

Highlife Time 3.

By John Collins. Accra: DAKpabli & Associates, 2018. 632 pp. ISBN 978-9988276195 (paperback). \$34.99; ASIN: B07C68H72B (Kindle). \$9.99. Illustrations, portraits, no index.

British-born professor John Collins has dedicated his career to popular music in West Africa; he wrote ten books and over eighty scholarly articles, produced a myriad of Ghanaian bands in his Bokoor Studios, toured extensively as a guitarist, and taught for twenty-four years at the University of Ghana's Department of Music. *Highlife Time 3* contains his cumulative experiences, research, and interviews of more than five decades working and living in Ghana and is a testimony to Collins's dedication to promoting and studying popular music in the region. Part memoir, philosophic musing, oral history project, and ethnomusicological study, this book provides the broadest survey to date of highlife.

In *Highlife Time 3*, Collins presents a narrative of highlife as a musical continuum that is integrally tied to Ghana's precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial social, cultural, and political pasts as well as our globalized present. The overarching thesis that drives this expansive work is that highlife, as expressed in everything from Fanti adaha brass band music of the 1880s to current Ghanaian dancehall songs by artists such as Shatta Wale, embodies a unified aesthetic defined by a myriad of musical characteristics drawn from the Akan, Ga, Ewe, and other coastal ethnicities of Ghana. What Collins calls the "highlife imagination" reflects the intersection of these African musical, dance, and linguistic traditions with European, Caribbean, and American musical cultures. Like many other 20th century popular music genres in Africa that have emerged alongside new nations, highlife is a cultural force that shapes and is shaped by the processes of building a national identity and imagination.

Highlife Time 3 is a singular work in that it is as much a history of highlife music in Ghana as it is a reflection on the people, processes, places, struggles, and challenges of music making in West Africa. Collins draws primarily on interviews that he began conducting in the early 1970s after studying archaeology, sociology and political science at the University of Ghana, Legon. It was during this time that he toured with the Jaguar Jokers concert party band and also led his own Bokoor highlife band, which brought him into contact with key highlife figures. Collins' interview questions are journalistic in tone and focus on eliciting practical details of learning and performing highlife as well as details of the cultural landscape and Ghana's turbulent political backdrop. Through these interviews, we see political struggle from the perspective of the working artist—what historian of the Atlantic Marcus Rediker would term "history from below". For example, the comedian Ajax Bukana reflects on his associations with Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah and the subsequent coup that ushered in the military government:

When the coup against Kwame Nkrumah took place in 1966, it was the CPP people who were working at Guinea Press – so as all of us there were close to Nkrumah, we were all sacked. And the police came, arrested me and took me to the CID headquarters. They arrested all of the CPP security people and myself, as some CID people asked me if I was an informant and I said no. Then they looked

through a list of all Nkrumah's security people, but my name was not among them and they left me. But I stayed in the cells for three days (85).

Highlife Time 3 is an expanded version of *Highlife Time 2* (Accra: Anansesem Press, 1996) and *Highlife Time 1* (Accra: Anansesem Press, 1994) which remain the earliest book-length surveys of this genre in Ghana. Collins initially wrote *Highlife Time* driven by his fear that these stories and individuals would fade from public memory. As he was entering the University of Ghana as a lecturer in 1995 and charged with establishing a focus on popular music studies in the Department of Music, this text also served an essential role for music students as they conducted their own research in the newly established Masters of Philosophy program. Because this new volume includes both updated text from the previous versions and new chapters exploring Ghanaian popular music since the mid-1990s, *Highlife Time 3* blurs the line between being a new edition and separate work. A comparative survey of the indexes of the versions 3 and 2 reveals the addition of an extensive prologue, introductory chapter, and twelve new chapters scattered throughout the book as well as rewritten sections of previously existing chapters. According to Collins, forty percent of the previous 1996 book is included in the most recent version, with the new materials focusing on developments in Ghanaian popular music in the past twenty-two years, such as hiplife, azonto, dancehall, Afropop, contemporary highlife and electronic 'afrobeats'. Collins also includes a new section on Ivorian music as well as information from post-1996 interviews with artists such as Bibie Brew, Ebo Taylor, T.O. Jazz, T.D.B. Adjekum, Oscarmore Ofori, Saka Acquaye, Kwadwo Donkor, Joe Mensah, Abebe Kakraba, Anthony 'Scorpion' Entsie, Art Bennin, Nana Danso Abiam, Atongo Zimba, Aaron Bebe Sukura and Amartey 'Hedzoleh' Laryea.

The book is structured in ten sections that include sixty-four short chapters which each focus on an artist or group that Collins has either interviewed or collected oral histories of. As the chapters tend to be shorter in length, the book may have been better structured around ten larger chapters with subheadings on the individual artists. The absence of an index also makes it difficult to search for individual artists, though the chapter titles often lead the reader in the right direction. For researchers, the kindle version of the book enables keyword searches of the text, which greatly aids in referencing specific events, artists, locations, and songs.

One might perhaps see a lost opportunity to reorganize the content from the previous iterations of *Highlife Time* into either an encyclopedic format or a biographical narrative of Collins' life that interweaves his own experiences with the stories of musicians whom he worked with and interviewed. Both approaches have some obvious weaknesses. An encyclopedia would provide a useful tool to researchers while alienating the non-specialist reader. As Collins is invested heavily in producing knowledge that is of continued use to the Ghanaian public and education system, this approach would defeat the purpose of providing a narrative of the nation's popular music culture in a format that can continue to shape that culture. A biographic approach, while drawing together the numerous interviews into a single narrative chronology, would have shifted the focus from Ghana's musical history to Collins' own career, which would undermine his aim of providing a public record of highlife for future Ghanaians and lovers of Ghanaian music.

Highlife Time 3 trades depth for breadth, which can be seen a strength. The book's primary importance to the discipline of ethnomusicology and popular music studies is to provide extensive interview materials and oral history that provides a framework for more specialized studies. Other books that take elements of Collins work and expand them in great depth include Catherine Cole's *Ghana's Concert Party Theater* (2001), Steven Feld's *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana* (2012), Nate Plageman's *Highlife Saturday Night: Popular Music and Social Change in Urban Ghana* (2013), Jesse Weaver Shipley's *Living the Hiplife: Celebrity and Entrepreneurship in Ghanaian Popular Music* (2013) and *Trickster Theater: The Poetics of Freedom in Urban Africa* (2015), Paul Schauert's *Staging Ghana: Artistry and Nationalism in State Dance Ensembles* (2015), and David Afriyie Donkor's *Spiders of the Market: Ghanaian Trickster Performance in a Web of Neoliberalism* (2016). One can also survey Collins's own academic articles covering specialized topics through his online academic account (<https://ug-gh.academia.edu/EJohnCollins>).

The intended readership of *Highlife Time 3* is foremost the Ghanaian public, high school and university students, and researchers of Ghanaian and West African popular music and culture. Collins entreats us to step back and see a broad swath of musical history through individual testimonies. Those that encounter this book with little background may find themselves overwhelmed by the number of artists and topics surveyed. In that case, one should draw on the resources available (such as the music streaming platforms YouTube, iTunes, and Spotify) to immerse themselves in the music that inspired this lifelong work. At no time in history have these recordings been more accessible and so we should take Collins's cue to explore this rich musical landscape using *Highlife Time 3* as a roadmap.

Colter Harper (colterharper@gmail.com) is an American ethnomusicologist and jazz guitarist whose research interests include jazz and urban American history, music and labor, music pedagogy in Ghana, music and technology, music composition, and improvisation. In January 2020, Harper completed a seventeen-month Fulbright Scholar position in the University of Ghana's Department of Music. His research from this and previous trips to Ghana bridge music production, audio archiving, and modern musical practice in Accra. Currently he is completing a book on the history of jazz in Pittsburgh's Hill District neighborhood. Harper completed his PhD in ethnomusicology at the University of Pittsburgh in 2011 and performs as a guitarist in Ghana and the US.