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Appianda Arthur - Interview with Mark Slobin

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MS: So, when did you come to Wesleyan?

AA: Oh, I came to Wesleyan in seventy-'73.

MS: Ok.

AA: Through '77.

MS: Oh my gosh, a long time ago, huh? [laughs]

AA: Yes, yeah. Over forty years now.

MS: So why did you come to Wesleyan?

AA: Oh, because at the time, the ethnomusicology program was very, very good and the University of Ghana Institute of African Studies was seeking to develop its program as well.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: Through the (unintelligible) I sent it that way, if you can remember. And a few others. So that's why I came there.

MS: So, uh, you heard of it before? Or who told you about Wesleyan?

AA: Yeah. Well, that was a Ghanaian student, doctoral student also in the program. But we knew of it, we know of the Wesleyan program at the Institute of African studies at the University of Ghana. And so the Institute had sponsored a student that was two years ahead of me.

MS: Who was that?

AA: He was the first one who came there.

MS: Who was that, the first one?

AA: It was Asante Darkwa.

MS: Oh, Darkwa, oh yeah, sure.

AA: He's now deceased.

MS: Yeah, I know, yeah. Yes, he was a very nice man, Darkwa. Yeah, yeah.

AA: So.

MS: And then, so Darkwa was there first and then you and—who was there? Uh, well, in the dance program we had, there was...

AA: There were other Ghanaians. There were other Ghanaians, like Adzenyah, and Donkor.

MS: Right, Donkor.

AA: Yeah, they were not students. They were teaching dance and drumming and so forth, yeah.

MS: And Duodu.

AA: Yes, Duodu. Yeah.

MS: Right.

AA: Yeah, yeah. That was in the 70s, you know.

MS: Right. Yeah, it was a big period. It was great. We had all these nice students from Ghana.

AA: Yeah.

MS: So when you came, was that the first time that you left Ghana?

AA: Yes, well, no, when I came I went to the State University of New York, SUNY in Fredonia.

MS: Oh, ok.

AA: Doing a master's degree in music education.

MS: I see, ok.

AA: Yes, but yes.

MS: Oh, so you went to...oh, you were there first. So you came to Wesleyan from SUNY?

AA: Yes, I came to Wesleyan from SUNY Fredonia.

MS: Ok. That was a big change, right.

AA: Yeah, kind of. [laughs]

MS: It was still an American university, right.

AA: [unintelligible]

MS: So what did you want to do at Wesleyan? What interested you?

AA: What? I can't hear you.

MS: So what did you expect to do at Wesleyan? What were you interested in?

AA: Oh, to do a doctorate degree, a PhD in ethnomusicology.

MS: Yeah.

AA: And so that's why I came there, yeah.

MS: So how did you find the atmosphere?

AA: Well, it was, there were a number of foreign students.

MS: Who was there?

AA: I remember Sumarsam.

MS: Yes, of course.

AA: There's Sumarsam, and a few others whose names I can't remember now. It's been quite a while.

MS: Right, right.

AA: I remember it was a place for, there were other Ghanaian students at other departments, you know. And so we had a small group of Ghanaians at Wesleyan.

MS: Yeah.

AA: We were, yes, Asante Darkwa and I were the students in the music program at the time.

MS: Right. So who did you, so you met the faculty. Who were, who did you study with? What kind of courses did you have?

AA: Let's see. David McAllester.

MS: Ok, right.

AA: Yes, yes. I studied basically with David McAllester, yeah. Of course and you. Winslow was there.

MS: Yeah, yeah.

AA: And who else.

MS: Ted Grame was still there.

AA: Huh. Yeah. Those are the names I remember, you know.

MS: Yeah. So you learned how to do American Indian singing with McAllester.

AA: [laughs] Of course, you would do that. But I remember also, you were very interested in Uzbeks, you know. The (unintelligible). You had a specialty in that area or something.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: Hello?

MS: Yes, getting hard to hear.

AA: I turned up one...can you hear me?

MS: I can hear you, but it's not...

AA: Can you hear me?

MS: Yes, I can. Yeah. Yeah, I can hear you. It's not a really good connection.

AA: The afternoon is not a good time. That's why I wanted to call you in the morning.

MS: Right.

AA: But I remember, you had an interest in the Uzbeks.

MS: Yeah, uh huh.

AA: Russian, something. Is that right?

MS: Yes, Afghanistan and right, right.

AA: Are you still interested in the Uzbeks or something?

MS: Yes, but I haven't worked there. I stopped working there. I'm always interested in it. It changed a lot, of course. Over time. And I worked in Afghanistan, I lived in Afghanistan for a while.

AA: Oh, ok.

MS: Yeah. And that country, that poor country, that poor country has been through so much.

AA: I see, I see.

MS: Since then, yeah. So how did you find a topic to study?

AA: So much, yeah. Um, because I was going back to Ghana, I needed to do something that had relevance to Ghana.

MS: Yeah.

AA: So I did a study on the Abisa festival.

MS: Right.

AA: Hello?

MS: Yes, I'm there, I can hear you.

AA: I just barely can.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: That's what I did my studies on.

MS: And that was your home region, your own home area?

AA: Mmhm.

MS: I remember, I ran into you on the street.

AA: Yes, in my part of Ghana, where I came from. (unintelligible)

MS: I remember, one day, you...

AA: But that was a long time.

MS: Yes, that was a long time, that was a long time ago. So, and did you perform, did you do music performance? Were you playing music at Wesleyan?

AA: Hmm? Oh, I did do some drumming, but it was basically some drumming and that was about it.

MS: Ok, yeah.

AA: Yeah.

MS: I remember I saw you one day, you said you had to go back and be the head of the navy in Ghana.

AA: [laughs] No, I was...

MS: And you didn't want to.

AA: I was, the navy, I told the navy that overtly. I started leave to come. I had to back to the navy. But when I came, I was not qualified for the navy.

MS: Right.

AA: And so, and so, Professor Nketia arranged for me to come to the African Studies, because that's where the need for me was.

MS: Oh, ok, yes.

AA: And so he made a strong argument that, whether I teach at the university, or I'm in the navy, I'm serving Ghana.

MS: Yeah.

AA: And so the best place that I could be used, was where I should be sent. They needed me most at the university.

MS: Right.

AA: And still the Ghana air force was like, "Wait!" And I was, you know, transferred to the university.

MS: Oh, ok.

AA: So of course I studied (unintelligible) and so they had this at the back of their mind, that I would come later.

MS: So you did, from Wesleyan, right.

AA: Sent me.

MS: You went back to, yes. So did you use your information from Wesleyan?

AA: Yes, well, sure, sure. In fact, at the time, I wasn't married. I got married and I had some kids. Two of my kids came to Wesleyan.

MS: Oh, that's right. That's right. I remember now.

AA: I remember them, they told me about you. [laughs]

MS: Yes, that's right.

AA: Two of them came there, yeah. But with me, I was the African Studies for two years.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: In the second year, I ran for office, as a member of parliament. And got elected, so that was the end of my ethnomusicology.

MS: [laughs]

AA: I got into politics. And was in politics all the time.

MS: I think you were the only Wesleyan graduate who went into politics.

AA: [laughs]

MS: I think you must be the only one.

AA: Oh, yes. It was quite interesting because when my father had been the chief of the district where I was going to run, and so when I went, when I decided to run, they just called a

meeting of all the traditional chiefs and I was introduced and then I, you know, I was elected unopposed.

MS: Uh huh, uh huh.

AA: The parliament of Ghana, yeah.

MS: So you didn't have to do any music after that, right.

AA: No. Well, after the coup, after (unintelligible) I served for a while, because I lived through the coup d'etat, that sent me to political detention.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: And when I was in political detention, I was received Christ in prison. And so when I came out from prison, I came to Fuller Theological Seminary in California.

MS: Oh, all right.

AA: Yes, to study for the ministry.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: I was made an adjunct at the same time, to teach music and music communication, and so that's the only place I used my ethnomusicology, briefly, for about two, for another year.

MS: In the seminary.

AA: Yes, in the seminary.

MS: What kind of music was that?

AA: Yes, it was more of, teaching the other seminarians about the impact of music as a form of communication.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: And how that could be, how traditional music could be introduced to their respective churches.

MS: Oh, ok.

AA: Because there were, yeah, there were other, several other students from various countries at the seminary.

MS: Uh huh, uh huh. What kind of seminary was it?

AA: Oh, it was an international evangelical seminary, yes. Yeah. And of course while at the seminary, also, there was a music, a Christian music recording company. That hired me so I

could help them, with my ethnomusicology.

MS: Oh, ok.

AA: So, you know, it helped me out there.

MS: That's interesting, yeah. Huh.

AA: Yes.

MS: So what kind of things did you do there?

AA: (unintelligible)

MS: Yeah.

AA: Well, at (unintelligible) Music, when the various artists composed music, then I would look at the contexts of the music and see how it reflected, how the, theologically, the text was theologically sound, you know.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: And of course, I guess because I'm an ethnomusicologist, I would use that in advising on whether the music could be recorded or not. Whether it will work well with objectives and so forth and so on.

MS: Uh huh, uh huh. Oh, that's interesting.

AA: Yeah. Mmhm.

MS: So after that, you left that work?

AA: Well, after that, you remember Charles Colson?

MS: Yeah.

AA: Charles Colson was Nixon's political advisor.

MS: Right.

AA: Yeah, well, he came to Fuller seminary because he had heard that there was a politician who had also received Christ in prison. And so he appointed me as the foreign director.

MS: Oh, I see.

AA: And so I was moved to Nairobi to set up ministries in various African countries.

MS: Oh, I see.

AA: And from there, yes, from that moment, then I was in full-time Christian work. I served for five years. And then moved, I was brought back to the US as Vice President of the group called International Students Incorporated.

MS: Ok.

AA: Which is also a Christian ministry.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: And their role was to reach out to international students. And served there was vice president for another five years or so.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: And then I was hired by another company called Cook Communications, where I was the special minister's director for the world, globally.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: So I traveled to various countries, Mauritius, Singapore, Indonesia, and so forth and so on, yes.

MS: Uh huh. So did you do anything musical?

AA: During those times, when I went to a country, of course, the churches had worship groups and prison and worship groups and I would work with them, sometimes.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: Yes. So I used music in that context.

MS: Oh, ok.

AA: But first of all, my first role was more of a Christian establishing prison ministries in various countries, yeah.

MS: Very interesting work.

AA: Well, you know, I understood that, at that time, that when you get a degree from Wesleyan, you could do anything! [both laugh]

MS: That's good!

AA: So a degree from Wesleyan got me into politics, got me into Christian work, which I have done, until now.

MS: Ok. Well, now we call it "applied ethnomusicology"!

AA: [laughs]

MS: That's a big field of study is applied ethnomusicology. Very interesting. Well, well, yeah! Well, it's good to talk. And you know, find out all these things you've been doing.

AA: Oh, sure. Sure. Yes, I, later on, I became executive pastor of a very large church in Atlanta.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: So I was executive pastor for about five, six years. And then moved to California, you know, Los Angeles area, where—oh yeah, in fact I came back, I didn't come to Wesleyan, I don't remember, there was one of the students who was at that time doing physics. Chris Weaver. And Chris Weaver was my friend at Wesleyan. And so, both of us flew, I didn't know he had become rich and bought an aeroplane.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: So I came to visit him in, he was in Bethesda. I came to visit him and say, "Hey man, let's go to Wesleyan." And he said, "I have a meeting so I cannot go, but I've got an aeroplane." I said, "You must be kidding." So he went and brought out the instruments. The next day we flew to Wesleyan.

MS: Oh really.

AA: So we flew and stayed there for a while. Yeah, so yeah, in fact he's been teaching at MIT and wrote to me a few months ago that Wesleyan had taken him on as an adjunct professor or something. So that was the first time that he was coming back after we went to visit the place.

MS: What year was that?

AA: He has a specialty, in MIT, he has developed a number of computer-related stuff.

MS: Uh huh.

AA: You know, recently, in that area.

MS: What year was it when you went—came to visit?

AA: [pause] That was about '84, '85.

MS: Oh, ok. Yeah, I might have been away. I was away for a while there. Maybe I missed you then.

AA: Oh yeah, I was in Nairobi at the time. I was the African Director, and had come to Washington for a meeting.

MS: Ok, and that's when—

AA: That's when I went to see Chris, and he asked us to fly down.

MS: [laughs]

AA: Chris was a very interesting guy, because while we were in Wesleyan, we both drove, we did the escort service. I don't know whether it's still being done. There are cars that were given to us and we would pick a few new students in the night and move them around campus. So Chris and I did that for, as a job we had at Wesleyan.

MS: Oh, an escort service.

AA: Yeah, the escort service. And so when we came back to Wesleyan, we were going to all the places we visited as students and there used to be a MacDonald's or a coffee shop somewhere down there, you know. Yeah, that was quite a while.

MS: Yeah, that's a good story. Well, is there anything else you remember about your time as a student?

AA: It was—my experience at Wesleyan was a very—a very interesting one, you know. And because, at the time, the program (unintelligible)

MS: Oh, I'm not hearing you.

AA: (unintelligible)

MS: I'm not hearing.

AA:—the pioneers of the ethnomusicology program.

MS: Yeah.

AA:—and the Institute of African Studies in Ghana, and at Wesleyan. (unintelligible) There was a strong Wesleyan impact—

MS: Yeah. And then Asiana—

AA:—at the Institute of African Studies. And then Asiana—

MS: Asiana, yeah, was my student, too.

AA: You've got to remember him. [pause] Hello?

MS: He was a very nice—yes—yeah, I can hear you. He was a very nice—

AA: He passed in 2002.

MS: He passed away. Yeah. Yeah. He was a very nice—

AA: He passed on, yes.

MS: Right.

AA: So Darkwa, Asante Darkwa, Asiama, myself, Duodu—

MS: Duodu, yes.

AA: You know. Donkor passed.

MS: It was very sad, yes.

AA: We had a strong Wesleyan representation at the Institute of African Studies.

MS: There are two good students from Ghana right now.

AA: Oh, I see.

MS: And they're both very well trained and they're doing a Ph.D. at Wesleyan now. So it's a tradition that continues.

AA: I see. That's good.

MS: Yeah, yeah. Well, it's great to talk to you. It's nice to have a chance to catch up. And I really enjoy it, really enjoy it.

AA: Are you there? (unintelligible)

MS: Yeah, so it's really nice to talk and nice to have a chance to catch up.

AA: Thank you.

MS: Thanks for arranging the time. I hope to hear from you again.