

*CORRESPONDENCE

Derrick Affoh Amoah, 
info.derrycom993@gmail.com

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Adapting Larteh Folktunes for the Piano: A Creative Ethnomusicological Study of Cross-Cultural Composition in Ghana

Derrick Affoh Amoah^{1*}, Nono Yawo Akoto², Prosper Kofi Agboga³

¹University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

²Mount Mary College of Education, Eastern Region, Ghana

³Peki College of Education, Volta Region, Ghana

Abstract

Traditional music in many communities faces increasing erosion as modernisation disrupts intergenerational transmission. In Ghana, this trend has been documented among smaller ethnic groups in the Akwapem region. The Larteh people — an Akwapem community in Ghana's Eastern Region — possess a folk music tradition that remains entirely absent from peer-reviewed scholarship and African piano repertoire, a gap confirmed through searches of Scopus, RILM Abstracts, and AJOL. This study addressed that gap by adapting ten Larteh folktunes from the Ahenease and Kubease communities for solo piano. The ten tunes were selected from twenty collected over six months of fieldwork, based on melodic distinctiveness, rhythmic complexity, and representativeness across six documented social functions. Using creative ethnomusicology as its research design, the study gathered folktunes through semi-structured interviews with thirteen participants — eight elder musicians, three community elders, and two music teachers — alongside recorded live performances and ear-based transcription. Ten original piano compositions were produced, blending Larteh musical idioms with Western compositional techniques grounded in syncretism and intercultural composition theories. Cultural fidelity was verified through two rounds of community review, comparative score analysis, and evaluation against original recordings. The findings confirm that Larteh compound rhythms, call-and-response patterns, and pentatonic melodic contours can be rendered recognisably within a piano medium when guided by rigorous fieldwork and harmonic restraint. The study contributes ten piano scores to Ghanaian art music, offers a replicable compositional methodology for adapting under-researched African folk traditions, and identifies cross-rhythmic structures as a key compositional resource. Ten original piano compositions were produced, blending Larteh musical idioms with Western compositional techniques grounded in syncretism and intercultural composition theories. Cultural fidelity was verified through two rounds of community review, comparative score analysis, and evaluation against original recordings. The findings confirm that Larteh compound rhythms, call-and-response patterns, and pentatonic melodic contours can be rendered recognisably within a piano medium when guided by rigorous fieldwork and harmonic restraint. The study contributes ten piano scores to Ghanaian art music, offers a replicable compositional methodology for adapting under-researched African folk traditions, and identifies cross-rhythmic structures as a key compositional resource.

KEYWORDS

larteh folktunes; african pianism; cross-cultural composition; syncretism; creative ethnomusicology; ghanaian art music; piano adaptation; intercultural composition

Introduction

Traditional African music carries layers of meaning that formal notation has rarely captured. In many communities, songs mark seasons, bind generations, and encode history. The Larteh people of Akwapem, in Ghana's Eastern Region, are no exception. Their folktunes accompany social events — agricultural ceremonies, funeral rites, chieftaincy processions, and community recreation — and encode the distinct histories of the Ahenease and Kubease towns (Nketia, 1974). Ethnomusicological surveys indicate that such localised repertoires face acute risk as elder practitioners reduce in number and younger community members move

toward urban popular music cultures (Nketia, 2002; Seeger, 2015a; Titon, 2015a). Field enquiries conducted during this research confirmed that fewer than five active practitioners of core Larteh ceremonial folktones were under fifty years of age at the time of data collection.

This absence is indicative of a broader pattern. Despite decades of scholarship on African art music (Agawu 2016; Nketia 2005; Euba 1988), the volume of written piano repertoire rooted in Ghanaian traditions remains small relative to the country's musical wealth, a wealth documented across genres from urban jazz cosmopolitanism (Feld, 2012) to highlife's syncretism of local and global idioms (Collins, 1994, 1985). Nketia's (1999) *African Pianism: Twelve Pedagogical Pieces* was a landmark, building on the intercultural compositional groundwork Omojola, (2001) documented in Akin Euba's piano works, but scholars such as Omojola (2024) and Annan (2024) note that African pianism as a compositional practice is still expanding, and that many ethnic traditions have not yet contributed to it. Larteh is one such tradition..

Cross-cultural music adaptation raises both creative and ethical challenges. A composer working across cultures must balance the need to translate musical idioms — rhythm, timbre, ornament, form — into a new medium without stripping the music of its cultural meaning (Nettl, 2005). This study addresses these ethical dimensions explicitly: all fieldwork was conducted with prior informed consent from participants; compositions were returned to the community through review sessions; the musical knowledge shared by participants was acknowledged in all outputs; and no commercial exploitation of the material was undertaken without community agreement. Adjahoe (2017) faced similar compositional challenges when adapting a Volta-region folk song for the Bb atenteben and piano, ultimately arguing that neoclassical approaches could honour tradition while opening new compositional space. The current study takes a comparable position.

This study addresses three objectives: (1) to document the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic features of ten Larteh folktones from the Ahenease and Kubease communities; (2) to demonstrate a creative ethnomusicological methodology for adapting those features into solo piano compositions; and (3) to assess how recognisably the resulting compositions preserve Larteh musical idioms and how they interact with Western compositional conventions.

Two research questions guide the study. First: To what extent do the structural features of Larteh folktones — scale, rhythm, ornamentation, and call-and-response form — survive translation into solo piano compositions produced through creative ethnomusicology? Second: What compositional strategies most effectively bridge Larteh musical idioms and Western piano conventions without distorting the cultural character of the source material?

The remainder of this article is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews relevant literature. Section 3 presents the methodology. Section 4 reports the compositional findings. Section 5 discusses implications for African art music and music education. Section 6 concludes.

Cultural Music and Preservation

Cultural music preserves what text alone cannot: tone, timing, emotion, and social memory. Nketia, (2005) argued that music in African societies is inseparable from social function — it marks rites of passage, announces authority, and maintains

communal bonds. In the Akan setting, of which Larteh is part, music in the chief's court accompanies address and procession, while songs in farming and funeral contexts carry specific melodic and textual conventions that encode social roles, communal history, and spiritual relationships with the land (Nketia, 2002). (Stokes, 2010) reinforced this connection, demonstrating that ethnic musical traditions construct place and belonging in ways that formal documentation cannot replicate. Once the contexts that sustain these traditions weaken — through urbanisation, generational disruption, and the dominance of commercial popular music — the songs risk disappearing along with the social knowledge they encode.

The erosion of traditional music through modernisation is a global concern (Seeger, 2015b; Titon, 2015b; Turino, 2008), a concern formalised internationally in UNESCO, (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. In sub-Saharan Africa, specifically, urbanisation, the dominance of popular music genres, and the decline of intergenerational apprenticeship have accelerated the loss of localised folk repertoires (Mugovhani, 2016a; Omolo-Ongati, 2010). Ghana is not immune to this trend. Nketia (2002) noted that many Akan oral musical traditions are sustained by progressively smaller cohorts of elder practitioners whose successors may not carry the tradition forward.

Documenting and adapting folk music for Western instruments is one strategy for slowing that loss. Acquah (2013) showed this through his work on Asafo music in Ghana, tracing how performance modernises while the underlying idiom persists when composers engage carefully with source traditions. Acquah and Amuah (2014) extended that argument by demonstrating how thematic categorisation and melodic analysis can make Ghanaian folk material legible to broader scholarly audiences. Both studies reinforce the case that analytical engagement with folk traditions is simultaneously a scholarly and a cultural act — one that produces new musical knowledge while preserving existing communal knowledge.

Written scores are not the only preservation strategy, but they offer specific advantages for at-risk traditions. A notated transcription with an annotated piano adaptation creates a retrievable, performable, and teachable record that oral transmission alone cannot guarantee (Elschek, 2014). Where fieldwork has captured the tradition through audio and video documentation, written scores provide an additional layer of preservation and a pathway to formal music education.

African Pianism as a Compositional Framework

African pianism, as defined by Euba (1988) and elaborated by Nketia (1999), describes a compositional approach that renders African musical logic through the piano. Rather than simply harmonising folk melodies in a European manner, composers working in this tradition draw on the rhythmic layering, tonal vocabulary, and structural patterns of specific African traditions. As Nketia (1999) demonstrated in his pedagogical pieces, composers can use the piano to evoke the polyrhythmic textures of percussion ensembles and the melodic contours of vocal music.

This approach has grown into a demonstrably active compositional sub-field. (Adjahoe, 2017) combined Ghanaian folk song with sonata form to extend the capabilities of a traditional instrument. Annan (2024) examined how contemporary African composers integrate African musical aesthetics — including speech

surrogacy and communal memory — into piano performance practice. Omojola (2024) situated these developments within a postcolonial interrogation of musical power, arguing that African composers who draw on indigenous traditions are not simply preserving heritage but reshaping what counts as canonical repertoire. (Mugovhani, 2016b) provided additional evidence of the field's geographic breadth, documenting comparable compositional approaches among Venda composers in South Africa. Dor (2013) examined how Ghanaian art music composition negotiates the interface between oral tradition and Western notation, identifying this tension as both a creative challenge and an intellectual resource.

The concept of African pianism has also been examined in relation to pedagogy. Nzewi, (2015) argued that piano music grounded in African musical logic offers educational benefits beyond repertoire expansion; it provides students with analytical tools for understanding African musical structure within a familiar instrumental context. Flolu (2000) reinforced this from a Ghanaian teacher education perspective, noting that culturally grounded piano material engages students more effectively than imported repertoire detached from their musical experiences.

In Ghana, the lineage runs from Ephraim Amu's pioneering fusion of choral and traditional idioms, examined in detail in Sandler, (2019) recent study of Amu's notation and performance practice, through Nketia's theoretical and compositional work to younger composers who continue to find new ways to represent Ghanaian musical culture on Western instruments (Agordoh, 2004; Dor, 2013). The current study sits in this lineage, attempting to bring Larteh — a tradition not previously treated in this body of work — into the conversation.

Syncretism and Intercultural Composition Theory

Two theoretical frameworks anchor the compositional approach used in this study. Syncretism, in the context of music, refers to the principled blending of elements from two distinct musical cultures into a single, coherent work (Hermawan & Pradita, 2020; Syawaludin & Mikail, 2025). a concept with roots in Waterman, (1952) foundational account of African stylistic retention and blending in the Americas. This concept does not imply equal weighting; rather, it describes the process by which a composer with deep knowledge of one tradition makes deliberate choices about how to translate, retain, or transform its elements in another context.

Musical syncretism has been examined in a range of African contexts. In West Africa, scholars have documented how composers navigate the interface between indigenous musical logic and Western compositional conventions (Euba, 1988; Dor, 2013). The critical insight across this literature is that successful syncretism requires the composer to understand both systems from the inside, not to treat one as the primary framework and the other as a source of surface ornamentation.

Intercultural composition theory, as applied to African art music, specifies that the composer must have genuine background knowledge of the traditional music being adapted (Brukman, 2017). In this study, that knowledge was operationalised through four specific criteria: (1) direct participation in community performance events during the fieldwork period; (2) conversational competency in Twi and working familiarity with Larteh cultural conventions; (3) sustained

consultation with elder musicians and community knowledge holders over six months; and (4) expert validation of the final compositions by a Larteh musician-practitioner with over twenty years of performance experience. Agawu (2016) made a related point when critiquing representations of African music that privilege Western analytical categories over indigenous ones. (Crooke et al., 2024) also found, in a study of intercultural music engagement, that meaningful cross-cultural musical exchange requires frameworks that acknowledge both similarity and difference rather than collapsing distinctions.

Together, these frameworks guided both the fieldwork and the compositional decisions in the current study. They directed attention to what must be preserved — rhythmic organisation, melodic contour, the relationship between music and social context — and what may be transformed without losing the cultural identity of the source material.

Music Adaptation in Education and Performance

The value of folk music adaptation extends beyond preservation. In educational settings, culturally grounded repertoire gives students access to traditions they might not encounter through standard curricula. (Adu-Gilmore, 2024) demonstrated this in a study of music technology modules in Ghana, showing that students engaged more deeply with compositional tasks when the source material came from their own cultural contexts. This finding aligns with wider arguments about culturally responsive pedagogy in music education (Acquah, 2013; Coffie, 2023).

The Ghanaian context is particularly relevant to this study. Addo (1997) found that Ghanaian student teachers engaged more actively with music theory concepts when examples came from Ghanaian folk traditions rather than Western ones. Mans, (2000) documented similar findings in Namibia, and both studies point to the same conclusion: a culturally grounded repertoire is not simply a motivational enhancement but a pedagogical advantage. For piano education specifically, scores rooted in local folk traditions give students an analytical entry point into both the tradition and the Western instrument, a dual benefit that imported repertoire cannot provide.

In performance, an adapted folk repertoire can introduce audiences to unfamiliar traditions in a setting they already know. Crooke et al. (2024) found that intercultural music engagement fosters understanding when the exchange is structured, intentional, and guided by knowledge of both source cultures. Campbell (2018) reinforced this point, arguing that adaptations of folk traditions serve a communicative as well as an aesthetic function — they translate cultural knowledge across community boundaries, consistent with Small, (1998) argument that the meaning of a musical work is inseparable from the act of performing and receiving it in a specific social setting. Piano performances of adapted Larteh material would meet these conditions if the adaptations are accompanied by analytical notes and performance guidance — something the current study begins to address through its compositional annotations.

Methods

Research Design

This study used a creative ethnomusicology design.

Creative ethnomusicology, as theorised by Brukman (2017) and applied in Coffie (2023), combines ethnographic inquiry with compositional practice. It differs from conventional ethnography in that the researcher is not a detached observer but an active creative participant whose compositional output constitutes a primary research deliverable. It differs from practice-based research in that it requires systematic ethnographic data collection — fieldwork, participant interaction, and cultural analysis — rather than starting from the composer's own aesthetic intentions. It differs from composition research in that the source material is not the composer's own musical imagination but a documented community tradition, and the research goals include both knowledge production about that tradition and culturally accountable creative contribution to it.

This design was chosen because the study had two inseparable goals: to understand Larteh folktones on their own terms and to produce compositions faithful to those terms. A purely analytical design would have left the second goal unmet, while a purely compositional approach without fieldwork would have lacked the cultural grounding that intercultural composition theory requires.

Community and Participants

Fieldwork took place in the Ahenease and Kubease communities of Akwapem Larteh in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants with direct knowledge of Larteh folktone traditions. 'Direct knowledge' was assessed through three criteria: demonstrated ability to perform or lead folktone singing in community contexts; recognition by community leaders as authoritative sources on the traditions in question; and a minimum of fifteen years of active engagement with the relevant musical practices.

Participants included eight elder musicians (ages 54–78; five male, three female), three community elders with knowledge of the ceremonial functions and histories of the songs (ages 62–81; all male, reflecting the gender distribution of chieftaincy knowledge-holding in Larteh), and two music teachers working in the area (ages 34–41; one male, one female). This combination was designed to capture musical, historical, and pedagogical dimensions of the traditions: the elder musicians provided performance knowledge, the community elders provided contextual and ceremonial knowledge, and the music teachers provided perspective on how the traditions are currently transmitted to younger generations. Participants were identified through community leaders and verified through peer recommendation. All participants gave written informed consent prior to data collection. Participant identities were anonymised in all research outputs. The study was conducted under ethical clearance from the [name of institution], Ethics Reference Number [to be completed].

Data Collection

Data collection took place over six months using three methods. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants about the social functions, performance contexts, and melodic histories of Larteh folktones. Second, live performances of folktones were recorded using a digital audio recorder. Third, direct transcription of performances was carried out by ear and through repeated listening, producing notated scores of each tune. A total of twenty folktones were collected.

Ten were selected for adaptation based on three criteria: distinctiveness of melodic contour (tunes whose melodic profiles were sufficiently differentiated to yield contrasting piano pieces); rhythmic complexity (tunes that presented a range of rhythmic challenges relevant to the

research questions); and cultural representativeness across the six social functions documented in the fieldwork — agricultural ceremonies, funeral rites, chieftaincy processions, community recreation, children's games, and harvest celebrations. Table 1 presents all twenty collected tunes and the selection decisions.

Compositional Process

Each folktone underwent a four-stage compositional process. In the first stage, I analysed the tune for its scale type (most were pentatonic or hexatonic), rhythmic organisation (including the relationship between time cycle and melodic phrase), ornamental patterns, and relationship to text or dance. In the second stage, I identified which elements were structurally essential — those whose loss would make the tune culturally unrecognisable — and which could be transformed without distorting its identity. In the third stage, I composed a piano piece using the identified elements as the structural basis, drawing on Western harmonic and formal conventions only where they did not distort the source material. In the fourth stage, I reviewed each composition against the original recording for rhythmic and melodic accuracy and revised accordingly.

A Larteh musician who had participated in the fieldwork reviewed the final drafts. This reviewer had over twenty years of active performance experience in Larteh ceremonial and recreational music contexts, was fluent in the community's performance conventions, and had been directly involved in the fieldwork interviews. The review criteria were: melodic recognisability (could the reviewer identify the source tune from the piano score?); rhythmic fidelity (did the piano rhythmic structure reflect the original tune's metre and cross-rhythmic character?); and cultural appropriateness (were ornamental and harmonic choices consistent with Larteh musical values?). Two rounds of revision were conducted. In Round One, the reviewer identified three compositions in which the piano left-hand accompaniment pattern obscured rather than supported the call-and-response structure; these were revised to give the response phrase greater registral prominence. In Round Two, two ornamental approximations were adjusted following the reviewer's feedback that specific grace-note runs misrepresented the directional quality of the original slides.

Analytical Framework

The ten completed compositions were analysed using compositional device analysis, examining how specific techniques — motivic development, rhythmic augmentation, contrapuntal layering, harmonic substitution — interacted with the Larteh source material. Each composition was also assessed against the two theoretical frameworks: syncretism (whether the blending of two musical systems produced a coherent whole) and intercultural composition theory (whether knowledge of the Larteh tradition was visibly operative in each compositional decision). Table 2 in Section 4 presents the results of this systematic assessment.

Result and Discussion

Structural Features of the Ten Larteh Folktones

The ten selected folktones shared several features that shaped the adaptation process. All ten used pentatonic or hexatonic scales, consistent with the broader Akan musical tradition (Nketia, 2005). Seven of the ten were organised around a call-and-response structure, in which a lead melodic phrase is answered by a recurring refrain. This

feature created both a challenge and an opportunity during adaptation: the piano had to render both voices, requiring decisions about register, articulation, and dynamics that do not arise in the original vocal context.

Rhythmic organisation was more varied. Six tunes used compound duple metre, while three used a cross-rhythmic structure in which a duple-feeling melody sits against a triple-feeling accompaniment pattern, a characteristic of many Akan percussion traditions (Nketia, 2002). One tune employed a free rhythmic structure tied to speech rhythm. This last tune required the most significant compositional adjustment: the speech rhythm was preserved by notating the melody in a non-metrical graphic score format with performance notes specifying the relative durational values, avoiding the distortion that strict metric transcription would produce. Cultural meaning was protected by retaining the exact melodic pitches, the characteristic falling phrase contour of the original, and a footnote in the score explaining the tune's ceremonial context and the relationship between its text and its melodic shape.

Melodic ornamentation appeared in eight of the ten tunes, mostly as short grace notes or slides between pitches. These ornaments proved difficult to render precisely on the piano, which lacks the pitch flexibility of the voice or of instruments such as the *atenteben*. In five cases, I found piano equivalents — mordents, trills, grace-note runs — that preserved the ornamental character without replicating the exact sound. In the remaining three, I simplified the ornamentation and added a performance note explaining the original. Table 2 summarises the structural features and adaptation strategies for all ten tunes.

Compositional Outcomes

All ten compositions retained the core melodic contour and scale of their source tunes, as shown in Table 2. In nine of the ten cases, the call-and-response structure was preserved by distributing the call to the right hand and the response to the left, or by alternating between treble and bass registers. The cross-rhythmic tunes generated the most compositionally productive outcomes: in three pieces, polyrhythmic left-hand ostinato patterns drawn from the percussion ensemble traditions that accompany the original songs produced a pianistic texture that is recognisably Larteh without reproducing any specific instrument's part.

The compositions varied in their degree of Western harmonic content, and these differences were determined by the melodic direction of the source material rather than by compositional preference. Three pieces remain pentatonic throughout: in these cases, the introduction of any diatonic harmony would have imposed tonal hierarchies — particularly dominant-tonic relationships — that contradicted the melodic material's inherent tonal ambiguity. Four pieces add diatonic harmonies where the original texture suggested harmonic motion without stating it explicitly; in each case, the harmonic choice was made so that the bass note reinforced rather than contradicted the melodic phrase's terminal pitch. Three pieces incorporate Dorian and Mixolydian modal harmonisation: the Dorian mode was chosen for the two funeral tunes because it avoids the major-seventh leading tone that would contradict the pentatonic melodic descent, while the Mixolydian mode was appropriate for the recreational tunes because its lowered seventh degree aligns with the characteristic final pitch of the original melodies.

Assessment Against Theoretical Frameworks

Assessed against syncretism theory, all ten

compositions demonstrate principled blending. In each case, the Larteh and Western elements are distinguishable but mutually dependent: the Larteh melody gives the piece its identity, while the Western formal and harmonic conventions give it structural coherence for a piano-trained listener. No composition functions simply as a harmonised folk song; each uses the source material as the basis for compositional development.

Assessed against intercultural composition theory, results were rated against three explicit criteria: structural integration (whether Larteh musical logic — timeline position, ornamental character, phrase shape — was operative in specific compositional decisions rather than merely present as melodic surface); cultural recognisability (whether the Larteh musician-reviewer identified the composition as a recognisable representation of the source tune without prompting); and harmonic coherence (whether the Western harmonic material reinforced rather than contradicted the melodic direction of the source). Six compositions — Ahenease Dua, Kubease Ayeyo, Tweneboa Kokoo, Ahenease Mmerante, Mpanifo Dwom, and Kubease Afahye — achieved strong ratings on all three criteria. The four compositions based on tunes encountered later in the fieldwork — Kubease Mmaa Dwom, Kubease Akuapem Bi, Adwuma Nkomɔ, and Abisa Nkomɔ — achieved strong harmonic coherence but moderate structural integration, reflecting the less complete understanding of their social and performative context at the time of composition. This variation confirms Brukman's (2017) argument that the quality of intercultural composition depends on the depth of cultural knowledge the composer brings, not only on technical skill.

What the Findings Show

The ten compositions demonstrate that Larteh folk tunes can be adapted for solo piano while retaining recognisable cultural character. This claim rests on three forms of evidence: compositional device analysis showing that Larteh structural features — pentatonic scales, cross-rhythmic organisation, call-and-response form — are preserved as structural principles rather than surface decorations; community review findings showing that six compositions achieved strong recognisability ratings and four achieved moderate ratings from an expert Larteh practitioner; and comparative score analysis showing that in no composition did the harmonic or rhythmic material contradict the melodic direction of the source tune. The key determinants of success were fieldwork depth, structural analysis of the source tunes, and harmonic restraint.

Relationship to Prior Literature

These findings align with Adjahoe's (2017) work on Ghanaian folk songs and the *atenteben*-piano duo. Similar to that study, the current work shows that a neoclassical approach drawing on both traditional and Western conventions as structural resources can produce compositions that expand both canons simultaneously. They also align with Nketia's (1999) pedagogical position that African pianism requires composers to understand the rhythmic and melodic logic of the traditions they are drawing on, not merely to borrow surface features.

The finding that cross-rhythmic structures generated the most musically interesting outcomes extends Agawu's (2016) earlier arguments about the compositional productivity of African rhythmic organisation. Rather than treating compound rhythm as a translation problem, this study found it to be a compositional resource: the polyrhythmic left-hand ostinato patterns in the three cross-rhythmic pieces gave the compositions a pianistic texture that is both idiomatic and novel. This finding resonates with

Locke, (1987, 2009) analysis of Ewe drumming patterns and their potential for cross-cultural composition.

The modal harmonic language used in the three compositions, Dorian and Mixolydian, aligns with the broader literature on modal parallels between West African melodic organisation and pre-tonal European harmony (Nketia, 1974; Kubik, 1994). Rather than forcing Western functional harmonic progressions onto pentatonic source material, the modal approach produces harmonic settings that are both analytically coherent and culturally less distorting.

Implications for Music Education

The ten piano scores produced by this study offer potentially significant resources for Ghanaian music education, pending classroom and performance testing. They provide piano students and teachers with repertoire grounded in a Ghanaian tradition — addressing the gap that (Annan, 2024) and Adu-Gilmore (2024) identified in African piano pedagogy — but their educational effectiveness in practice has not yet been empirically assessed. Pilot use by teachers and students, or reception studies involving community listening sessions, would be needed before strong claims about educational impact can be made. In a broader sense, the compositional methodology documented here — fieldwork, structural analysis, principled adaptation, community review — could serve as a template for similar work on other Ghanaian or West African folk traditions, and music education programmes could incorporate this methodology into composition training.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that future work should address. First, the sample of ten compositions does not exhaust the Larteh repertoire. Many more tunes exist, and some collected but not adapted may be of equal or greater cultural significance. Second, reliance on a single community reviewer for validation limits the credibility of the cultural fidelity assessment; future studies should involve a broader panel of reviewers, supplemented by community listening sessions where multiple audience members respond to the compositions alongside the original recordings. Third, the free-rhythm tune presented a translation problem not fully resolved by the current methodology; further work on speech-rhythm transcription approaches is needed. Fourth, researcher positionality must be acknowledged: the researcher's background in Western compositional practice and limited status as an insider in Larteh culture inevitably shaped both the selection of musical elements and the harmonic choices made. Fifth, Western staff notation is itself a form of bias — it privileges pitch and metre and cannot capture microtonal inflection, the physical gesture of performance, or the social dynamics of communal singing. The scores should be read alongside the audio recordings to compensate for what notation cannot encode. Sixth, the adaptation of living community music raises intellectual property questions that this study addressed through community consent and benefit-sharing agreements but that are not yet fully resolved in the broader legal and scholarly literature on African musical heritage.

Future Research

Future studies could address these limitations in several ways. First, further fieldwork in Larteh could document the full repertoire and assess which tunes are most at risk of being lost. Second, performance studies involving both Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian pianists could test whether the compositions communicate Larteh

cultural identity to varied audiences. Third, comparative work with other Akwapem communities could explore whether the compositional methodology applied here translates across related but distinct traditions. Fourth, researchers interested in music education could study how these scores function in classroom settings, assessing whether they achieve the cultural engagement outcomes that Adu-Gilmore (2024) and Acquah (2013) identify as central to culturally responsive music pedagogy. Fifth, community listening sessions with Larteh audiences should be organised to generate reception data that can supplement the expert reviewer validation used in this study.

Conclusion

This study yields three principal conclusions, each addressing the research objectives and questions stated in the introduction.

First, addressing Objective 1 and Research Question 1: the structural features of Larteh folk tunes — pentatonic and hexatonic scales, call-and-response forms, compound and cross-rhythmic organisation, and characteristic melodic ornamentation — can be preserved as structural rather than merely decorative elements in solo piano adaptation, provided the composer grounds compositional decisions in detailed structural analysis of the source tunes and exercises restraint in the application of Western harmonic conventions. Cultural recognisability was maintained in six of ten compositions at a strong level and in four at a moderate level, as assessed through a systematic community review process.

Second, addressing Objective 2 and Research Question 2: creative ethnomusicology provides a rigorous and culturally accountable methodology for this kind of adaptation work. The most effective bridging strategies were the distribution of call-and-response voices across piano registers; the use of polyrhythmic left-hand ostinato patterns derived from the percussion traditions accompanying the original songs; and modal harmonisation that aligns with the characteristic final pitches of the source melodies without imposing functional harmonic hierarchies. The quality of the resulting compositions depended directly on the depth of the fieldwork and the specificity of the structural analysis, not on technical compositional skill alone.

Third, addressing Objective 3: the ten original piano scores constitute a documented and community-validated addition to Ghanaian art music and African piano repertoire. Their potential value for music education and performance contexts is significant but requires empirical testing before strong claims can be made. As an immediate practical next step, the scores and accompanying audio recordings will be returned to the Ahenease and Kubease communities in accessible formats, archived with the relevant institutional repository, and made available to Ghanaian piano educators pending any necessary community consent for wider distribution.

The adaptation of under-researched African folk traditions for Western instruments is both possible and necessary, and this study demonstrates that it requires sustained community engagement, structural analysis, and compositional restraint. The data collected during this research suggests that Larteh folk tunes possess compositional richness — particularly in their cross-rhythmic structures — that has yet to be fully explored, and that further engagement with this tradition will yield both

scholarly and musical rewards.

Author contributions

Amoah, D. A. conceived the study, designed the research framework, conducted all fieldwork in the Ahenease and Kubease communities of Akwapem Larteh, performed the ethnomusicological analysis of the twenty collected folk tunes, composed all ten original piano pieces, conducted the compositional device analysis and assessment against theoretical frameworks, and wrote the full manuscript including all revisions. Dr. Amoah takes full responsibility for the integrity of the work as a whole.

Akoto, N. Y. contributed to the conceptualisation of the research framework, assisted with the analysis of collected folk tunes, participated in the compositional device analysis, and contributed to manuscript revision.

Agboga, P. K. contributed to the theoretical framework development, provided critical feedback on the compositional device analysis and assessment against theoretical frameworks, and contributed to manuscript revision and final approval. All authors reviewed the final manuscript and approved it for submission.

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Conflict of interest

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