies and the stern discipline of the college, which attempted to change him into an Englishman. According to him, enlisting in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), a secretive branch of the U.S. Army involved in World War II operations, he travelled to the USA in 1943, where exposure to international influences and jazz music inspired him to merge African elements with Western styles. His work as a broadcaster and journalist further promoted African rhythms, and collaborations with Afro-Cuban jazz musicians expanded his musical perspective. His extensive experience with traditional African drums, particularly the Talking Drum, motivated him to introduce this instrument to the U.S. jazz scene, as exemplified by his album *Africa Speaks, America Answers*. I can say that his cultural roots, international experiences, and creative vision converged to shape his revolutionary approach to jazz, one that highlighted African identity and rhythms.

**FG:** *What inspired Ghanaba to blend traditional African music with jazz, and how was his approach received initially in the international music scene?*

**AA:** I believe his desire to honestly represent African culture and spirituality within contemporary music drives his work. His innovative approach aims to elevate African rhythms and instruments, like the talking drum, to the global jazz scene. Initially, his fusion was met with curiosity and admiration, but also scepticism, especially in the international jazz community, which often favoured Western styles. Over time, however, his pioneering work gained recognition for its originality and cultural importance, establishing him as a trailblazer in world music and broadening jazz's expressive boundaries.

**FG:** *Can you describe the significance of his album, "Africa Speaks, America Answers," and its impact on both African and global music audiences?*

**AA:** This groundbreaking album by Ghanaba was recorded in 1956, notable for its pioneering fusion of African rhythms, jazz, and Western music. It showcased Africa's rich cultural heritage to an international audience. By integrating the African Talking Drum (Mpintin Donno) into jazz and the broader American musical scene, Ghanaba challenged stereotypes and expanded the scope of jazz, emphasising its African origins. He introduced this drum through his acclaimed Decca album, *Africa Speaks, America Answers*. The album's commercial success demonstrated a global demand for authentic African sounds and influenced musicians worldwide. It also elevated the profile of African music on the international stage, inspiring future artists to explore their cultural roots through music. Ghanaba's innovative work laid the groundwork for Afrocentric jazz and world music genres, fostering cross-cultural understanding. His legacy stands as a testament to music's power as a universal language that unites Africa and the world.

**FG:** *What challenges did he face in popularising African rhythms in the jazz genre, especially during the 1950s and 1960s?*

**AA:** Primarily due to racial biases and cultural misunderstandings. Western audiences and jazz musicians often regarded African music as primitive and incompatible with jazz's sophistication. Furthermore, there was resistance within the jazz community to incorporating African drums and rhythms, which were viewed as unfamiliar or exotic. As previously mentioned, Ghanaba's efforts

to blend African traditional elements with jazz were sometimes met with scepticism, prejudice, and a lack of recognition from mainstream jazz circles, making his pioneering work both groundbreaking and challenging.

**FG:** *He has been called the "Divine Drummer" and "Odomanankoma Kyrema." What do these titles mean to him personally, and how do they reflect his musical philosophy?*

**AA:** To Ghanaba, "Divine Drummer" and "Odomanankoma Kyrema" reflect his spiritual connection and reverence for African heritage. They embody his philosophy of music as a sacred, transformative force, emphasising divine inspiration, spiritual awakening, and the power of African rhythms to transcend cultural boundaries.

**FG:** *How did his experiences in Ghana, Liberia, and the United States influence his musical style and worldview?*

**AA:** In Ghana, he was exposed to local traditions, rhythms, and spiritual practices, which fostered a deep appreciation for African musical and cultural heritage. His leadership in school bands and early performances helped cultivate his understanding of indigenous sounds and their spiritual significance. Moving to Liberia, he worked with the national broadcasting service and participated in notable events such as the inauguration of President William Tubman, immersing himself in West African musical expressions. These experiences allowed him to incorporate genuine regional sounds into his performances, promoting African musical identity on a broader stage. Relocating to the United States, Ghanaba encountered jazz, blues, and Western musical innovations, which he seamlessly fused with African rhythms and spiritual elements. His collaborations with American musicians and performances at venues like the African Room in NYC exemplify his efforts to create a cross-cultural dialogue through music. These diverse experiences fostered a worldview rooted in Pan-African consciousness, emphasising the spiritual and cultural strength of Africa, while advocating for its recognition and pride within global music.

**FG:** *As a member of Ghana's inner cabinet of intellectuals, how did his political and spiritual beliefs influence his musical career?*

**AA:** As a member of Ghana's inner cabinet of intellectuals, personally chosen by President Kwame Nkrumah, he was immersed in the nation's quest for cultural identity and independence, which fueled his dedication to promoting truly African sounds. His spiritual conviction, especially his commitment to honouring his creator through music, guided his innovative fusion of traditional African rhythms with jazz, exemplified by his African Talking Drums and sacred performances. His belief in spiritual possession during performances, where audiences experienced trance-like states, reinforced his view that music was a divine gift capable of connecting humans with higher spirits. Politically and spiritually integrated, Ghanaba used music as a vessel for cultural affirmation and spiritual expression, elevating both his artistry and his influence in Ghana and beyond.

**FG:** *Looking back at Ghanaba's career, what moments stand out as the most transformative or meaningful to you?*

**AA:** His innovative blend of African rhythms and jazz, along with his leadership in Ghanaian politics and spiritual music, marked his impactful and meaningful career.

**FG:** *Thank you for your time and insights.*

**AA:** You're very welcome. I'm glad I could share these insights with you. Wishing you all the best on your scholarly journey and endeavours.

## 6. WRAPPING UP THE CONVERSATION

Anumnyam embodies a dynamic fusion of traditional African cultural elements with contemporary artistic expressions, emphasising cultural blend, innovation, and activism. His collaborations across music, literature, and the performing arts highlight a holistic approach to integrating heritage with modernity. This not only revitalises indigenous practices, but also reimagines them for new audiences, fostering a vibrant cultural renaissance. Anumnyam's active participation in national arts organisations and cultural policy-making underscores his commitment to promoting African narratives and challenging stereotypes, positioning art as a powerful tool for social and political change. Central to his work is a focus on African and Ghanaian identity, coupled with advocacy for cultural pride and collective consciousness.

Ghanaba, as a Pan-African icon, symbolises the spiritual and political awakening of African peoples through cultural expression. His pioneering use of traditional symbols, such as the talking drum, within modern musical contexts stresses Africa's resilience and spiritual depth, inspiring a sense of unity and progress. His contributions extend beyond music to political activism, emphasising cultural autonomy and Pan-African ideals, encouraging Africans and the diaspora to remember their roots and embrace their heritage.

Both Anumnyam and Ghanaba exemplify how art and culture serve as vital platforms for identity, resistance, and the ongoing Pan-African renaissance.

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