

A Contemporary Perspective of the Role of Women in Popular Music in Ghana: A Case of Les Femmes All Women Band

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ABSTRACT: - *The image of women in the past has always been stuck at the background appearing as silhouette against their male counterparts. This can be verified in the Ghanaian popular music scene, as well as the traditional set up, as few women are usually seen daring in this male dominated area or even barred from taking any major role in traditional music performances. However, women are slowly changing the perception of society and reinforcing the belief that they can rise to the occasion when given the opportunity. This study sought to identify and bring to the fore, through interviews, one women ensemble that has braced itself up against societal indifference in the popular music arena. The study also highlighted the profiles of the women performers as well as their achievements as a group. It is realized that women in the arts and other fields of endeavours are equally good as their male counterparts.*

Keywords: contemporary, popular music, traditional music, Les Femme

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, popular music has undergone a tremendous evolution. The impetus of this movement has been characterized by the emergence of musicians forming dance bands. Popular music is now used for most events such as, weddings naming ceremonies, funerals and many more. This genre of music is not only performed by live bands but also sound systems which play either a recorded version of the live band or play recorded materials which are computerized from the studio. In all these, men have played a dominant role and women who participated in these roles were seen as strange and performing duties which are not meant for them. According to Mann and Huffman (2005), “third-wave feminists of the late 1980’s to 1990’s pointed out that norms of feminine and masculine roles and behaviour vary across societal contexts and that there is no universal experience of women” (p.76). In recent or contemporary times, with reference to the 21st century; women have played roles and are playing roles in popular music in Ghana. One of these women popular bands who have come to lime light to break the “prerogative of male bands” is the “Les Femmes” of Ghana. This popular band has been very vibrant and their involvement in popular music in this 21st Century needs to be unearthed. The study therefore sought to examine the contemporary perspective of the role of women in popular music in Ghana, with the “Les Femmes” all women band, as the case study.

Although women have played roles in contemporary popular music band in Ghana, their significance has not been documented over the past decade. This situation, as a result of societal perception, has limited the availability of extensive research materials covering the phenomenon. This paper begins with a theoretical framework of performativity of women in artistic endeavours in a society where men dominate such performances. It reviews literature on five topical issues, delineates the method and the process, presents the results and draws conclusions after discussion of the findings.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was underpinned by the theory of Women in Development (WID) as expounded in the works of Koczberski (2007/2002/1998/1996). Indeed, the fundamental issue relating to women and the development process is historical. According to Koczberski (1998), “the idea of integrating Third World women into aid practice first emerged in the USA in the early 1970s when (mainly female) development practitioners and researchers began pushing for greater representation of women in aid agencies”(p.396). It was argued that the aid programmes given by some major institutions such as United States Agency for International Development

(USAID), the UN, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and the World Bank were 'male-biased'. As a result of this, women became ignored and/or disadvantaged by the development process (Koczberski, 1998).

An extensive body of literature now condemns the early modernisation approaches as having failed to deliver real benefits for women, especially the poor in the third world countries (Hoben, 1982). Suffice it to say that, for women's status to improve there is the need for them to move into productive ventures that men have gained so much recognition and employment. Some of such productive ventures is in the arts. Popular music performances in Ghana have been lucrative and, mostly, women who are popular music artistes in Ghana have been taking the singing roles with most instrumental roles given to men. Some of these popular musical genres are highlife, hip-life, hip-hop and gospel. In all these highly patronized genres, women are relegated to only singing. Should the status-quo remain sacrosanct? Within the WID theory, such a view is predicated on the assumption that musical endeavours in the contemporary world are socially progressive and a necessary precursor to self-advancement. WID has therefore provided the framework that allows women see development as a linear cumulative process and thereby making strides. In the musical performances, women are constructing their talents meaningfully and gainfully in groups and as individuals, contrary to the assertion that "productivity and capacity to work is often constrained by culture and tradition, which often keeps women homebound, while men go into the outside world" (Bergeron, 2003, p.398).

Furthermore, some women's groups appear to be more powerful, better networked and positioned than others to receive aid money (Koczberski, 1998). The emergence of the WID theory has so far axiomatically affected the activities of women in all walks of life in Ghana, including the arts, politics, and economics. From this basic premise it is assumed that a more feminist awareness or gender-sensitive approach to development practice would be sufficient to deliver economic and social benefits to women. The most obvious, relevance of women's economic independence, in terms of musical performance is what has been initiated by the Les Femmes All Women Band.

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

3.1 Background of Women in Music

It is generally acknowledged that one of the most influential aspects of the performing arts that have been an ever present phenomenon in extended social groups and distinctive cultural organizations is music. Thus, its existence in society has fueled the dominance of creative minds in that area. Scholarly writings have revealed the active participation of both sexes in music over the years pointing out the dominant roles of men. Clawson (1999) for instance was of the view that men have tended to dominate the making of popular music, in numbers as well as in terms of creative and organizational control. Besides, each era has borne a small active group of feisty, creative women who, often against immense odds, have raised their voices in song. This statement was echoed in a later submission in the same article where she emphasized the significance of the role of women in popular music. "Miriam Makeba, Dolly Rathebe, Dorothy Masuka are names which immediately come to mind at the mention of our heritage of great women singers. They were the bright lights of the fifties; the first Hollywood style stars" from Schubert (2012). Clawson's submission regarding the participation of women is vindicated based on the small fraction of feisty women she spoke of. This submission could do little in establishing an acceptable standard of knowledge with regards to the number of women participation in popular music at the time. Since several social factors also affect the participation of women in music, it is expedient to point out that a look into those facets could help bring a better understanding to the issue of women in music. Other written sources have highlighted certain aspects of societal influences on women with regards to music. This submission however restricted it is to popular music in Ghana, reveals some factors to consider when researching into the background of women in music. Despite not dominantly decorated, literature has showcased the presence of women in music. An in-depth look from a historical perspective will uncover more facts about the role they play.

3.2 Historical Account of Women in Ghanaian Popular Music

Several creative minds have been actively involved in the history and development of popular music in Ghana over the years. These extremely talented individuals have been predominantly males but the presence of females in playing complementary role in such performances cannot be ignored. Literature has captured a lot of information on women in Ghanaian popular music. Like Collins (2012) postulated, until the late 1960s, there were very few women operating in Ghanaian popular music and concert party scenes, because it was commonly known that such profession was not descent for women to pursue. Again, Collins was of the view that the growth in the prominence of Ghanaian women pop artists over the last twenty years could be categorized into four major reasons: the effect of government policies, the impact of foreign women artists, the utilization of traditional music by Ghanaian popular musicians and the boom in Christian gospel music. From an indigenous

cultural perspective, Stein Hunt (1993) had reiterated a similar situation by submitting that women among the *dagomba* do not have the primary responsibility for music making or for organization of other fine arts. According to him, women simply accompany or assist their husbands in these endeavours. In any case, these references uncover the truth about the status of women in music without an extensive look at the cause of their minute numerical presence.

Literature has also captured information on women who have dominated the popular music scene in Ghana over the years. Some of these female musicians according to Collins (2005) are Lola Everett, Charlotte Dada, Lady Talata Heidi from northern Ghana, Alto saxophonist Eugenia 'Asabea' Cropper and concert guitarist Vida Rose. In addition, there are the more traditionally oriented pop musicians such as Ewe singer Efua Dokonu, the leader of the Gasuku cultural troupe Naa Amanua, and Diana Reindorf who runs the Dwansie choral group. Important Akan singers of the 1970s were Mumba, Janet Osei, Awura Ama, followed in the 1980s by Abena Yanth, Akosua Amoama, Akosua Agyepong, and Yaa Oforiwa to mention a few. These women who have been popular in the music scene attract the interest of scholars. Whiteley (2013) saw this being more an indicator, rather than a true measure, of power in the industry.

3.3 Women in Ghanaian pop music and the perception of the Society

Acquah (2013, p.27) stated that "the Fante tradition frowns on the handling and playing of Asafo by women because it is not only a male ensemble but also associated with wars". This submission points to societal perception of women in relation to music in culture. The way people live and behave in certain geographical areas shapes their way of thinking. This situation has been dominant in typical Ghanaian cultures and scholars have been very elaborate on the subject. Women tend to respond to the stigma from society by crawling into their shells. They do not want to be ridiculed by people who tag their personality with raising a family and establishing a home. In this regard, Dunu and Ugbo (2015) also pointed out how most songs create particular images; usually a well-to-do man with a lot of money has girls all over him and controls and orders them like he owns them. This dominant representation unfortunately seems to affect women's identity of themselves and how the society also views them as objects of male possession and domination. Unfortunately, this has been the case in the past until women gender activists began to champion the course of educating the society on the capabilities of a woman. However, the revelation of this movement has slowly curbed the perception of society and reinforced the belief of women taking initiatives. As the years go by, there has been an increase in numerical presence of women in the popular music industry of Ghana. Several documented sources have revealed the active participation of women in the formation of bands in Ghana in the past decade.

3.4 The Role of the Female Musician

In the past, socio-cultural restrictions greatly defined the functions of women in the Ghanaian performance industry. In this regard, Greitemeyer, Hollingdale and Traut-Mattausch (2015) pointed out that women popular artistes, however, are held in particularly low esteem and some of the reasons for this stem from some traditional African attitudes. As Dunu and Ugbo (2015) postulated, "music, especially popular ones have been adduced to have (or to have had) a big impact on the way gender is constructed in our culture" (p.37). Traditionally, it was believed that women in their menses (periodical cycle) bring bad luck to their performing groups. Women were confined to limited responsibilities such as vocal backing and playing of light percussive instruments. They were never allowed to touch traditional drums. Collins (2012) affirmed the fact that although traditionally singing and dancing are the reserve of women; drumming is basically reserved for men.

In Ghana, culture defines most systems in society and a breach or reluctance to follow its demands leads to stigma. Nketia (1968) reiterated that amongst the Akan of Ghana for instance, women are not allowed to play horns and drums (except the *donno*; pressure drum) but are allowed to play light percussive instruments such as bamboo stamping tubes, *adenkum* gourds and rattles. This way of life has characterized every aspect of the society.

Harrev (1992) shared the experience of Aicha Kone, one of the Cote d'Ivoire' top stars who says 'not all families will accept a woman to be an artiste and embrace her as a bride....they think an artiste cannot be a serious person, that she is never at home, traveling all the time'. From a Western perspective, this situation is analyzed by Whiteley (2013) who stated that "role-play and its relationship to genders identity (to include the traditional split between career/family) is still considered a stumbling block for British women managers"(pp.449-452). In particular, the promotion of a woman to the head of a Department is perceived by many top MDs as a political statement, (a point that is borne out by *Vox* magazine's list of music industry's 'Twenty Most Powerful People').

In spite of the traditional inferences which dominated society, the 1960's brought a massive turn around. Modernization/Urbanization processes created the opportunity for women to take more responsibility. Like Banks and Carr (1974) asserted, women roles began to change as a result of the freedom given by society

through the advocacy of feminine gender activists. This is particularly noticeable with the inflow of women into the popular entertainment industry at the time. Cole (2001) observed the impact of the inflow and commented: in the early part of the decade some of the concert female impersonators began to be replaced by professional actresses like Asha of Arebela's group, Margaret Quainoo (Araba Stamp), Adelaide Buaben, Comfort Akua Dampo and Esi Kom of the Workers Brigade Concert Party and Madame Kenya of the Riches Big Sound. (p. 17)

They were followed by the guitarists Vida Rose and dramatist Efua Sutherland who both set up their own concert parties in the late 1960's.

3.5 Female Bands in Ghana

There are records on the presence of women in popular bands over the years. According to Collins (1986) a stimulus to local dance band women came from the 1956 visit to Ghana by Louis Armstrong and his 'All Stars' that featured the famous blues singer Velma Middleton. Notwithstanding the dominance of men in the playing of instruments, women have been able to brace through the area of popular bands in Ghana and one of them which has appeared so strongly in the popular music scene is Les Femmes all women band. In 2014, Les femmes all women band was formed and launched. The one-on-one interview with the leader of the group revealed that the band was actually the second pop band in Ghana to feature an all women contingent playing the instruments and singing as well. This vibrant female band in Ghana has received just little scholarly attention found online at www.Facebook.com. Since 2014, studies have shown that, there has been little update on them. For this reason, this research intends to fill this gap and expound on detailed account of the band. The scarcity of literature on female pop bands in Ghana presents a great responsibility for scholars to look at the phenomenon in a more in-depth manner.

III. METHODOLOGY

Setting, Participants and Process

The study was conducted in Kanda a suburb of Accra in the Greater Region of Ghana. It is the capital of Ghana covering an area of 225.67 km² (87.13 sq. miles) with an estimated urban population of 2.27 million as of 2012. It is organized into 12 local government districts – 11 municipal districts and the Accra Metropolitan District, which is the only district within the capital to be granted city status. "Accra" usually refers to the Accra Metropolitan Area, which serves as the capital of Ghana, while the district which is within the jurisdiction of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly is distinguished from the rest of the capital as the City of Accra. In common usage, however, the terms "Accra" and "City of Accra" are used interchangeably.

The intersection of the Lafa stream and Mallam junction serves as the Western border of Accra, the Great Hall of the University of Ghana forms Accra's Northern border, while the Nautical College forms the Eastern border. The Gulf of Guinea forms the Southern border. Accra is the Greater Accra Region's economic, administrative and social hub and serves as the anchor of the larger Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA), which is inhabited by about 4 million people, making it the thirteenth-largest metropolitan area in Africa.

Kanda is an averagely populated middle and high-income area a few kilometres northeast of the city center. The area is home to the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), the national television and radio stations, a private television station, TV3, the Accra Zoo, the popular +233 Jazz Bar and Grill (a place for evening and weekend revelers) and a handful of embassies. There are schools, clinics and churches (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Charismatic, Pentecostal and Evangelical); local Muslims attend the mosque on the Kanda Highway. This is the area where the band is situated.

The research was rooted in case study design. As described by Wynn and Williams (2012), a case study is a research strategy and an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context. Case studies are based on in-depth investigation of a single individual, group or event to explore the causes of underlying principles. The instruments used for the data included observation and interview. A total of five (5) instrumentalists were sampled. All of them were purposively selected to ascertain their instrumental areas based on the theory of Women in Development (WID).

Four rehearsal sessions and three musical performances were observed. The performances were observed in the natural environment of the instrumentalists while permission was sought to take record of the activities. Through interview and observation, data was gathered on the musical aesthetic qualities of their performances as well as their achievements so far in the music industry and towards their own well being. Individual and group participants were interviewed during rehearsal sessions of the group at +233 Jazz and Grill premises. Also, we participated in the performances from the group thereby enabling us observe some hidden aesthetics which they could not be described during the interview.

The participants were made to understand the need for objectivity in all the responses to enable the researchers have a true picture of the situation as it exists on the ground. Four weeks with seven different days were used in the data collection process. Data were cross-checked and where we were not sure, we went back to the participants for reconciliation. High standard of decency in the research was upheld, especially, in relation to the participants, and assured accuracy in the reportage. In the presentation and discussion of the data, real names of the participants were used to serve as reference for their personal profile.

V. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 The formation of the Band: Les Femme Band

In the year 2009 in Accra Dzesi, women of colour band was founded by Lead Vocalist, Della Hayes, comprising of all women with Abena Pomah on guitar, Sita Korley on keyboards, Joanna Deneka on trumpet, Vida “Feehin” Ofori on percussion, and Wendy Opoku on drums. They played for two years in and around Accra specifically, at the Alisa Hotel Jazz Bar. The idea of putting together an all women band was something thought of by Della Hayes who later became the leader of the band. She shared this idea with various people in the music industry in Ghana and began to select musicians who could help her to make her vision come to pass. In her quest to gather the components of the band, she met the keyboardist who was introduced to her by Charles Duvvor, a pianist. The “bands women” came from varied background. The Keyboardist who was already playing at the Police Interdenominational Church assisted her in acquiring the services of the drummer, who had just completed Senior Secondary and had acquired that skill in School. The trumpeter was hired from an already existing band; Amen band, which had appeared on the “bands alive” programme. The lead guitarist, who had been introduced to the art of guitar playing earlier, was, as at the time a food vendor. The electric bass guitarist was a beautician at the time she was introduced and was also a practicing bass guitarist. Last, but not least was the percussionist who was with the “Wolumei” band.

In February 2009, the first rehearsal session was put together where the individual female musicians selected came to play together for the first time. Like Kenny, Davis and Oates (2004), a rehearsal occurs as preparation for a performance in music and the other performing arts so the rehearsal did not only introduce the band members to the instrument they could play, it was a beginning to build their proficiency. As individuals, a few had been part of bands dominated by men, thus, being a part of an all women band was a total new experience for them. They subsequently played at +233 jazz and grill bar as well as many club venues. According to the drummer, the band’s launch at the Alliance Francaise was when she felt very unique. It was almost impossible to put an all women band together but it was done, anyway. This sensation kept the group to gather and caused them to achieve many feats in the public domain over the years. Since its creation, the band has given more than 300 concerts both in public and private places and regularly performs at major nightclubs in Accra such as +233 Jazz Jazz and Grill bar (now the prominent music spot in Accra), Cuzzy Bros and Alisa Hotel jazz club. Their music is a mixture of afro beats and Ghanaian highlife, interspersed with “hippidippip”: an experimental form of music which uses scattling to make music. The band has gained prominence in Accra, featuring on all the major radio and television stations in Ghana because of its uniqueness, variety of musical style, perseverance, and humble background. This status has exited the media, the public and many governmental agencies. Ever since its launch, the group has rapidly gained popularity, performing at the McTontoh (osibisa founder) tribute concert in Accra, at the National Theatre and the International Conference Center also in Accra, at the Citi FM Music Of Ghanaian Origin Concert and with icons such as Kojo Antwi, Becca, Sheriffa, Meiway and many others.

The band has travelled widely, performing at the “LesNuits Atypiques de Koudougou” festival in Burkina Faso in 2011. They were asked to stay until the final night and then had a standing ovation from over 3,500 people, at the Tinaa fest. The group also performed at the independence anniversary celebration of La Cote D’Ivoire in Abidjan in 2012, and at Stars Integration of Culture of Africa musical competition, Benin in 2014 where they became second with their song “Happy Yourself”. The achievements of the band brought fame to its members and reinforced a social believe in their competence. Wendy Opoku the drummer expressed “the way I play like a man has made me believe that; what a man can do, a woman can do better”.

After reinforcing the support of society through sterling performances, the band went through a period of transition. Some members left the band due to lack of transparency, honesty and continuous exploitation from the leadership. A high demand of the band to perform at various programmes made the leadership seize the opportunity to misappropriate the funds gained. The management team became corrupt, exploiting the members and refusing to pay them their earnings as expected. In an interview with “Feehin” the percussionist, she recalled her frustration saying:

I hate being exploited especially when I have worked hard to earn a living. They [the leadership] never spoke to us about it despite knowing there was a problem. The experience was not good at all, given the exposure and

success the band had over a short period of time, I decided to leave because I couldn't take it any longer. I realized my colleagues shared the same sentiments so it was an easy decision after all because we left together. (Feehin)

These problems disintegrated the band and left the rest of the members no choice than to break away. The drummer, Wendy Opoku, travelled to Sweden for further studies while other members went about their own ventures. These challenges and other factors culminated in bringing Dzesi band to its knees. Subsequently, there was a call up by core members of Dzesi band to come together to form a new one out of the previous. Thus, in 2014 a new all-female pop band emerged known as the Les Femmes. This band is yet to be launched but has already gained popularity among the music industry and has many lovers following it.

5.2 Commercial Breakthrough

In June 2015, the New band began to perform at +233 Jazz Bar and Grill (Nr. 1 music spot in Accra) and has since been performing there live on Wednesdays; performing a variety of Pop music such as Jazz, Funk, Reggae, Highlife and Hip-life. It has performed at both public and private functions mainly in the nation's capital, Accra. The group won a lot of hearts at the Savanna Girl Talk Concert with icon Efyra and other icons such as MzVee, Adoma, El, Sarkodie, and many others who have made it in the Ghanaian Pop music industry in December 2015. In January 2016, the band performed at the La Palm Royal Beach Hotel in Accra where an awards event for hotels was held. Although the band does not have its own musical instruments; rehearsals are done at a studio which is for rent. It also gets gigs through playing at the +233 Jazz bar and Grill in Accra, and subsequently performs at other functions. Sometimes, the managers or leaders of the band lobby for the gigs the band gets. According to music lovers, "the men can play but the women band rock". People are excited when they see the all women band play. Like postulated by one of them:

For the mere fact that women are seen playing on instruments is something else and to add to it they play so well. At times the band becomes a sight to see by tourists to the point that when foreigners are in the country they are brought to the +233 Jazz Bar and Grill to see the all women band play. (Sita Korley)

5.3 Profile of the Members

In an interview conducted to obtain information on the profile of all band members, there were interesting responses from the participants about how they started their music career and the experiences they went through in order to become the expert performers they are today. The data reveals very important aspects of the process of growth of the female musician in a male dominated Pop music industry in Ghana.

Abigail Aniapam; the Trapset Drummer

According to Abigail, she was fourteen old when she started playing the trapset but she is thirty (30) now.

My junior High School head master, Mr. Enoch Lamptey Mills taught me an introductory groove on the drum set to assist him shoot a music video. (Aniapam)

After that experience Abigail said she told her Bishop of her church that she wanted to learn the drum set so she could play in church. She recalled:

He was not hesitant; he quickly endorsed my decision and encouraged me to learn. Pastor Isaiah Philip Boateng, my then youth pastor who is now a resident pastor at a branch of our church in Darkuman volunteered to teach me. He sacrificed a lot of his time to teach me the basics of drumming and that became the foundation of my music career as a drummer. (Aniapam)

In Abigail's case, we realized that she had a strong foundation of which she built her professional music career. A little encouragement gave her the confidence to take the initiative to learn how to play the drums. This little spark was enough to cause her to play at events. She said;

I played in church and also had the opportunity to play in Chara Praise Band from 2010: a band which I still play up to date, I also played the Lamptey mills band in 2000. I still play in my church anyway. (Aniapam)

This is to say that it was her enthusiasm that built her to engage more in such social music practice. This is why Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson (2005) asserted that happy people are healthier, more successful, and more socially engaged. Despite the positives experiences in Abigail's initial submission, she acknowledged some challenges which almost jeopardized an aspect of her social life. She admitted that men used to ridicule her and treated her like a man by the instruments she plays. This situation, she said, negatively affected her perception about herself and the future of the band.

She, however, admitted that the band has given her courage and taught her a lot, thereby giving her the opportunity to contribute her quota to Ghana's entertainment industry. He counted on how the unique atmosphere created by her colleagues has fueled continuous beliefs in what she does: "Our resilience and desire have also commanded trust from our fans". She later admitted that a lot of things have changed over the years

attributing it to the fact that people had begun to realize the significance of the participation of women in pop bands. She expressed:

I think women have made a strong statement over the years which has seen them earn the love of society despite all the traditional beliefs and cultural practices. I can say with all confidence that I am very happy in my interpersonal relationship now: both family and spouse. (Anipam)

Vida “Feehin” Ofoli; the percussionist

Playing in the percussion section of a Pop band could be quite challenging given that the percussionist is expected to maintain a steady pulse throughout the music in order not to sway other instrumentalists off the groove. Mostly, this role is assigned to males taking into consideration the energy involved in playing percussion. Feehin didn't hesitate in sharing this same view. She conceded:

You need to be conscious with pulse to be a good percussionist. This job has been a challenging one since I took it on, but I can say that I have developed into a fine player of the percussions. (Feehin)

Feehin's musical career is something of a contrast to that of Abigail. She is the participant with most experience with 32 years of playing in the Pop band. She started playing at the age of fifteen (15) and is now forty-seven (47) years old. She taught herself during her childhood days, playing with empty milk tins and pretending they were percussion instruments. This really helped her play by intuition. She also learnt by imitating people she saw play such instruments. She admitted that she never had any instructor who sat her down to take her through percussion lessons. Meanwhile, she stated categorically that her mother and the extended family were never in favour of her learning to play the percussions. They were totally against it and saw it as something vulgar; causing people to disrespect those who play such instruments. She however, expressed the fulfillment she gets when she plays:

I enjoyed playing it every time and I never listened to them no matter the circumstances.

She recalled that, she had to stop helping her mother at the market in selling her goods because she felt that she was not having enough time to practice with the band. This decision made her family members very angry and they tagged her as a wayward child. According to her, the only time family members valued her career, was when her mother died and many musicians and bands came to the funeral to support her with live band music. “Since then, my family members always give me the respect I deserve”, she plainly said.

By analyzing the situation, we become conscious of the fact that the respect given to her was as a result of her social status. This status can be recognized when we observe the support given to her by her colleague musicians who attended her mother's funeral. A clear scenario is presented on what society esteems to be important or not. Feehin expressed her opinion that, in the Ghanaian culture, people are only recognized and respected based on the wealth they have accumulated. Money is power! It enhances one's social status and causes people to respect you regardless of your shortcomings. With this submission one can attest to the fact that acceptance into society can be achieved by building a positive social status regardless of societal perception. This reason could also be applicable to the appreciation shown to women in Pop bands over the years due to the commitment they have exhibited in the face of stigmatization from the public. The issue of women playing diminutive roles in Pop bands in Ghana in the past is also a big subject for Feehin who admitted that most of the bands she played before joining the all women band were male dominated. Like she said,

I was the only lady among them playing an instrument. I've had so many experiences especially being the only female in a male dominated band. People were surprised and happy. In 2005 I was published in the graphic showbiz with my profile and my telephone number; in 2006 I was also enlisted on www.Ghanamusic.com with my full information. This brought about jobs because a lot of people wanted to learn from me. I even had international students taking lessons from me. (Feehin)

Some of the bands she played with were Shipiloi, Ablekuma, Ablaze, Kusum ensemble, Bukom ensemble, then, later joined the Sakumo cultural band where she played for many years before joining the women band. She recalled that “Shipiloi” was the first band she played at the age of sixteen years.

Abena Pomah; Lead guitarist

Another contrast is presented in the case of Abena who had a late start to her music career. She started playing at the age of 24 and now 40 years. Even though she showed interest, her father was not willing to teach her. He told her that the guitar was something for men so he rather wanted her brother to learn but her brother did not show any interest in it. As a result of this situation, she rather took drumming lessons from her church to satisfy her desire to learn how to play an instrument. This means that culture should not undermine our abilities over instruments in school environment (Lun, Fischer & Ward, 2010). Her situation is something of great interest given that she had a desire to learn but had no one to teach her. Indeed, when females are able to do away with panic and fear, they can show themselves worthy of performing after gaining such experiences (Sullivan, 2002). According to Abena, her father revealed a remarkable situation which has been highlighted by previous participants concerning the perception of society on the role of women. This situation shows that this problem

existed not only among people who have little or no knowledge about music but also among the male musicians. Abena later moved to stay in the village called Akyem-Akropong where her father had established his own gospel band. There, she met the bassist. She then expressed her interest in learning the guitar so this man started taking her through some basic lessons in bass guitar playing.

After realizing the quick pace at which Abena was responding to the tutorials, he was encouraged to teach her even more. Of course, human beings also have an amazing capacity to learn new skills and adapt to new environments (Green & Bavelier, 2008). After few more lessons, she began to play at church. Periods of hard work with consistent practicing, Abena warmed people's hearts with her playing skills and they began to appreciate her efforts. Church members were so tender hearted towards her and kept encouraging her because of the fact that she was a lady playing lead guitar. Her dream was finally realized because she began to feel loved and appreciated for her achievement.

Abena also shared many experiences she had as a band woman over the years. She admitted that being a musician has been rather tough and exciting as well. It has opened doors for her, irrespective of the fact that her husband left her; the popularity she gained brought him back. It has also taken her to places she never dreamt of going. "I have travelled to Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast", as she reported. According to Abena, being an instrumentalist is a joy for her. One most moment for her is when they performed at all first ladies in Africa's conference and his Excellency, the former President of the Republic of Ghana, Jerry John Rawlings gave her a hand shake and took a picture with her.

Ama Ekem; the Bassist

Ama started her bass guitar lessons in her church at age of eighteen years. A bass guitarist in the church volunteered to teach her. That opportunity led her to become a professional bassist. According to her, she did not encounter any learning problem but she put in lots of commitment and perseverance to learn the instrument. She had the opportunity to join live band performance at the beach which she amazingly grasped that opportunity. Ama expressed the joy and satisfaction she had in knowing how to play the instrument. She was more than happy due to how the beach band welcomed her, regardless of her gender, to play with them. According to her, she is proud to belong to the all women band because they command a lot of respect everywhere they go.

Ruby Nunoo; the Singer

This is the only participant with the least experience in the group. Ruby started music when was 20 years old. From her submission, her love for music was stirred up from childhood as she inherited from her father, because, the father was a lover of music so much so that any time he was at home, he would be heard playing and singing to a tune from his tape recorder and that alone got her closer to him. At age 20, she started singing at the Royal House Chapel International Church and since then singing has become her profession. Most of her training came from singing in church.

Concerning her social status, she acknowledged the fact that, her life has been affected positively because she got to meet people of high status from different countries and this has brought good opportunities in her way. Ruby finds so much love in her singing and the performances with her group due to enormous appreciation she receives from performances. The members of this enterprising band have revealed other aspects of their lives away from live performances and continuous musical activity lifestyle. The trumpeter, Joanna Deneka and the pianist, Sita Afriyie have been able to upgrade themselves with formal music education in higher learning institutions. Females need to climb high the academic ladder (Coughlin, Wingard, Hollihan & Hollihan, 2005) to enable them do everything they set their minds on to do. Sita, who is a co-author of this paper, is pursuing her Masters Degree in Music to enhance her musical career.

5.4 Achievements

The band has travelled widely for various performances. In 2011, they were invited to perform at "Les Nuits Atypiques de Koudougou" festival in Burkina Faso. They performed so well that over 3,500 audiences gave them a standing ovation at the Tinaa fest. In February 2011, the band received a Musicians Union, Ghana (MUSIGA) award for their enormous contribution to the music industry in Ghana. In 2012, they attended the independence anniversary celebration of La Cote D'ivoire in Abidjan. In 2014, they travelled to Benin for Stars Integration of Culture of Africa musical competition in Benin in which they placed second with their song "Happy Yourself". For

VI. CONCLUSION

Over a period of time popular music has taken a dramatic turn. Indeed it has gradually warmed itself up into the hearts of its patrons and critics alike because of the aura and style involved in its performance. Performances of this genre cut across the social and artistic milieu and are held frequently at almost every cultural, political and religious setting. This development has therefore brought about a high growth in its production and participation and has increased the number of popular bands in Ghana. Majority of these bands are dominated by men with women to take up roles, hitherto, have been the preserve of the men and begun to do things society thought were impossible for women to do. However, society is unaware of the fact the women have taken up the challenge to break this jinx and are getting themselves involved in major male dominated activities and endeavours in recent past. The study of Les femmes, all women band” brought to the fore the activities of some women in the popular music scene. Indeed, the myth and superstitious beliefs that it is a taboo for women to play musical instruments is broken in this era. Women are being taught to play these instruments in schools and in other traditional ensembles. They play with much conviction and society is always amazed and marveled at their dexterity on these instruments. Music is a career that women should be encouraged to take up seriously since it also serves as a source of employment where income is earned. Finally it has come to a realization that women attract the same attention as men do because with the little effort it is seen as something unbelievable and when they do it at their best it looks amazing and extraordinary.

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