



1 WHO IS THE CHIEF?

THE CHIEF IS AMMASUHENE NANA KWAME APPIAH.
THE ATUMPAN DRUMS GREET THE CHIEF OF AMMASU (0:22)

In the mid-70s our family went to Ghana, my wife Prudence to do fieldwork for her doctoral thesis in social anthropology, and I to learn about west african music first hand.

In Dormaa we encountered the magnificent chief of Ammasu and the regionally renowned Akapoma band. They invited us and our two small children to stay and study in their village. Our children spoke the language Twi fluently after one and a half years but then forgot it as quickly.

In Ammasu I learned from Kwame Yeboah and became a member of the Ammasu Akapoma Group, the hottest music provider at funerals around Dormaa-Ahenkro in the Brong-Ahafu region of Ghana.

After 30 years the music in these recordings is as fresh as ever. This booklet mixes translations from the texts sung or spoken with my and Prudence's comments.

Bengt Berger

Right: Nana Barima Kwame Amponsah Appiah, Ammasuhene (chief of Ammasu) and Ankobeahene (chief of the ruling matrilineage Ankobea) is dancing an expressive and powerful dance.





2 WHEN I DIE THERE WILL BE PEACE IN THE HOUSE

AWESO 1 (10.11)

Any important ritual function will open with pouring of libation, that is, drinks for the ancestors, to ensure a successful activity.

Aweso music is light and mobile, including more singing and female participation compared to the official ritual music that uses the bigger Fontomfrom and Atumpan drums. Every so often the texts are concerned with life and death.

- Ancestor spirits! Here are drinks. May this game be successful. Come and receive drinks.
- Grandsire of Gyasy, royal of Denkyira. It's he who climbed the tree and reminds us of our ancestors. Child of the Asuava clan, will I be enthusiastically mourned on my death?

Kwakwa Yirifie has cooled down the enemy.

- *In the absence of father, I shall be restless up there.*
- *The Anafranaku plant stand up under the plantain tree for rain to give birth to triplets, and let's see... If Yaa does not come, I will die. Yaa has wronged me. Yaa Serwa's death has disturbed me. I am flooded.*
- *Yaa, respond to my hearing. Child of royal birth, I am dying. The blood of royal birth is unique. Something has blurred my vision. The only child of father. The only child of mother.*
- *Yaa Asanterwea*, you achieved a lot. Yaa Asanterwea, you have left us a lot.*
- *When I die, peace will reign in the house.*

* A legendary woman hero who led the Akan against the English and died in the war.
Left: The female section of the Ammasu Akapoma Group.

3 PROVERBS & GREETINGS

ON THE ATUMPAN DRUMS (1.40)

The **Atumpan Drums** are known as the talking drums in Ghana and at least elderly people will understand the words they speak. They are the master drums in Akapoma as well as in other important ceremonial and recreational music in this part of the country as well as in neighbouring Ashanti and other regions of Ghana.

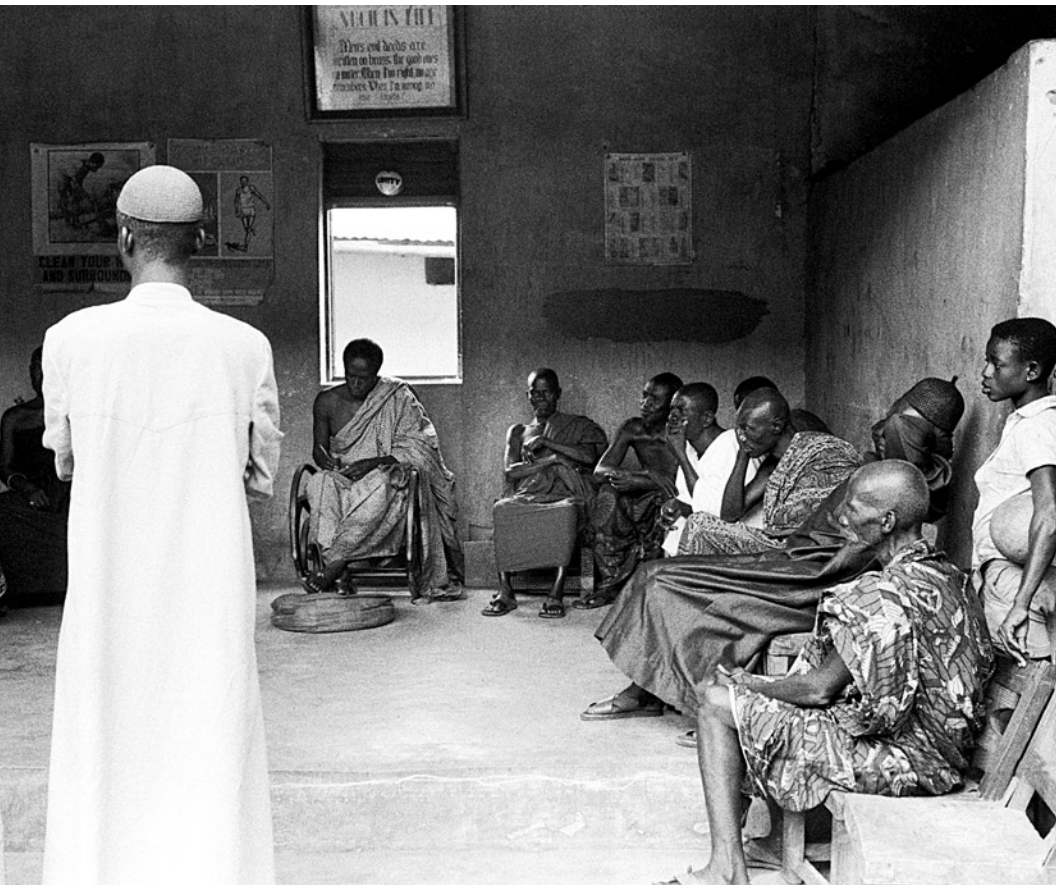
The master drummer is the Master of Ceremonies at funerals and other official functions. He is a soloist, he will lead the ensemble, greet important persons arriving, tell proverbs and give general comments on the proceedings. This he does in between the music pieces as well as in the middle as a part of them.

– *If you live, you live on the land, if you die they bury you in the land so whatever.... you go inside the land.*

- *Speak at once. Who is that? That is the Dormaheene (chief of Dormaa).*
- *Accept our sympathy.*
- *Sympathy for this chief. You are the long chief. Children fear you.*
- *Salute to somebody who has been to school and has become a chief.*
- *Salute: accept our sympathy*
- *There is difference in a mouse and there is difference in a mouse and there is difference in mouse.**
- *(For white people:) You are a road. You are the chief of the roads.*
- *Thanks to the chief.*
- *Thanks to the great drummer.*
- *All days are not equal.*
- *A tree called Fruntumia that produces rubber is soft when cutting it, but if you don't take care it spoils the face of an axe.*

* Meaning, everybody is different. *Right:* The master drummer greets an old lady.





4 FONTOMFROM

THE ROYAL DRUMS (6.14)

Many of the different kinds of music the Akapoma band played and sang relate to the history of the Dormaa people. Fontomfrom is the most important of these, being the main official royal music.

One of the ways in which royalty and their courtiers expressed their relative positions of wealth, power and privilege was through music and by membership in the Akapoma band.

I heard five different varieties of Fontomfrom, each revolving around a distinct and unique bell pattern. This is the most common one.



5 THE ROYAL HORN

NANA'S HORN (0.23)

The chiefs horn, an ivory trumpet, will be sounded at official functions like a palaver when people discuss various subjects

and complaints with the chief and his advisory council.

Left: The palaver gives any villager a possibility to have negotiations led by the chief and the elders.

6 YOU ARE SO BRAVE

FUNERAL DIRGE BY AMMA
KYERENMAA (3.25)

A majority of the music found in Ammasu is in one way or another connected to death. In fact, funerals, wake-keepings and similar circumstances are the most common occasions for music making, be it on a grand scale with the big Akapoma Group or in a small and private setting like this funeral dirge where Amma Kyerenmaa sings praises to a brave man that died.

- *You are so brave you dispossessed the warrior of his bullets.*
 - *The child of the crocodile.*
 - *You don't go back on your oath.*
-

Right: Amma Kyerenmaa.





7 MY LOVER IS STRANDED ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE RIVER

FUNERAL DIRGE BY KWAME YEBOAH AND AHENKAAN (3.04)

One of the most imposing and colourful persons we met in Ammasu was Kwabena Ahenkaan. He was and apparently still is one of the more central people in the royal lineage Ankobea, as well as in the Akapoma music group. Ahenkaan was said to be a powerful man, known and respected for his social standing and close relationship with the current chief, his custodianship of the Kwasi Gyebum deity and healing shrine, his knowledge about both historical and current affairs of Ammasu and its leadership, his humour and quick wit, his good looks, his powerful singing voice and his appeal to women.

It seemed that Ahenkaan was known to nearly everyone, and even those who appeared to be his competitors and rivals expressed admiration for his skills and amicability.

As the child of an important chief and himself the first-born male child of his mother, Ahenkaan also inherited certain privileges. He lived primarily in the Palace quarters, staying close to his father and came to learn a lot about the history of Ammasu and Dormaa District. He was an important member of the Chief's advisory council, and was frequently consulted even on personal matters by many people.

Left: Ahenkaan performing with the Ammasu Akapoma Group.

Ahenkaan was a very busy man and at that time he had a reputation to keep up in terms of liaising with his wives and other women, enjoying drinks and just generally keeping in touch with people and making sure he was informed about the affairs of the townspeople.

Some years ago, Ahenkaan had a health scare and since then is said to have cut down on drinking and smoking. When explaining his marital arrangements, Ahenkaan changed the number of wives he had several times, then finally settled on “approximately four”. He was also unclear or rather purposely oblique about the number of children he had fathered, which was said to be 16.

Like most other Ammasu residents, Ahenkaan was a cocoa and food farmer.

In addition, he had some income from performing certain palace functions, receiving a small share of the rents for land and property that the ruling Ankobea lineage could claim, and from fees he was paid for divination and healing rites as keeper of the Kwesi Gyebum shrine. Despite this, he was not a wealthy man, and there were many people who depended on contributions from him for their support.

- *My lover is stranded on the opposite bank of the river.*
- *In the absence of this man, what do I do?*
- *The drum you are playing, may God bless you.*
- *White man, hold your gun firmly and let's strike.*

Right: Kwame Yeboah and Ahenkaan performing surrounded by ladies.





8 MY EYES ARE FLOODED WITH TEARS

FUNERAL DIRGE BY E.K.K. & WOMEN (1.31)

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The fact that the farmer's life is one of hard work with few occasions to take a day off might be one of the reasons for the abundance of music in connection with funerals.

But the ancestors are very much present in the daily life and nothing important will be undertaken without an offering to them.

In this song the lead singer is naming one after the other of his ancestors and for each one the chorus will answer:

– *My eyes are flooded with tears.*

.....

Left: Mourning the dead.



9 AKAPOMA

RECORDED AT THE QUEEN MOTHER'S FUNERAL (5.31)

This is a history of the Akapoma group and its music as related by the Chief and some of his elders:

"We have had Akapoma since the time that Nana Kwasi Akwaboa was chief. At that time the white men had come to take us as slaves. We Brong and Ashantis were one nation. Yaa Asantewaa, a royal woman and fighter, stood up and said that "we would never let them take us as slaves".

There was a lot of fighting between the white men and the Ashantis. That war was around 1901. The white men defeated us and took some of our brothers and sisters to their homes. They also forced the King and all the chiefs to swear that they would not fight them again.

The leader of the the Dormaa people

was a woman called Akosua Nsoah. She went with some of the chiefs to Kumasi to swear the oath the British were forcing on us. Before they left, the Dormaa chiefs told their people to form a group to play some special drums, because the chiefs might be killed or taken hostage, and be unable to return to their homes.

Thus the group was formed to play the special music, and the group as well as the music was called 'Akapoma'. The chiefs admonished the group and all the people to remain united and to love and devote themselves to one another, and to play the drums for 'Akapoma'. Akapoma means to unite, be strong, meet any adversity and show our strength as one people:

– Ye ye akapomamu.

10 LET US SAY GOODBYE TO EACH OTHER - KUNUNKU

WAKE KEEPING BY KWAME YEBOAH, APPIAH (15.31)

We stayed in a small room in the royal palace (not at all as grand as it sounds, I'm afraid). Once I woke up in the middle of the night, hearing beautiful gentle singing of a kind that I had never heard before. I took my Nagra tape recorder and followed the sound to a compound nearby.

Three men and three elderly women were singing Kununku, an old song form that I only heard this once after the widows had returned from the funeral in neighboring village Aboabo.

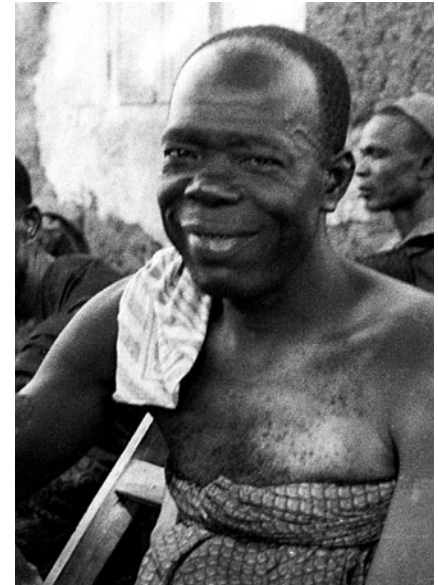
During this wake keeping Kwame Yeboah and Appiah, (whom one would find drunk in the village on a daily basis, but who has a very meaningful function here) are helping the widows in their mourning during the night and do most of the lead singing plus accompaniment on a plastic jar and an empty bottle.

- *Let us say goodbye to each other. A great man has died. Let us part ways.*
- *Dabi, dabi – until some day, until some day*. If you eat, share the food with your brother, because its only the vulture that eats and leaves his brother.*
- *(Appiah sings the refrain:) I am a small boy in difficulty, I am living in a flooded house. This should have happened to an elder. My brother travelled far. He never came back. Because of that I am a small boy in difficulty. My brother travelled far. He never came back. I am a small boy Kudjo left, he never returned. Yao left, he never returned. I am a small boy...*
- *If somebody says it, he will suffer for it. So let's all come together*
- *The queen who mends broken parts is*

- passing with her dondos. Ago!*
- *I have nothing so I can't be on the alert. The rich can protect themselves against danger. I have nothing so I can't.*
- *(Kwame Yeboah mentions various names like:) Appiah or Okobi, will play with me. Why didn't he play with me?*
- *(Appiah:) The asafohene will play with me. Why didn't he play with me? The white man says he will... Why...*
- *(Kwame Yeboah:) Mister Bengt says he will.... Why... (The names are various people that the singers like but they did not come forward).*

.....
* Meaning "We will not meet until I die".

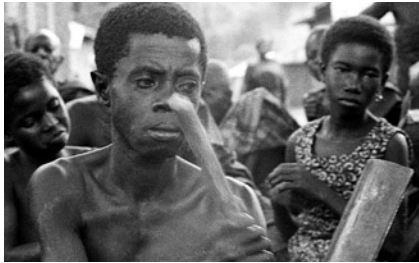
Top: Kwame Yeboah. Below: Appiah dancing to the Ammasu Akapoma Group.



11 DENSEUO

DRUMMING PIECE (2.56)

The Ammasu Akapamo Group plays the Denseuo drum music with the same band members for a change of pace. In this as in almost all other Ghanaian drumming, everything revolves around the bell.



12 NEW LOVE IS MORE THAN MADNESS

LOVE SONGS BY KWAME YEBOAH AND KOFI BOANU (2.19)

The important position of Okyeame (royal linguist or spokesperson) during the time of our stay was held by Kofi Boanu, a magnificent oratorian and mem-

ber of the Akapoma music band. Here he and Kwame Yeboah visit our compound one evening in very high spirits. The next track is recorded just a little later.

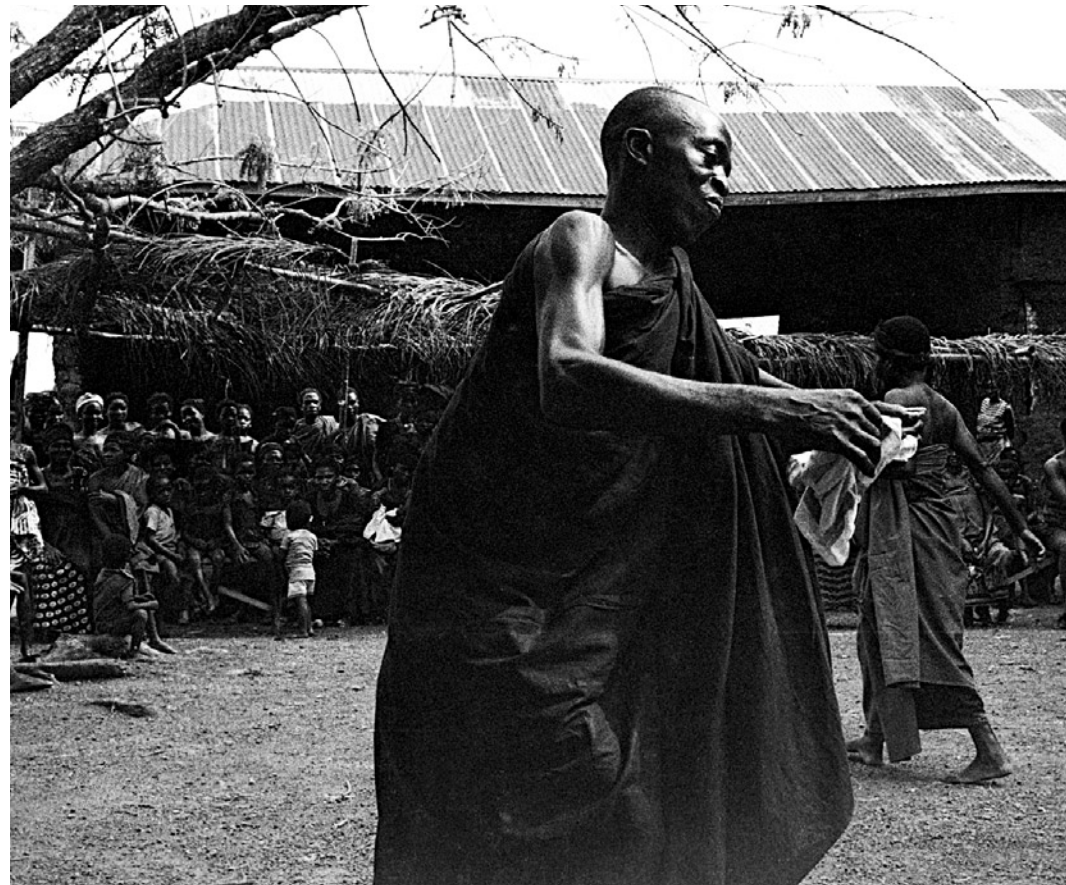
13 IF I DON'T MARRY YOU I'LL DIE OUT OF SHAME

LOVE SONGS BY KWAME YEBOAH, KOFI BOANU AND AHENKAAN (2.33)

After a while they are joined by Ahenkaan. Palm wine and Akpeteshi (the local distilled alcohol) has definitely played a part in the singers performance to the

general amusement. Alcohol is quite a common commodity, not only in the official contexts, and as in the west, quite often musicians like it.

Right: Kofi Boanu dancing.





14 NANA YAGO

CHILDREN SINGS CANTATA (5.13)

Children look after smaller children and actively take part in the upbringing of children younger than themselves. It is not uncommon to hear older children quote proverbs to younger ones.

Here the lead singer is calling out names and for each the chorus will sing:

– *When you left you didn't say good bye, come back soon.*

15 TANA TINANA

CHILDREN SINGS CANTATA (5.04)

Having a child means having someone to take care of you in your old age. To have children is the most common reason for marriage but in Ammasu there is no such thing as an illegitimate child since children inherit their social belonging and identity through their mothers, married or not.



This is a “happy” song with a surprising text:

– *Mother is dead. If somebody comes from over there, please bring me something.*
– *I am an orphan, I'm like a the tse-tse fly that nobody likes, but I give my problems to God.*

16 THE BRASS BAND

THE BRASS BAND (9.20)

The brass bands showed up at the slightly more "modern" events, the National Day, the ruling military's manifestations and similar occasions.



17 EGGS ARE EGGS...

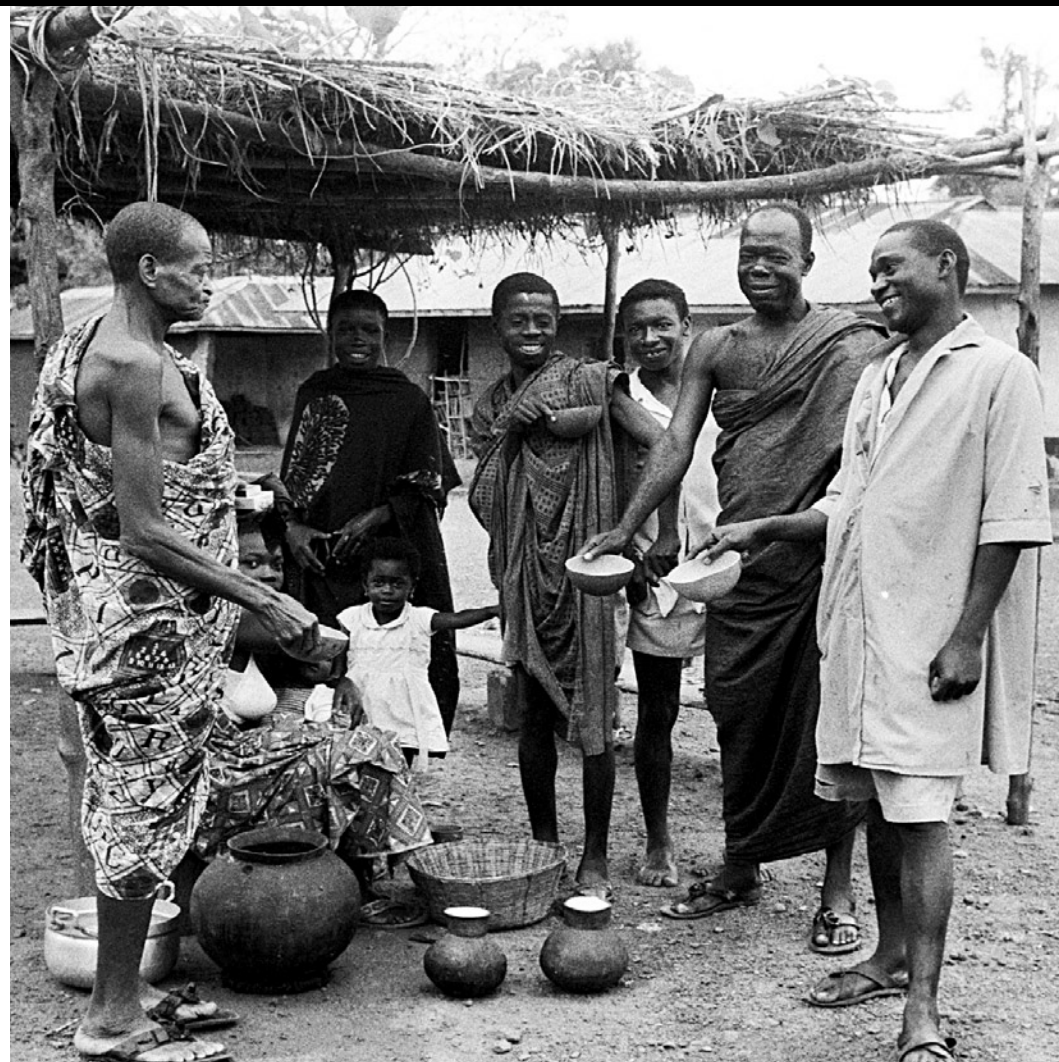
CONCLUDING PROVERB (0.23)

...but some are rotten is one of the many wonderful proverbs that the music and culture of Ammasu is so full of. Here it's translated by the chief of Ammasu.



As said before, 30 years have passed since these recordings were made, so I wonder how the music of the village sounds today. I've had some contact with the village before this release and have learned that my main teacher Kwame Yeboah and Kofi Boanu have joined their ancestors.

But Ahenkaan is still there (it's his fingerprint on the cd, granting us permission to release the music), so let's hope and believe that some young people have joined, and that the Ammasu Akapoma Group still is the hottest music providers at funerals around Dormaa-Ahenkro in the Brong-Ahafu region of Ghana.



MORE MATERIAL

Find more info, music and pictures at www.countryandeastern.se

Text

"Ammasu" by Prudence Woodford-Berger

Mp3 albums

The Music of Ammasu – More Drumming (cex06)

The Music of Ammasu – More Singing (cex07)

The Music of Ammasu – Analytical Drumming (cex08)

Pictures

More photos from Ammasu

The making of the Atumpán drums

Our family in Ammasu

PRODUCTION

All music composed by Ammasu Akapoma Group (Country & Eastern)

All recordings and photos by Bengt Berger

Liner notes by Bengt Berger and Prudence Woodford-Berger

Mastered by Claes Persson, CRP recording

Produced by Bengt Berger

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