

## **Creativity and Originality of Musical Works: J.V. Armaah's "Biribi Papa Bi Wo Aseda Akyi" In Perspective**

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**ABSTRACT:-** The paper takes a close scrutiny of a choral musical piece with the title "Biribi papa bi wo aseda akyi" (something better beyond thanks) composed by one of Ghana's prolific composers, James Varrick-Armaah. It exposes the problem or difficulty composers face in their bid to come out with new and original works. Using formal musical analysis as the design, both accidental and purposive sampling techniques were used to select four pieces for the study. The pieces were analysed for their musical phrases, textual phrases, lyrics, melodic movements as well as form to reach an evaluative point. Other supporting studies, together with the main, reveal that art music composers seldom unconsciously, subconsciously, or consciously make use of elements of existing works, fuse with their ideas and identify the works as their own. The conclusion drawn from the study is that Armaah's composition "Biribi papa bi wo aseda akyi" is an amalgamation of three of his earlier compositions portraying more of creativity than originality. The study displays an analytical impulse that has implications for compositional impulse.

**Key words:-** creativity, originality, amalgamation, Biribi papa bi wo aseda akyi.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Description of compositional processes used in creating musical works is very significant to build upon general theories and devices of creative thinking behaviour among composers. In this regard, several authors such as Webster (2002), Baroni (1999) Roozendaal (1993) and Laske (1989) made conscious efforts to establish conceptual model for creative thinking in music creation that includes performance and analysis in the same vein within the interplay of consciousness, unconsciousness and subconsciousness. Indeed, the art of composing or creating a musical work takes various forms and means including arrangement which involves the adaptation of a piece of music for a medium other than that for which it was originally composed (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2007). It also involves the employment of varied melodic and compositional techniques which can be consciously, subconsciously, or unconsciously used by a composer to arrive at a completely new work. Undoubtedly, the combination and synchronization of musical ideas by different composers result in different and distinct compositions. One difficulty composers occasionally face in their quest to be original in a work could be the permeation or infiltration of musical ideas used in already known or existing musical works. The adoption or rejection of such ideas largely depends on the composer who may know of the particular idea's existence in a work and purposely "borrow" or unknowingly make use of. This is especially so with beginners in musical composition and even mature composers who are ken in terms of other musical works. The emphasis is upon organization, where in the composition of a piece of music, for example, the constituent parts of the emerging product are a combination of the segments and sections of existing ones by the same composer or different composers. Although such musical pieces may serve the purpose upon which they were composed, in musical analysis, it raises questions about creativity and originality of such pieces. In Ghana, one of such pieces is a slow danceable piece with the title Biribi Papa Bi Wo Aseda Akyi (something better beyond thanks) created by James Varrick Armaah, one of Ghana's prolific composers. The study therefore examines this piece by making references to the existing works by the same composer. It also presents an elucidation of the compositional mind and compositional process as described by other researchers and music theorists (Mereku, 1993). The results of this study add to existing literature in music composition, performance and analysis.

### **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Assayag et al. (1999), it is commonly admitted that musical perception is guided by expectations based on the recent past context. This perception, to the writer, may not only apply to the listener or an audience of a musical piece but also the composer of a musical work. On the part of the composer, the

'recent past context' can be a context in the music being composed itself or context in a music composed not long before a current one. In some other cases, it could be informed or influenced by an earlier composition. In the case of a composer, no matter what informs an entire composition or a passage in a composition, attempts are made to make a new composition as original as possible.

In a study to examine compositional strategies and musical creativity when composing with staff notations as against graphic notations among Korean students, Auh and Walker (1999) briefly defined musical originality as the ability to make music that is unique, unheard before, and different from peers. Creativity was also described to be at its strongest in the act of composition where knowledge, imagination, intellect and skill come together in one pursuit (Philpott et al., 2004). A relation of the definition by Auh and Walker (1999) and the description by Philpott et al. (2004) to the current study raises a question about the originality of Armaah's Biribi Papa Bi Wɔ Aseda Akyi (something better beyond thanks) or how creative the composer was in the composition of the work.

Citing Sternberg and Lubart, Willamon, et al. (2006) also defined creativity within psychology as the ability to produce work that is both novel and appropriate. A comparative study of Biribi Papa Bi Wɔ Aseda Akyi and three earlier compositions by the same composer then brings the two features in the definition of creativity in Willamon et al. (2006) into question. Whilst the new composition, Biribi Papa Bi Wɔ Aseda Akyi, can be termed appropriate in terms of its usefulness as it adds to the literature of danceable Ghanaian choral music, its novelty, from a careful scrutiny and comparison with three of his earlier compositions leaves much to be desired.

### III. METHODOLOGY

In the following, I detail how I chanced on the problem and how the musical pieces were selected; then how the process was done to achieve the desired results. The design used for the study was music analytical design. It deals with examination of elemental parts of music or the study of relationship of small parts of a whole and making a decision by looking at all or some of the factors involved (Hevner, 1936). In all, four pieces, composed in the Akan language of Ghana were selected from compilations of James Varrick Armaah.

**Table 1: Sample**

S/N	Title of the Song	English Translation
1.	Biribi papa bi wɔ aseda akyi	something better after thanks
2.	Oye	He is good
3.	Ɔsɛ Aseda	He deserves thanks
4.	Ɛyɛ Wo De	It is Yours

In selecting the pieces for the analysis, both accidental and purposive sampling techniques were used. As described by Petersen, et al. (2005), accidental sampling, also known as grab or opportunity sampling, is a form of non-probability sampling that involves taking a population sample that is close at hand, rather than carefully determined and obtained. In this case, Biribi papa bi wɔ aseda akyi, which I refer to as the main piece, was selected accidentally when I was teaching my choir and realized that it had some resemblance with some pieces I had listened to and studied. Having selected this main piece, I purposively selected the other three, which I also refer to as ancillary pieces, and made a critical scrutiny of them. As Sharma (2017) has stated, "Purposive sampling is a sampling technique in which researchers rely on their own judgment when choosing members of population to participate in the study (p. 752). Both the main piece and the ancillary pieces were examined and evaluated thoroughly. They were deconstructed, and determining the manipulation of, and relationships between, identified musical elements and compositional devices, I substantiated judgments about how the ancillary pieces relate to the expressed style of the main piece. Parameters such as musical phrases, textual phrases, lyrics, melodic movements and form were taken into consideration in the piece. Notation of the relevant passages in the four compositions studied were done and used as examples to substantiate the results obtained.

### IV. RESULTS FROM ANALYSIS

The results of the scrutiny were discussed with the main piece in relation to the ancillary pieces.

#### 4.1 Biribi Papa Bi Wɔ Aseda Akyi and Ɛyɛ Wo De

The similarity observed or drawn between these compositions was in the theme and opening lyrics of the latter and the title of the former. It could be observed that the composer used the opening and domineering text in his

Ɛye Wo de composition to title and also use dominantly in the lyrics of his Biribi papa bi wɔ aseda akyi. The following examples show the opening passages of the two works discussed.

**Example 1: Opening lyrics of Biribi papa bi wo aseda akyi**

**Example 2: Opening lyrics of Ɛye Wo de**

#### 4.2 Biribi Papa Bi Wɔ Aseda Akyi and Oye

From the observation and scrutiny of the two works, the composer made a 100% use of the form and arrangement of his song, Oye (He is good) in writing or composing Biribi papa bi wɔ aseda akyi. Beginning with the key and time signatures, the composer used the same key (A flat major) and the same simple quadruple time (  $\frac{4}{4}$  ) signature for the Oye. Apart from this, the same form and arrangement of Oye which could be illustrated as  $A^2 B^2 C B$  was also used for the Biribi papa bi wɔ aseda akyi. The illustration  $A^2 B^2 C B$  is explained as the first section of the piece (A) performed twice, the second section (B) also performed twice, before the third section (C) and then a restatement of the B section of the music.

A further detailed description of the contents of the two songs shows that the composer made use of the same melodic and rhythmic opening passage of Oye as shown in Examples 3 and 4 below:

**Example 3: Rhythmic and harmonic opening of Biribi papa bi wo aseda akyi**

**Example 4: Rhythmic and harmonic opening of Oye**

It is clear that the first section of Oye was repeated by the composer before the tenor part was assigned a cue to take the chorus to the second section and this was similarly done in the composer's Biribi papa bi wɔ aseda akyi. The respective cues are shown in Examples 5 and 6.

Mo mma yen mbom nka se \_\_\_\_\_ O - ye \_\_\_\_\_

**Example 5: Cue by Tenor (circled) to begin second section of Oye**

Oh biri-bi pa-pa

**Example 6: Cue by Tenor (circled) to begin second section of Biribi papabi wɔ aseda akyi**

Following the cues are the choruses in the second section of the pieces which were repeated or supposed to be performed twice in both compositions before moving to the third section, C, where the composer employed the call and response technique by making alto, tenor and bass parts alternate calls for the full chorus to respond to each call. Each of the three parts mentioned was also assigned to call twice (either the same or slightly varied - depending on the text assigned) in both compositions. Then, in similar fashion, the cue notes in the tenor parts were used again immediately after the second or last call in the bass part to take the choruses back to the beginning of the second section in both works. The following examples from the two compositions provide a picture of this narrative.

O - bia - ra be - bɔ Wo din daa Biri - bi pa - pa bi wɔa - se - da 'kyia, O -

Biri - bi pa - pa bi wɔa - se - da 'kyia 'yɛ Wo

biara be - te Wo nka daa, Biri - bi Biri - bi

deao Biri - bi pa - pa bi wɔa - se - da 'kyiɛ Wo (Mɛ - bɔ Wo din, mɛ - to Wo ndwom)

**Example 6: Call and response passages in Biribi papa bi wɔ aseda akyi**

Following are the call and response passages in Oye

**Example 7: Call and response passages in Oye**

#### 4.3 Biribi Papa Bi Wɔ Aseda Akyi and Ɔsɛ Aseda

Between these two above-named compositions by the same composer, it could also be observed that there was another form of extraction of ideas in terms of lyrics and melody from the latter which was composed before Biribi Papa Bi Wɔ Aseda Akyi. See Examples 8 and 9.



**Example 8: Melodic and textual ideas (circled and underlined) from Armaah's Ɔsɛ Aseda**



**Example 9: Melodic and textual ideas (circled and underlined) as used in Biribi Papa Bi Wɔ Aseda Akyi**

### V. CONCLUSIONS

The paper draws the conclusion that the composition Biribi Papa Bi Wɔ Aseda Akyi (something better beyond thanks) by James Varrick Armaah is an amalgamation of compositional resources in terms of text, form, and melody from three of his earlier compositions - Ɔsɛ Aseda (He deserves thanks), Ɛye Wo De (It is Yours) and Oye (He is good). It could also be concluded that although any of the four compositions discussed may be familiar with Ghanaian choral music aficionados, it may take one to be privy to all the four compositions and also a conscious study to realize that the composition Biribi Papa Bi Wɔ Aseda Akyi is a culmination of the other three. Finally, there is the likelihood that there are similar compositions as Armaah's Biribi Papa Bi Wɔ Aseda Akyi unnoticed until audience and song teachers get access to the compositions or ideas used in the creation of such works. It is obvious to see this as an expression of creativity since creativity deals with the act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality but does it portray originality? An original work is not a copied piece or based upon the work of existing ones, instead, it is a work created with a unique style and substance. In spite of its lack of originality, it exposes a new creative way of choral music compositions where one's musical pieces can be selected and synthesized into a hybrid creative work.

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