HISTORY OF SET DESIGN IN GHANA: A STUDY OF
PRODUCTIONS OF CONCERT PARTY, NATIONAL THEATRE,

BY

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10507271

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PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF
MPHIL THEATRE ARTS DEGREE

JULY, 2017
DECLARATION

I, Mawukplorm Harriet Abla Adjahoe, do hereby declare that except for the references cited, which have been duly acknowledged, this thesis titled *History of Set Design in Ghana: a Study of Productions of Concert Party, National Theatre, and Efua Theodora Sutherland Studio* is the product of my own research work in the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ghana, Legon. This thesis has not been published or submitted either in part or in whole anywhere for the award of any degree in any University.

............................................. .............................................
Mawukplorm Harriet Abla Adjahoe Date
(Student)

This works has been submitted with my approval as supervisor

............................................. .............................................
Mr. John Djisenu Date
(Main Supervisor)
DEDICATION

To my loving husband Eric, my heartbeat.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To the source of all life and being may my enduring gratitude forever resound.

I am grateful to my supervisor, Mr. John Djisenu, for his mentoring and guidance, and the examiners whose comments and contributions have steered this work successfully to the end.

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to trace the history of set design in Ghana through the study of some selected productions of the Concert Party, the National Theatre and the Efua Theodora Sutherland Studio. The qualitative research design was employed for the study. Two sampling techniques were employed to gather data for the research; purposive sampling technique was used to select a total of 12 respondents for the study, and sequential sampling technique was used in selecting the documents for analysis. The outcome from the research revealed that the travelling theatre tradition; Concert Party employed a minimal use of set design, using bill bards and painted canvases which served advertisement purposes, as background for the performances. From the time the Keysoap brand of the Unilever Brothers Ltd. Ghana, together with the Ghana National Theatre organized a revival series of the dying Concert Party tradition, set design has steadily developed from a two-dimensional representation of geographical locations, to a three-dimensional realistic, naturalistic (rocks, houses, huts, trees, forests, etc.), and representational design for performances at the National Theatre and Efua Theodora Sutherland Studio. The study recommends that future researchers expend energies on how technological development has influenced the advancement of set design in Ghana. Considering the difficulty encountered in acquiring materials for study, it is also recommended that archives are established to keep relevant documents of performances.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Theatre, on the global platform, has experienced modifications over the years, or better still, centuries since the Western tradition of theatre began in ancient Greece. Design for the theatre is usually broken down into four categories: set (including props), costume, light, and sound. All of these technical areas work together in a production to establish the place, time, period, and mood of the production. Ruins of the earliest theatres such as the great outdoor theatres defining the classical period, convey the designers’ in-depth knowledge of the import of maximum communication between the stages and audiences. The period was characterized by minimal use of set, considering that for the most part, the actors’ voice, music and dance carried the performance. Designers employed exaggerated costumes, masks, and elevated shoes for maximum visibility; stage machinery for special effects (such as Hell’s Mouth and the machine for the visitation of the gods); especially during the Medieval Morality Plays, and lighting for the performances was dependent on the bright sun. Theatre performances took place during the day, as evening performances could have been problematic considering the fact that there was no invention in place to light an evening performance to enhance visibility for both the spectators and the performers.

Edu (2001, p. 1) has defined set design in simple terms as “the creation of an appropriate environment of an action; for a play or an event in a theatre within any given space at a particular point in time”. While a number of theatre scholars (see Gillette 1996; Gerald 1989; Brockett, Ball, Fleming, Carlson 2014, etc.) have also voiced their perception of
what set design for the theatre is, it has been proven that during the classical Greek period – the period that has been characterized to be the beginning of theatre – Set design or scenery design for the acting space was minimally established; rather concentration was placed on stage properties, and the visibility of the performers through the use of costumes and make up. As the theatre tradition grew, and other nationalities began experiencing different levels of theatre, the works of the likes of Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446), Pellegrino da San Daniele (1467-1547), Giovan Battista Aleotti (1546-1636), and Edward Henry Gordon Craig (1872-1966) saw a paradigm shift and the gradual advancement of set artistry. The history of theatrical scenery is as old as the theatre itself, and just as obtuse and tradition-bound. What we tend to think of as 'traditional scenery', that is two-dimensional canvas-covered 'flats' painted to resemble a three-dimensional surface or vista, is in fact a relatively recent innovation and a significant departure from the more ancient forms of theatrical expression, which tended to rely less on the actual representation of space and more on the conveyance of action and mood. In that during the Greek, Roman, Medieval and Elizabethan periods, the scenery for the theatre performances was usually the rear walls of the theatre. En masse, settings for scenes were unimportant or stated in a character’s lines, in comparison to the grandeur in the make-up, costume and actions of the play.

Today’s scenery design bears much appreciation to Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) who theorized (as cited in Brew-Riverson, 2013: 94) that:

…flat painted scenery was drab, uninteresting and inappropriate for a three-dimensional actor…This challenge he attributed to the conflicting elements of the living actor, the horizontal floor and the
vertical scenery. His answer to these obstacles was to replace the flat painted scenery and all decorative detail with more functional three-dimensional structures which would complement the three-dimensional actor.

In Africa, thence Ghana, the performing arts are ubiquitous and have formed an integral part of the Ghanaian community life (Asiedu, 2014). However, researchers have contemplated the specific period or date on which theatre began in Ghana thence, there has not been the establishment of a definitive period for the beginning of theatre in Ghana but it is believed that before the arrival of the Portuguese, the Dutch, or the British there is the likelihood that theatre existed in Ghana. Lokanga and Sarinjeive (2001, p. vii), writes that

“Whenever the words ‘Africa’, ‘literature’, and even ‘drama’ are juxtaposed, it does not take long for the discussion to become a heated. For example, the question of whether or not drama was present in Africa before the arrival of the Europeans in the late nineteenth century is never quite resolved”.

Kerr (1995) indicates that there have been series of heated debate as to whether drama did or did not exist in pre-colonial Africa, and to what extent it could or should be distinguished from rituals. This is attributive, according to Kerr (1995), to the confusion resulting from the use of such words as drama, theatre and ritual, which are loaded with meanings derived from European rather than African culture. Nonetheless, it is the belief that the Ghanaian indigenous ‘arts culture’ which came in a form of storytelling, impersonations, children’s games, singing, dancing and clapping of hands and are still prominent in the traditional celebrations of festivals, rituals, rites of passages, among others subsisted since time immemorial.
Agovi (1990) avows that

“Unfortunately, we have never had the benefit of such comprehensive documentation on the origins of literary theatre in Ghana during the colonial period. Research and publication on the Ghanaian literary dram have almost always either concentrated exclusively on the Concert Party tradition or on the post-independence works of Ghanaian playwrights” (p. 3).

It is derivative of his claim that although there have been submissions of the existence of some form of theatre in Ghana probably even before the colonial period, documentations have majorly concentrated on the Ghanaian Concert Party tradition, thus seemingly presenting it to bear the beginning of documentation of Ghanaian theatre in the early 1900’s. This tradition drew inspiration from Ghanaian indigenous dramatic elements, among other sources, in tackling contemporary issues. The Concert Party became a dramatic form which quickly spread through the entire Ghanaian populace in the early 1920’s. Although the Concert Party tradition has been seen to have begun with the Two Bobs, it has still been traced further to the nineteenth century before Teacher Yalley’s beginnings. Yalley, a head-teacher of his school, started his concert party vocation in the 1918s when he wore fancy dress, joked and danced at his school’s Empire Day celebration (Barber, Collins, & Ricard, 1997).

This Concert Party tradition gained popularity when the Two Bobs – Bob Johnson and Bob Cole – formed their concert group and turned a one-man show to an expanded version consisting of three principal characters. Years down the lane, other groups such as Jaguar Jokers, Kakaiku among others, sprang up and the concert groups enlarged from the three principal characters to a group numbering over seven characters. Other forms of
theatre generated from this point, for example: Anansegoro, and the Abibigoro. These “new” forms of theatre had existed with our great, great ancestors. These terms were recently designated as such.

These concert shows were put up at courtyards, market places, lorry stations, among other places. There were platforms erected for such performances, which were mostly planks of wood arranged on packed cement blocks. During the performances costumes, make-up, and props were employed in full force. The question now is whether there was an evidence of scenic design per its definition in academia, especially during the early days of this theatre tradition prior to its migration from the open-air performance spaces to the Ghana National Theatre as well as performances spaces.

The subject matter of this study is researching, studying, and documenting the history and the various developmental stages of set design in Ghanaian “theatre” productions in Ghana – a component that contributes to the total theatre experience. The specific focus is on scenery built for theatrical performances of the Ghanaian Concert Parties, the Ghana National Theatre and that of the Efua Theodora Sutherland Drama Studio, between the year 1960 and 2000.

1.2. Problem Statement

The Performing Arts have, over the years, provided Ghanaians a great platform for the expression of social sentiments, for entertainment, for education among others. However, a formal intellectual focus on the practice of these arts began to gain grounds after 1962 when the School of Performing Arts was established in the University of Ghana, Legon; a move that was pioneered by Ghana’s first president, Dr. Kwame
Nkrumah while championing the course of the African identity. Asiedu, (2014) posits that, around this same time that the performing arts in Ghana was formally inculcated into the academic field, theatre departments in the United States, and in some parts of the world, began to increasingly develop. Since then, various aspects of the Performing Arts have come under the close scrutiny of scholars, trying, among other things, to analyze the nature of individual components and to establish generative processes that underscore the creation of new ones.

In terms of theatre, the various aspects that make up a complete production have not received equal scholarly attention. The relevant extant literature is replete with information on playwriting, acting techniques, costume, make-up, and lighting, aspects of prop and comparably very little on scenic design; particularly within the Ghanaian terrain, although it is yet argued that in fact very little literature is available on these various aspects of the theatrical performance in the locus of the Ghanaian stage. Mention can be made of Kwakye-Oppong and Dennis’ *From Text to Performance: The Costumier versus Other Personnel in the Theatre* (2014); Adjei’s *Theatrical Make-up in Ghana: A Search for Local Materials* (2014); among a few. Although set construction has been part of the whole theatre experience, scholars in Ghana have not expended adequate energies to bring it more into the limelight in terms of presentation in scholarly writing. Information on scenic design in Ghana is scanty, fragmented and scattered in different writings. It is the reality of this lacuna that propels this current study. My aim is to contribute to filling this gap by systematically putting the history and development of set in Ghana from 1960 to 2000 under a historical analytical lens.
1.3. Objectives

Stemming from the statement of the problem above, my general purpose is to critically study the history of set design in Ghana, noting how various factors and trends have influenced its development from 1960 to 2000. Consequently, the following will be my specific objectives:

1. To trace the beginnings of set design and construction in Ghana, using the Concert Party tradition.
2. To describe pictures of various sets designed within the period with the aim of pointing out the developmental stages.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does the concert party tradition help in tracing the beginnings and processes of set design and construction in Ghana?
2. What influenced the emergence of other performance spaces and Ghanaian theatre forms and how did they contribute to the developmental process of set design?
3. To what extent have reasons for set design in Ghana changed over the years?

1.5. Scope of the Study (Delimitation)

This study mainly focuses on stage set design for the production of dramas or plays. It does not consider the set built for other purposes such as for television shows and other popular shows. Its basic concentration will be on set design for theatre productions. Again, the study focuses on the period between 1960 and 2000.
1.6. Limitation

Historical research, by its very nature, requires in-depth archival investigations and extensive content analysis of relevant and available materials. However, such a pool of resources is unfortunately not available in this case. Therefore, much of the data that will be analyzed in this study will be based on oral information of surviving members of some relevant theater traditions that are closely linked to the study, as well as other resource persons with knowledge relevant to this study. Although steps will be taken to triangulate the information received from such sources, the fact still remains that errors and distortions are highly possible.

1.7. Organization of the Study

The organization of this research report is in five chapters. Chapter one talks about the introduction to the study. Chapter two concentrates on the review of related and relevant available literature. This chapter highlights what different submissions have been made by various authorities about the various aspects of the study. This is to explicate and define the research and also give focus to the study. In addition, it presents a solid footing for verification of the research findings. Chapter three examines the research method; of which a description of the procedures for collecting and analyzing data for the study is revealed. Chapter four presents the analysis of the primary and secondary data so as to address the research questions in the study. Chapter five gives the findings of the study. It as well summarizes the study, displays the conclusions drawn from the findings and offers suggestions or recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A number of advantages go hand in hand with reviewing related literature in any study. Apart from serving to avoid inadvertent replication, it informs the selection of methods and provides an important dimension for interpreting the findings of the study; thus imbuing the study with cumulative and predictive validity among others. As I aim to find how set design in Ghana has evolved over the years, relevant literature will be reviewed briefly on history, history of set design across the world, before delving into matters concerning Ghanaian set design.

The study of scenery design is a sub-field of theatre history which, in turn, is a branch of history. As such, it is best to begin any exploration of scenic design by briefly examining the nature of history before, how it is defined, and the methodologies most profitably employed to gain a better understanding of both history and scenic design. Thus relevant literature will be topically reviewed in association with history and scenic design. This line of action is shaped by Abe Omololu Taiwo (2009, 155) as follows:

The Theatre Arts as a discipline engrafts unto itself some of the contents of several other disciplines such as History, Physics, Social Studies, Literature, Religion and many more. The Africa Theatre Arts scholar is hereby faced with the task of dealing with these other disciplines which Theatre Art has brought into itself. It represents and also has the power to the rise up in the defense of these disciplines.
2.2 What Is History?

Grange (2013, 3) defines written history as “a golf mine of experience. It provides a range of experiences and circumstances that no single generation could possibly experience on its own… it provides the discovery of how often the same ideas and experiences have occurred to others over the centuries”. In Grange’s definition, it is deduced that history is an essential element of every culture as it throws light on what life has been before it is now and in addition provides evidence on how often an event, idea or experience occurred to people in the past.

The word "history" has several connotations in English. A standard interpretation of the word is the definition found in the Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1995, 285) as “(the study of or a record or story of) past events considered together, esp. events or developments of a particular period, country or subject”. The modern historian and historiographer Simon Schama (1991) suggests that history should be perceived as a human endeavour in which we attempt to make sense of the past in all its splendid messiness. To add to that, Grange (2013), in drawing conclusion from suggestions of other critics, again opines that “history is what you can remember and is full of half-remembered facts… that certain events in history were inevitable. Inevitable, didactic, or prophetic, the foremost imperative in studying history is its function as the memory of the human race, coupled with the most efficient tool of learning ever invented, namely literacy” (p. 3).

Although Grange’s submission is arguable as it is usually the oral tradition that poses such limitation of being full of half-remembered facts and possibly adulterated, I still am in concession with Schama and Grange in their positions that history could be
oxymoronically disorderly and resplendent, but it serves in its function as the instrument for retaining and recalling past experiences of the entire human race. Imagine waking up each morning without any memory; that is how humans would feel without the acknowledgement and study of history. Drawing on Taiwo’s submission on theatre arts engrafting itself into other disciplines, I will now venture into the realm of scenery for theatre, and its history.

2.3 Defining Scenic Design

A trip to the theatre to see a play, an opera, ballet or even a concert, opens to the audience a world of technical theatre where such effects as lighting, costuming, make-up, sound, and scenery are on the peak of display. All of these design and technical areas work together in a production to establish the place, time, period, and mood of the production. Groves (2010, 13) is in concurrence with this assumption when he states that “Yet theatre is more than what we see on stage. What is visible once the curtain has been raised is the fruit of much work, consisting of learnt skills, precise activities, detailed preparation and application all geared to the single objective of producing the best possible performance...”.

Just as old as the history of theatre in itself is, so is the history of theatrical scenery. The two-dimensional canvas-covered flats which are usually painted and homologous to three-dimensional panoramic view, is in fact the fruits of a relatively recent innovation. This traditional scenery has been seen as a significant departure from the more ancient forms of theatrical scenic expression, which tended to basically depend very little on the
actual representation of space and relying more on the communication of action and mood.

A number of performing arts scholars have given detailed definitions of scenic design and its worth to the Performing Arts. Parker and Smith (1968, 13 & 14), in their bid to provide insight into scene design, define it as follows:

In the drama, or literary theatre, the written words of the playwright are transformed by the director and his fellow artists into an audible and visible expression of the author’s ideas for an audience. In the presentation of a play, scene design solely exists to bring, through the stage setting, visual substance to the dreams of the playwright.

From the above quotation, it is cogitative that the written work of the playwright is rendered not exclusively by the director but the total outlook is as a result of a collaborative work between the technical and the design personnel. The scenery, an aspect of technical theatre, becomes the manifestation of the imagination of the playwright and the designer. In spite of this materialization of imagination being the output of the scenic designer, the director and other designers such as the costume and lighting designers have a say in the final presentation of the scenery. For unity and harmony to be achieved in the presentation, members of the technical or design team agree to work with a colour palette that is conducive to the theme, style and mood of the play.

Scenic design is defined simply by Edu (2001) as “the creation of an appropriate environment of an action; for a play or an event in a theatre within any given space at a particular point in time” (p. 1). The words underpinning this definition are ‘appropriate
environment’ in which sense; the scenery should corroborate the event for which it has been made available. Gerald’s (1989) definition seems to be in concurrence with that of Edu’s definition of scenic design when he defines it as “the art of devising appropriate surroundings for the action…” (p. 1). In this case, the scenery does not only glorify itself in its aesthetics but also becomes a medium of communication between the designer and the audience; carrying meaning and emotions. In expressing the production concept, as well as production style, a set design appeals to the audience’s sense of vision and emotion. This implies that, upon just the first glance at the ‘stage picture’ the audience gains fair knowledge of the kind of mood and feelings the performance will relate.

This implication is confirmed in Gillette (1996, 105), when he states that “scenery helps the audience understand and enjoy a play by providing a visual reinforcement of the production concept.” The stage scenery does not make the production but it contributes to the total appreciation and understanding of the drama. It is the vital touch to the visual outlook of the production.

In modern Ghanaian theatres, scenic designs for play productions tend to denote their acceptance of the definition of scenic design as given above. In an attempt to pursue a better appreciation of the play by the audience, scenic designers employ a cumulative structure that gives an environment its general atmosphere. This structure, which could range from furniture, shelves, cabinets, wall hangings, to draperies, carpets, among other elements used, designates a certain locale or give decoration to a background. It is in the application of these structures for better understanding that scenic design is justified. Scenic design does not exclusively apply to the stage but it is also an important
component of the film and television industry as far as mood and atmosphere building are concerned.

2.3.1 Justification of Scenic Design

Theatre scholars have underscored the functionality, aside aesthetics, of set design in connection to theatrical performances. The major focus of the scenic designer is to design and give life to an acting space as well as communicate his or her intentions and emotions in agreement with the director and the playwright’s intentions. Most scenic designs are not a matter of creating an impressive design but an appropriate environment that will provide cogent meaningful pictures. Every stage design has its meaning and implications. The designer seeks to establish some effective understanding of the production by carefully choosing his working elements to design the set. Scenery contributes to the understanding and enjoyment of the play by providing visual reinforcement of the production concept. In other words, the design should create an environment for the play that is supportive of the production concept. Theatrical designers work towards achieving similar goals with their designs. In concurrence with Michael Gillette, these goals, as posited by Archer, Gendrich, and Hood (2010) are broken down as follows in the subheadings.

2.3.1.1 Definition of the World of the Play (Time, Place, Economics, etc.)

Gillette (1996) indicates that “geography has a significant impact on the design of buildings and their furnishings.” In Ghana, mud houses with thatches are predominantly found in villages and hamlets found throughout the country. These mud houses provide
coolness during the hot weather. This is so because unlike the cement block which absorbs and retains heat for a longer period, the clay does absorb heat but does not retain it for a long time. Similarly, these mud houses are found in typical villages in Ghana. However, in recent times, although village and urban or metropolitan divide is primarily geographic, styles in the architecture of houses and business structures have changed rapidly stemming from socio-economic circumstances rather than geographic or architectural demands. The scenic designer takes into consideration such elements as the walls, ceilings, floors and furnishings, to create appropriate environments for plays.

Barranger (2015) claims that by the latter part of the nineteenth century, a naturalistic philosophy that postulated that life could be explained by the forces of society, heredity, psyche, economics, and the environment, had dominated the theatre. She continues that “If environment (including economic factors) really did govern people’s lives, then it needed be shown as audiences actually experienced it” (p. 246). It is in line with this assertion that the demands of realism called for the stage to look like actual rooms, houses, places, etc. To provide clues to the historical period of the play, the designer needs to do a research into the historical background of the play. The designer takes account of the furniture, the rooms (form and shape), and if it is a building, the architectural aesthetics from the period of the play. These elements help the audience ascertain the period, country and locale of the play. The subsequent migration of the Concert Party from the unconventional open air performance spaces to the National theatre saw a realization of Barranger’s asseveration. In creating a somewhat realistic bedroom for the performance of “Onnipa Trimu Ye Sum”, the designers used a table-turned-bed to suggest the acting place. Although the actualization of realism wasn’t fully
achieved peradventure that designers weren’t fully abreast with the concept, or the challenge posed by unavailability of funds, there were instances set designs for concert party productions in the 1990s attempted to define the world of the play in terms of time, place, economic status, etc.

Most set designs tend to indicate what kind of characters inhabit the environment of the play. In effect, the audience should be able to decipher what manner of person lives in that particular environment, by looking at the visual description of the stage. The scene designer achieves this effect, by using set props and decorative props. For instance, in general terms, a bedroom that is decorated with an expensive bed, curtained with satin or metallic fabric, and has elegant wall hangings, suggests a type of occupant. Apparently, that same room could be furnished with just a single bed, with ragged bedspreads littered on the floor, and without wall hangings. This room would also suggest a totally different sort of character inhabiting the described environment of the play. Dwelling on the same instance of the concert party, the bedroom created had no extravagant props embellishing it with the exception of the presence of an ‘ankora’¹ which was used by some of the actors. These decorations draw the audience’s attention to certain features or characteristics of the inhabitant.

2.3.1.2 Evocation of Mood (Atmosphere, Feeling)

A scenic design should enhance the mood and spirit of the play. Spirit refers to the production concept, that is the manner and style in which a production design team wish to present the play to the audience. Spirit also refers to the tune essence of the play. Mood

¹ Ankora is an Akan word for a traditional tank, which is aluminum and usually black in colour.
is usually referred to as the feeling of a play, be it comic, tragic, farcical and so on and so forth. Parker and Smith (1968) describe it as “the quality of a play that, when properly transmitted, effects a state of mind and emotional response in the audience. It can be expressed in such words as sparkling, warm, gloomy, earthy, mystic, and so forth. Some more general expressions of mood are tragedy, comedy, farce, and the like, that are also used to define a type of play” (pp. 20-21).

In clarifying the difference in feeling of a tragedy and comedy, Parker and Smith, continue to say that, “a tragedy is usually a mood-dominated play as is low comedy or farce” (p. 20). The designer makes use of elements that reinforce the emotional characteristics of the play. In which case, it is advisable for the design to have sharp angles, hard lines, and dark colours; if the play is a tragedy, to express the mood that the production concept tends to relay. If a play is romantic, the use of soft curves, and a palette of delicate, cool colours, is implemented to reinforce the romantic qualities of the play. In the case of comic plays, the designer makes use of bright colours in addition to the soft curves. In evoking mood in the audience,

Parker and Smith (1968) reiterate the importance of the establishment of mood when they give a further description of it as “the ball, sometimes the bouncing ball, the designer must always keep in sight as he moves through the mass of technical decisions and mundane problems that occur during the execution of his design” (p. 21).
2.3.1.3 Reinforcement of the Style

Many a time, we are tempted to define style in line with period. For Parker, Craig, and Block (2003), style in theatre is quite difficult to define in specific terms because it is seen, heard and felt. Saint-Dennis (2009) avows that style, suggesting period, is but a secondary meaning. He explains that an actor who plays a part in a realistic play will show style in his acting. Likewise, the wearing of period costume may not give the actor style. For him, style is not superficial or merely external but it implies an idea of quality before the aesthetic. In effect, he gives his definition of style as “the perceptible form that is taken by reality in revealing to us its true and inner character” (p. 61).

Although his definition also carries weight, the notion that style is linked to period cannot be done away with. The scenic designers consider the period, concept, thematic concerns among other elements, to inform their notion of the style of the play. The same applies to the director who is even at a higher stand of infusing his personal style into the direction of the play. By so doing, the audiences are able to decipher the deep meaning of the play rather than the superficial. It is in this sense that a director could request for a “bare stage” (which is also classified under scenery) to enhance his style. The set designed and constructed for the production of Trevor Rhone’s Old Story Time by the Resident Drama Group Company of the National Theatre of Ghana Abibigromma, can be cited as an example. The placement of real living room settee coupled with its corresponding centre table; the use of set properties as photographs, shelves, living room dividers suggests the style of realism. Parker, Craig, and Block (2003) conclude that “Literary, acting, directing, and visual styles, as well as period styles unite to form a single production style” (p. 54).
2.3.1.4 Support and Amplification of the Dramatic Action

Parker, Craig, and Block (2003) observe that “the set is the geometry of the eventual play, so that a wrong set makes many scenes impossible to play, and even destroys many possibilities for the actors” (p. 2). Gathering from their assertion, scenic designers have the responsibility to promote the understanding of the play by creating environments that support the theme, actions, among others, of the play as well as heightening certain features that can give a stronger backing to the characteristics underlying the players in the play. An example could be given of the set design for Abibigromma’s production of Sutherland’s *The Marriage of Anansewa* staged at the Efua Sutherland Drama Studio in 2000. The hanging of the gigantic spider web in the corner of the room immediately surmounts to notion of entanglement; whether by the victim or the assailant. Indeed Ananse is greatly personified by creating for him a house, but to amplify the dramatic action and add more meaning to the play, a web is created in the corner of the house. This is done to create the impression of how Ananse is the spider.

Design in the modern theatre is concerned with the total visual and aural effect of a dramatic production. In any production, this overall effect is the sum of all the elements that provide the audience with clues about the world of the play. Scene design, the physical and visual environment, is often the strongest visual element that supports the spoken word of the dramatic form (Parker, Craig, and Block. 2003, 10).
2.3.1.5 Focus of the Audience

That scenic design is the visual embodiment of the words of the play, cannot be overemphasized. Audience play a vital role in the theatre, in that without them, there will be no theatre. Theatre needs a live audience for it to be a theatre. Creation of the scenery for a production should attract the audiences’ attention the moment the curtain opens. As observed in Erlhoff and Marshall’s Design Dictionary: Perspectives on Design Terminology (2008), “It is important to understand that the design of the set is not simply functional; it creates an atmosphere that gives the audience a visual feeling of the environment of the event…The choice of backdrop, light, sound, props, costume, and increasingly, projected media impacts the viewer’s experience of the production” (2008, 358). In as much as it attracts their attention, it will be atrocious for the set to outweigh the performance in terms of action, dialogue, blocking, and so on, thereby distracting the audience. For the elements of theatre to be in balance and to achieve one purpose, there is the need for designers of the various aspects to collaborate and work together as confirmed by Peter Brook in his Empty Space (1968). He writes that “a designer, to become best at what he does, works his design out step by step with the director, going back, changing, scrapping as a conception of the whole gradually takes form” (p. 38).

In achieving these functional elements of set design, there are various principles, outlined by different theatre scholars, which are applied.

2.4 Principles and Concepts of Scenic Design

A number of theatre scholars have posited that there are general principles governing scenery design. These principles are concepts employed to organize the structural
elements of design. The way these principles are applied affects the expressiveness or the message of the work. Gillette’s *Theatrical Design and Production: An Introduction to Scene Design and Construction, Lighting, Sound, Costume, and Makeup* (1999) which provides a comprehensive information on these principles outlines them as balance, proportion, rhythm, emphasis, and unity. Balance is given as a reconciliation of opposing forces in a composition that results in visual stability. Balance can be achieved in two forms: symmetrically and asymmetrically. Symmetrical balance is having equal weight repeated on equal sides of a centrally placed mirror, whereas asymmetric balance involves placing objects differently to allow varying visual weights to balance from the centre without repeating.

The second principle, proportion, is basically the relationship of sizes or scale among objects or parts of a whole. This takes into consideration the relative sizes and scale of the various elements in a design. Rhythm, the next principle is described as the timed movement through space; a connected path along which the eye follows a regular repetitive arrangement of motifs. Rhythm is largely dependent on the repetition of elements of design or pattern and their movement to achieve its effects. Rhythm is created in a number of ways such as linear rhythm, repetition, alternation, and gradation. Linear rhythm is the characteristic flow of the individual line and is not dependent on pattern but more dependent on timed movement of the viewer’s eye; repetition involves the use of patterning to achieve timed movement and a visual beat; alternation is a specific instance of patterning in which a sequence of repeating motifs are presented in turn; gradation employs a series of motifs – may be shape or colour – patterned to relate to one another.
Another principle, Emphasis, refers to the focal point. It marks the locations in a composition which most strongly draw the viewers’ attention. Emphasis is achieved in a number of ways. These include repetition, contrast, and the use of neutral background, colour, texture, or shape. The last principle, unity, is the underlying component that summarizes all the elements and principles of design. It is the sense that all of the parts are working together to achieve a common result.

2.5 History of Set Design
As it is with not documenting events, the existing knowledge on history of Greek and Roman theatres are based entirely on archaeological studies. Gillette (1996) in effect establishes that, there is no work, scholarly or otherwise that can authoritatively present their findings as a one hundred percent accurate picture of what the theatres looked like. The available literature is incumbent on the generalization drawn from the little evidence that existed in relation to theatre.

2.5.1 Scenic Design in the Greek Theatre
According to Gillette (1996), Greek theatre possessed no single style and that different styles had common elements that characterized what has become known as Greek theatre. The Greek theatre which was at first circular and open-air had a flat orchestra pit located in the hollow between two hillsides. In a further description of the Greek theatre, Brockett (1982), enlightens that a skene, which was not architecturally joined to the auditorium was a small wooden hut, erected behind the playing area was introduced in 465 BC. This skene became the changing room for the actors where they could easily
change their costumes. The spaces at either side which lay between the *skene* and the auditorium served as entrances and exits. The *skene* later became a two-storey building with three doorways in front and an entrance by either side when stone structures were erected, and additionally served as the scenic background for the play. This instigated the reduction of the seating area to a little more than a semicircle. The floor in front of the *skene* was elevated, with steps leading down to the *orchēstra*, where the chorus was located. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 below illustrate the Greek theatre architecture and its various members.

![Fig. 2.1 The remnants of a Greek theatre](image1.jpg)  ![Fig. 2.2 Illustration of the parts of the Greek theatron](image2.jpg)

This scene house, as proposed by Brockett, Ball, Fleming, and Carlson (2014) served as *proskenion*, an architectural background for plays of all kinds including those set on seashores, in the woods and even outside caves. He concludes that this convention implied that clues of the setting were embedded in the dialogue rather than the representational scenery. In his detailed work on *The Roman Theatre and Its Audience*,
Beacham (1991) affirms that the first time theatrical painting is spoken of is in Aristotle’s Poetics (1449a) in which Sophocles is credited as having been the first to introduce scene painting; *skenographia* in the middle of the fifth century BC. In addition, Sophocles also employed such devices as *periaktoi* (revolving prisms with painted scenery), *eccyclema* (wagons for tableaus), and *mechane* (flying machines) were also used. During this era, Greek plays were performed in daylight, and the dramas were frequently designed to take advantage of the position of the sun. Also, theatre sites were well-placed to gain the best effects of the natural light.

### 2.5.2 Scenic Design in the Roman Theatre

Beacham (1991) posits that nearly all theatres in the earliest period of Roman theatre were more or less molded against that of the Greek theatre. He makes this assumption based on the examination of the archaeological evidence provided by the theatres of Magna Graecia and Sicily. The Roman theatres were of the *paraskenia* type where the stage was raised and had a façade with the *skene*, or scene building behind it. Like the Greeks, the Romans also had two projecting wings which incorporated doors on each side of the skene, with one in the middle. “The area in front of the three doors was thought of, conventionally, as an open street which the characters normally refered to as *platea*; less frequently as *via.*” (p. 61). The three-door *skene*, was always a street; from the point of view of the actor facing the audience; off left indicated the town or adjacent points and off right indicated an exit to the country or distant points. The Romans inculcated some features such as creation of the apron of the stage by extending the playing area over part
of the orchestra, where important members of the audience were seated. Illustrations of the Roman theatre and stage mechanics are illustrated in figures 2.3 and 2.4 below.

![Illustration of the Roman theatre in Bosra, Syria](image)

**Fig. 2.3 An illustration of the parts of the Fig. 2.4 The Roman theatre in Bosra, Syria**

**Roman theatre**

As seen in the illustrations above, the Roman theatre was often an enclosed structure built on level ground as opposed to the Greek’s on the hillside. Beacham (1991, p. 58), attributes the form of these structures to the fact that they “were constructed in the urban locales and in the midst of other public buildings, all situated in a natural enclave…”.

This form of theatre architecture was later converted to a later form known as the *scaenae frons* model. The *scaenae frons* was an elaborately decorated background permanently erected behind the stage which normally had three entrances to the stage. A curtain was sometimes used to open the play. It was dropped into a trough as the play began. The Romans were probably the first to use torches and lamps at evening performances. After the fall of the Roman Empire in A.D. 364, these theatres, which also served as venues for gladiatorial fights, circuses, and lion feeding, as is affirmed by Gillette (1996), were
deserted for approximately five hundred years. The theatrical tradition was kept alive by travelling entertainers and jugglers who performed wherever they could find an audience.

2.5.3 Medieval Scenic Design

During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church was strongly against theatre performance, referring to it as association with pagan festivals and an impediment to their quest in converting heathens. In an account relayed by Grange in his book, *A Primer in Theatre History: From the Greeks to the Spanish Golden Age* (2013), it is revealed that the Church endeavoured to deprive Europe of as many festivals as it possibly could and replaced them with such Saint’s Days just as they had done with other holidays such as Easter and Christmas. Despite their relentless effort to totally wipe out theatre, the Church ultimately adopted the theatre to relate the message as well as the Church doctrines to the indigenes, thus reviving an almost-dying tradition.

The religious plays of the Middle Ages were performed at first within, and later in front of the church, with the separate scenes organized around an open space. This form of staging continued when the plays were moved into the street. Gillette (1996) has explained that platforms were constructed and mounted on wagons which were called pageant wagons. These platforms were often erected each time there was a performance, and pulled down when it ended. An example of a medieval scenic design for the Religious Plays organized by The Church is seen in figure 2.5.
Gillette (1996) continues that the religious plays shared some commonalities in production. “The sets were identical, in concept if not detail, and followed the conventions that had been developed by the clergy for the church productions.” (p. 36). The individual platform scenes became more elaborately built up, comprising of small buildings known as mansions, and there was widespread use of machinery and traps. According to Grange (2013), information about medieval lighting is uncertain, although it seems likely that torches, both moving and stationary, were utilized.

### 2.5.4 Renaissance Scenic Design

Brown (2001) posits that Renaissance drama developed in European countries with Italy standing out through its development of a new system of play presentation which comprised generic structures and methods of acting. Commedia dell’Arte, a form of theatre which reigned in the mid 16th century to late 18th century, was one of the developments of the new system of play presentation. This form of theatre was characterized by masks of different types and had its performances based on sketches or
scenarios. More importantly, along with the Italian Renaissance theatre came a more “refined” visual aspect of scene design.

According to Gillette (1996), in as much as Renaissance theatres were Roman-inspired, the significant change was that the theatre finally moved indoors, and was similar to the Roman theatre in that the structure was entirely enclosed. In his book chapter in the edited book, *A History of Italian Theatre*, Andrews (2006) explains the enclosure of the Italian theatre structure as the indigenes seeing theatre or drama “as a winter activity to be pursued indoors” (p. 36). The Italian Renaissance is said to be a pivot to many innovations in theatre architecture and scene design. The first permanent theatre in Italy, the Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza (built between 1580 and 1585), designed by Italian architect Andrea Palladio (1508 - 1580), was one of the theatres which was modeled against the ancient Roman theatre architecture (Gillette, 1999). This time, the *scaenae frons* was not a single decorated wall any longer, but was broken by several arches, as illustrated in figure 2.6.
According to Brockett (1982), the buildings of the scenes in the Teatro Olimpico were made of wood, *stucco* (a plaster now made mostly from Portland cement and sand and lime; POP). In effect, it was a painted canvas with false marble and false stones. On the sides of the painted canvas were *frescos* (a mural done with water colours on wet plaster) that gave an illusion of great distance. Andrews (2006) asserts that the performance area was a raised platform located at one end of the room, and was sometimes closed by curtains. The performing area was not initially framed by a proscenium arch. He adds that professional artists were enlisted to produce an illusionistic perspective backdrop that depicted town or any other suitable location (see figure 2.6 above). This backcloth, he claims “mirrored the world inhabited by the audience, but was self-contained and separate from that world” (p. 35).

Brockett (1982) notes that Vincenzo Scamozzi (1548 - 1616), a notable follower of Palladio, and a renowned architect and stage designer of the late Renaissance, tried to
integrate the stage setting into the surrounding space in his Teatro all’antica, built in 1589 at Sabbioneta. Although as a follower of Palladio and credibly influenced by his master, Scamozzi’s design was nevertheless characterized by different needs in terms of space and form. While his master’s Teatro Olimpico is wide and shallow; almost squared (see fig. 2.6), Scamozzi’s Teatro all’antica is narrow and deep; almost rectangular as illustrated in figure 2.7 below.

The seating area took the form of a horseshoe with only five rows of seat. There were several attempts to create perspective on stage, but the best representations were drawn by Sebastiano Serlio (1475-1554), as illustrated in figures 2.8 and 2.9 below. Serlio set up a stadium seating around an orchestra with only the prince or duke seated in the middle. The stage is raked to increase the illusion of depth through perspective. In addition, Serlio framed the stage picture and designed three all purpose settings to place in the picture.
frame – one for tragedy, one for comedy, and one for pastorals. Samples of Serlio’s framed stage pictures are seen in figures 2.8 and 2.9.

![Serlio’s scene for tragedy in Architettura, 1545](image1)

**Fig. 2.8** Serlio’s elaborately painted scenery for tragedy

![Serlio’s scene for comedy in Architettura, 1545](image2)

**Fig. 2.9** An elaborately painted scenery for comedy scene

In describing the nature of scene design during this period, Gillette (1996) propounds that elaborately painted scenery which depicted comic scene, tragic scene, satiric scene, to mention but a few, was introduced. These painted sceneries are called stock sets. The use of stock sets necessitated the development of the proscenium stage.

Scamozzi constructed streets, made of timber and plaster on a raked stage, behind the doorways of the *frons scaenae*, employed a "solid drop" background and enlarged the central stage arch to make one perspective. The raked floor on the Renaissance stages sloped upwards away from the audience and this aided in the view for the audience. Additional developments during this era included “angled wings” which were a modified version of the Greek *periaktoi*, used in changing scenes. By virtue of the clumsy nature of the scene changing when using the angled wings, Giovan Aleotti replaced the angled wings with flat wings which were placed in grooves attached to the floor at the bottom,
and another set of flat wings set in grooves at the top.\(^2\) Like the angled wings, the flat wings were nested one behind the other. Along with the painted changeable scenery, many special effects began to be created, like trapdoors, flying, and wave-machines and so on.

2.5.5 Italian Baroque Scenic Design

In his book *The Art of Acting in Antiquity: Iconographical Studies in Classical, Hellenistic and Byzantine Theatre*, Neiiendam (1992) discusses that in the early seventeenth century, during the Italian Baroque (the period spanning late sixteenth century to early eighteenth century) was characterized by artists, architects, and urban planners magnifying and intensifying the classical traditions of the city. Giovanni Battista Aleotti, for the first time in the theatre Teatro degli Intrepidi at Ferrara in 1606, introduced flats which were painted canvas stretched over wooden frames, with decorative props painted on them. This system of flats he again employed in 1618, in the much larger Teatro Farnese in Parma which was the first theatre built with a series of proscenium arches to give an impression of depth. Londré (1999) adds that Alleoti invented the sliding wings. This was a series of flats, set in grooves on the stage floor which was set up at each wing position. At the scene change, the most visible in the last scene (those flats in front) were simultaneously pulled out of sight backstage. The realistic stage setting was not known; designs were always symmetrical and in perspective

\(^2\) As derived from http://heironimohrkach.blogspot.com
In the late seventeenth century, one family name is inextricably linked with the proliferation of Italian Baroque theatre architecture and stage design: the Galli-Bibiena. Ferdinando Galli Bibiena (1657 - 1743) began the dynasty’s achievement by the initiation of multiple or oblique perspective in Italy. Up until this period stage design was based on one-point perspective where a single disappearing point in which every line seemed to retreat with a sense of distance toward one point, and this disappearing point was located in the middle of the background. An illustration of such scenery painting is seen in figure 2.10.

![An illustration of stage design by Galli da Bibbiena](image)

**Fig. 2.10 An illustration of stage design by Galli da Bibbiena**

Mayor, writing in 1945, claims “Ferdinando opened even the tiniest stage hitherto undreamed of space and the loftiness by painting architecture seen at about a 45° slant. A ground plan of these painted buildings would resemble the V of the angle of a building
driving at the audience like the prow of a ship…” (p. 36). For Mayor, these restless flights of architecture which run diagonally offstage towards undetermined distances, was a revolution which reigned in scenic design for half of the eighteenth century. Their designs, elaborately ornamented, and heavy with movement and detail, became increasingly fussy; the set, in conflict with the actor, became the main attraction.

2.5.6 English Renaissance and Restoration Scenic Design

Nicoll (1958), impresses on his readers in his book, The Development of the Theatre, that the baroque designs had influence in London, “but it is a strange fact that while English scenic endeavour up to the time of Inigo Jones kept well abreast of Continental example, after 1660 it lagged lamentably behind and has not even yet recovered from a position of inferiority which it has thus copied for two and a half centuries” (p. 157). According Londré (1999), Inigo Jones designed virtually all those lavish entertainments. This he accomplished by travelling to Italy and France to study the architectural and stage design achievements of Andrea Palladio, Vincenzo Scamozzi, Bernardo Buontalenti among others. “Jones adapted Italian techniques of perspective painting, changeable scenes, and machinery for flying effects to the limited facilities of the Banqueting House at Whitehall, and he made the first use of a proscenium arch in England” (p. 1). A sample of Jones’ design is seen in the illustration of figure 2.11.

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3 Inigo Jones (1573-1652) was England’s first major scene designer. He introduced the Italian concept of perspective scenery to the English court theatre of James I in the beginning of the 17th century. In 1605 he designed a perspective setting using angled wings and a back shutter for a production of Ben Jonson’s The Masque of Blackness. By 1608 he was framing his scenery with a proscenium arch and in the 1630s he abandoned the angled wings of Serlio for the more practical flat wings of Aleotti.
Gillette (1996) posits that, in the 1600s, the production of drama in England took place in a different type of structure. Around this time, several structures purposed for theatrical events were built outside London, with the most famous likely being the Globe theatre (1599 – 1632). Brockett (2014) throws more light on the conventions of the Elizabethan theatre by examining the Globe theatre of which William Shakespeare was a part owner. According to Brockett, the Globe was a round structure of an external diameter of approximately ninety-nine feet. It had three levels of roofed galleries with each gallery having the depth of twelve feet six inches. He continues that the Elizabethan theatre had a sheltered stage which was raised six feet from the ground and was approximately forty-one feet three inches wide and twenty-four feet nine inches deep. This stage was enormous enough to extend to the middle of the yard. Gillette (1996) claims the surrounding yard, or pit, “served as the space for the lower-class audience – the groundlings – to stand” (p. 40). The roof of the stage – what Brockett calls “the heavens”
or “the shadow” – has more bearing on the Greek theatrical convention (Brockett 2014, p.106).

According to Brockett (2014), the English set “façade served the function of mansions in the medieval stage, while the stage platform served as platea” (p. 107). Stage properties utilized, for instance tents, beds, thrones, among others, were brought on stage to meet the demands of the actions rather than to localize a scene. He adds that the background for all the scenes were formalized façade, and the specific location of a scene was primarily established through dialogue. Brockett calls this convention “spoken décor”. He conclude that “Overall, then, this stage was an adaptation of medieval conventions” (p. 107).

The eighteenth century English scenic art was not as highly developed as all that followed in the wake of the Italian Baroque. Apart from the spectacular effects contrived for pantomimes, the English theatre relied largely upon stock scenes that were interchangeable from one play to another with such typical locales as a city street, a garden, a room in a palace, a forest, a prison (Londré, 1999). Londré observes that with the English stage’s continuous use of the back shutters (flats) which were manually slid along in the upper and lower supporting grooves, the centre of the painted background were begrimed with handprints and even worse, occasionally the two halves of the back scene did not match. They add that two designers were able to stand out under such circumstances: Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg and William Capon.

The Alsatian landscape painter, de Loutherbourg (1740–1812) in his design for A Christmas Tale in 1774 (a pantomime based on Favart’s La fée Urgèle),”depicted a craggy mountain vista far more atmospheric than anything that had ever before been
designed for the English stage, and he enhanced the illusion of depth by the irregular placement of set pieces and ground rows realistically painted like rocks” (p. 129).

Another device of de Loutherbourg introduced by de Loutherbourg was the transparent scenery (the scrim): “cut-out sections of backcloth were replaced with gauze and lit from behind” (ibid). William Capon designed for John Philip Kemble at the Drury Lane and Covent Garden, beginning with the 1794 Macbeth that inaugurated the Drury Lane theatre. In his designs, he “pursued an interest in ‘antiquarian’ scenery that presaged the next century’s increasing attention to historical and geographical accuracy” (pp. 128, 129).

On nineteenth century scenic design, Nicoll, writing in 1958 (p. 194), explains that

This antiquarian-spectacular movement is unquestionably,…the most important in the age. At the same time it must be noted that spectacularism…was not opposed to a genuinely realistic movement; indeed, it sprang ultimately from a desire to reproduce as faithfully as possible the buildings and the costumes contemporaneous with the action of Shakespeare’s tragedies and comedies. Obviously the same tendency could find application in plays written of later conditions, an endeavour being made to present in strictest faithfulness the current phenomena of ordinary existence. Such an endeavour led to the exploring of new possibilities.

As part of the possibilities explored, old flats were replaced with structures built with more solidity and the conventionalism of scenery arrangement also gave way to a more illusionistic effect. For instance, in the eighteenth century, the scenery of a room was depicted with a solid background and some side wings which clearly was not a representation of reality. With the dawn of realism sweeping over the theatre, during the
nineteenth century, efforts were made to secure a more verisimilitude setting. Hence the realistically detailed, three-walled, roofed setting that simulated a room with the concept of the invisible ‘Fourth Wall’ was successfully employed, for the first time, in Madame Vestris’ London production of The Conquering Game by William Bayle Bernard. The box set complete with a ceiling, coupled with the concept of the invisible ‘Fourth Wall’ forced the acting area to be located behind the proscenium arch, thus eliminating the need for a wide apron and glaring footlights.

Decorative props were still painted on the flats. However, as theatre companies pursuing aims in the naturalistic treatment of crowds (particularly in the Théâtre Libre under the artistic direction and administration of André Antoine, Berlin’s Freie Bühne, under Otto Brahm, and Constantin Stanislavsky) gained impetus, realistic and even actual objects were used. This trend toward realism and historical accuracy culminated in the photographic realism of David Belasco who even incorporated smells into several productions. According to Nicoll (1958, p. 196), “The United States of America saw the development of Belasco realism, in which living animals appeared in farm-yard scenes and even the theatrical meals had to be cooked before the eyes of the spectators with real ingredients.”

The nineteenth century brought extensive changes in lighting and scene design. Gaslight was first introduced in 1817 in England. Gaslight was responsible for many theatre fires, nonetheless, by 1849, gaslight had had the advantage of being centrally controlled. According to Brew-Riverson (2013, p. 94), until Thomas Edison invented electric light bulb in 1879, “Illumination was by candles and oil lamps. Later, gas lights were introduced which brought some improvement in lighting by the constant threats of fire
and actual fires, sometimes with tragic, fatal consequences made it imperative to find better, safer alternative sources.”

2.5.7 Twentieth Century Scenic Design

According to Barranger, (1984), scene designers in the early twentieth century, opposed to naturalism, strove to show the essence of a play through simplification, suggestion, and, often, stylization; selective realism was the keynote. Nicoll (1958, p. 203), submits that

In the theatrical rather than in the dramatic sphere, more powerful were the innovations of Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia. The essence of Craig’s artistic endeavour is to be found in a revolt against the falsity of the realistic method, in a determination to dismiss the cluttering trivialities which only too often do service for art on the stage. For those falsities he would substitute symbolic form, and in order to cast out the trivialities he would make the theatre once more a temple.

Nicoll (1958) continues that Craig’s ideals were seen as inspiration derived from the theatre of the Greeks. Craig modified the mass of light and shade with a more naturalistic detail and imaginatively conceptualized shapes in a form of statues to replace the illusionistic interiors. He also elevated the actors’ space by providing various planes on stage. One most prevailing element in Craig’s work was the three-dimensional form. “He attacks the realistic theatre, but he also attacks the painted theatre. There is virtually no ‘decoration’ in his designs: his effects are created wholly by the employment of simple mass-forms” (Nicoll 1958, p.203). In the works of the Swiss designer, Adolphe Appia it
was evident that he was also in rejection to detail and painted ornamentation, only that while Craig emphasized vertical lines, he emphasized the horizontal.

Brew-Riverson (2013) espouses that Adolphe Appia recognized the potential of lighting as a similitude to music, playing an important role in enhancing mood and not to merely illuminate the actors. He thus developed theories on stage design particularly stage lighting. Some of these he was able to realize in his designs for Henrik Ibsen’s and George Bernard Shaw’s plays.

![Stage design of Edward Gordon Craig featuring vertical lines and...](image)

**Fig. 2.12** Stage design of Edward Gordon Craig featuring vertical lines and

For Nicoll (1958), the Craig-Appia method is of great import since its three-dimension system, coupled with the provision of ample space for the performers, has become the basis for which many artists have founded their works.

Nicoll (1958) observes that other designers who sprang in the twentieth century – Jacques Copeau with suggestive forms and screens, Vsevolod Meyerhold with his constructivist
sets of skeletal structures and geometric forms, Max Reinhardt with his expressionistic sets of abstract distortion, and Erwin Piscator with his theatricality and educational approach – all brought imagination and creativity to realistic design, which had become cluttered and uninteresting.

Smith’s American Theatre Design Since 1945 (2000) provides useful insight into scenic design and designers of the twentieth century in the Americas. He traces the development of scenic design to the 1915 production of *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*, directed by Harley Granville-Barker, and designed by Robert Edmond Jones. He describes Jones’s set as monochromatic and in stark contrast to David Belasco’s realistic theatre. According to him, Jones’s designs “Primarily inspired by Edward Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia, it promoted a visual stage picture that often bordered on the abstract” (p. 514). This mode of presentation by Jones eventually became known as the New Stagecraft which, according to Smith (2000), some scholars and critics have claimed to be the most significant development in twentieth century theatre in America. Smith (2000) posits that Robert Edmond Jones has also been accredited with introducing another innovation which has had far greater impact on the evolution of theatre design. Smith (2000) further explains that “Jones insisted that the scenic designer be present as an active participant at the beginning of the production process, thus changing the practice of design by giving the designer an opportunity to contribute to the interpretation of the script” (p. 515).

There were the likes of other prominent designers such as Lee Simonson whose work was often characterized by a unit set, and often surrounded by an open space and backed with a cyclorama on which extra scenic elements were projected; Norman Bel Geddes whose
designs were more abstract yet established a more theatrical image “that became the hallmark of the so-called American style” (Smith 2000, p. 515). Smith concludes that despite the numerous designers that sprang during this period, “it was Jones and Simonson, and then Donald Oenslager, Jo Mielziner, Oliver Smith, and Boris Aronson who dominated American theatre design between the 1920 and 1960” (Smith 2000, p. 515).

**Fig. 2. 13** Norman Bel Geddes’ sketch for the grave yard scene for Hamlet 1929

The tenet of this study is based on the last four decades of the twentieth century and as such the history of set design in the twentieth century is undoubtedly relevant to this study. Analysis of sets designed for productions at the Ghana National Theatre and the Efua Theodora Sutherland Drama Studio reveals a trend that is modeled against the ideals of Craig and Appia. Some works of Johnson Edu and John Djisenu in the National Theatre (this will be analyzed into detail in Chapter Four of this research) features the three dimensional mode of scenery design, against the availability of ample space, as propounded by Craig and Appia. For the majority of the three decades preceding the final decade of the years under study, the Concert Party tradition paid little or no attention to
set design. The basic nature of designs for productions under this tradition can be related to the Greek form of performance stage where the skene is erected basically to serve as a demarcation for back stage and on stage.

In conclusion, it is derived that scenic design has gone through series of developmental stages since the introduction of theatre in Greek civilization. As time progressed, stage settings grew more and more realistic, reaching their peak in the Belasco realism of the 1910-20's, in which complete diners, with working soda-fountains and freshly-made food, were re-created on stage. Perhaps as a reaction to such excess, and in parallel with trends in the arts and architecture, scenery began a trend towards abstraction, although realistic settings remained in evidence, and are still used today. Our more modern notion of scenery can be dated back to the nineteenth century with everything coming together in the late 1900s and continuing to today, until there is no established style of scenic production and pretty much anything goes. While the creation of the design of a visual environment for an action is the sole responsibility of the scenic designer, modern scenography has grown as complex as to require the highly specialized skills of hundreds of artists and crafts people to mount a single production.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Diverse approaches to conducting research in the various fields, yield different research designs. This is what is implied when Sarantakos (2005), avows that “Diversity in research reflects diversity in the parameters that guide it. More precisely, it means diversity in the ontology and epistemology that underlie the methodology, which in turn guides the research” (p. 29). This chapter seeks to outline the methodology and approach to the research. It discusses the principles that guide the research design as well as the methods employed in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. It further presents the productions and set designs studied.

3.2 Choosing a Methodological Approach

Every researcher needs a procedure to gather information on a research topic in every field of study. This study is one that can be explicated as under the historical branch of research work in Theatre. Borg (1963), as cited by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), has defined historical research as the “systematic and objective location, evaluation and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events” (p. 191). Cohen continues that the collection of data for a historical research is “an act of reconstruction undertaken in a spirit of critical inquiry designed to achieve a faithful representation of a previous age” (p. 191).

There are two major enquiry approaches employed by researchers namely, the qualitative, and the quantitative approaches. There is no single definition for these
research approaches yet some scholars have attempted describing the characteristics that distinguish one from the other (for instance Neuman, 2003; Cohen et. al., 2000; Dawson, 2002; Sarantakos, 2005). Quantitative research reduces observed data into numbers as basis of analysis, where qualitative research is one which focuses on reduction of data into texts. Because of this, the variables of interest (such as subjective personal opinions, analysis of historical materials, pictures, interview, video, etc.) are usually those that might lose significantly if reduced to numbers. In their edited book Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers, Ritchie and Lewis (2003, 3) highlighted the key element that characterizes a qualitative research as “aims which are directed at providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories”.

To help achieve the purpose of this study, the qualitative approach suits best as it provides the avenue for flexibility in both the strategies and techniques used including the overall research process itself. First, the emphasis of this study is on discovering the history and the various developmental stages of scenic design in theatre productions, specifically, the popular theatre (Concert Party), theatre performances at the National Theatre, and the Drama Studio. Second, as this study is a historical study, the qualitative approach is more advantageous as it gives room for content analysis to be able to determine the developmental stages and trends in set design. Neuman (2003, 141), and Dawson (2002, 14) assert that, the qualitative method of research is more efficacious for “…grasping subtle shades of meaning, for pulling together divergent information and for switching perspectives” and it equally “explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences
through such methods as interviews or focus groups. It attempts to get an in-depth opinion from participants.” As part of the study, analysis of information from different sources; interviews, newspapers, pictures and footages are conducted; examined; thence the qualitative method of research is more applicable. Footages – still and motion – were gathered from the National Theatre, the Institute of African Studies, as well as other prominent individuals who have at a point in time been involved with any of the theatre performance spaces under review. Additionally, relevant news articles both print and media, were sourced and examined to acquire more information regarding the study.

3.3 Research Design

In this study, the analytical research method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) which combines historical and descriptive content analysis (Sarantakos, 2005) is employed. Cohen, Lawrence, and Morrison (2000, p. 158), explain that historical research “is an act of reconstruction undertaken in a spirit of critical inquiry designed to achieve a faithful representation of a previous age”. They continue that “the ability of history to employ the past to predict the future, and to use the present to explain the past, gives it a dual and unique quality which makes it especially useful for all sorts of scholarly study and research”. The descriptive content analysis seeks to describe a particular message pool in almost archival fashion (Neuendorf, 2002) the exact steps employed in this study were (a) the gathering of data (b) the criticism of data (c) presentation of facts (d) interpretations, and conclusions. Accordingly, the data gathered in this study was documentation of the various set design forms. The second step involved the holistic description of the designs by decades. The third step presented the main differences evident in each decade’s
design. Conclusions were then made for each decade’s set design studied. The main developments in all the four decades were discussed and clearly pointed out.

3.4 Sampling Technique

There are a number of sampling techniques available for the researcher’s use, and the selection of a particular type is largely dependent on the kind of research design employed by the researcher. As is defined by Dawson (2002), sampling is the researcher’s ability to choose “a smaller, more manageable number of people to take part in [the] research” (p. 47). For the purpose of this study as a historical research, the purposive and sequential sampling techniques were adopted. The purposive sampling technique is applied to “choose subjects who, in their opinion, are relevant to the project” (Sarantakos, 2005, 164). The criterion for the choice of the respondents is their knowledge and expertise which informs their suitability for the research. Per the requirements of this study, as a history of set design of the aforementioned theatre and theatre spaces, I sampled my interview respondents from the population of set designers, directors in Ghana, and persons who have had close relationship with the elements of the topic. Such persons included Prof. Esi Sutherland-Addy, Prof John Collins, some selected staff of the Ghana Television (GTV-GBC) and a few others. From Prof Sutherland-Addy, for instance, I got first hand information including photographs of the Ghana Drama Studio, as she is daughter of the famous theatre practitioner and mother of Anansegoro, Dr. Efua Theodora Sutherland.

The second sampling method employed in reaching substantial yet representative working sample size was sequential sampling. Sequential sampling has been defined as a
sampling plan in which an undetermined number of samples are tested one by one, accumulating the results until a decision can be made. This type of non-probability sampling technique permits the researcher to pick and study a single or group of subjects within a given time frame and, after analysis of the results, picks another group of subjects, if needed. As this historical research entails document study, this method of sampling is exploited in the selection of documents to study to achieve the purpose of the study. More importantly, as resulting from the repetitive nature of this sampling technique, minor changes and adjustments can be done at the initial stages of the study to shapen the research method and fine-tune the result analysis.

In compiling the few photographs and footages of performances of the Concert Party between 1960 and the early 90s, I discovered a particular trend in the nature of the scenic background. Due to the fact that this popular theatre was a travelling theatre, they basically made use of normal Ghanaian print cloth as backdrops and a few properties on stage. For almost the three decades (1960-1990) preceding the relocation to the National Theatre, such scenery was represented on the stage. Therefore, after examining the few available samples of photographs of a decade’s performance of the Concert Party, the results accumulated proved no need to further examine more photographs for that particular decade in question.

My focus is to highlight the historical trends in scenic design in the Concert Party, theatre performances in the National Theatre of Ghana as well as the Efua Sutherland Drama Studio. There is the need to carefully select respondents from whom I could gather

4 As retrieved from https://explorable.com/sequential-sampling
substantial information to support the study. Prominent scenic designers were interviewed to share their experiences and views on the theme. Persons as Mr. John Djisenu, Mr. David Amoo, and Mr. Joojo Quantsom were interviewed to gain in-depth knowledge about the research topic. Mr. Djisenu recounted his personal encounter with a Concert Party troupe that visited his town in the early 60s, divulging his emotional stance and the impact the troupe made with their performance. He also revealed the mode of publicity of the Concert Party performances which also served sometimes as the scenery description of the shows. In addition, other important people interviewed were theatre practitioners who worked for and with the theatre as directors, costume designers, among others. Prof. Martin Owusu, Dr. Ossei Agyemang, with their years and experience in theatre, were among the directors sampled for the purpose of the study. These individuals were the selected focus in consideration of their in-depth knowledge about information pertaining to their work.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

As Hockett (1995) suggests (cited in Cohen et al., 2007) history is not classified as a science which uses direct observation as is seen in chemistry or biology. Like the archeologist, the historian has to use traces which have been left to interpret a past event and has to “base judgment on evidence, weighing, evaluating and judging the truth of the evidence of others’ observations until the hypothesis explains all the relevant evidence” (p.193). As has been rightly posited, data collected for this research study was based on the traces of evidence of events past thusly photographs, videos, as well as articles in
newspapers and these available data, when collected, were evaluated and cogitated to reach a viable hypothesis.

### 3.5.1 Primary Sources

Primary sources and secondary sources are the two main classifications of sources in a historical research. Firstly, as Cohen, et al (2007) suggest, primary sources of data are those items that are archetypical to the study and are regarded as the life blood of historical research. The primary sources have been grouped into two categories: the remains or relics of a given period (buildings, fossils, skeletons, tools, pictures, coins, etc.); and those items that have had unmediated physical relationship with the events (written and oral testimonies of actual participants – manuscripts, letters, memoranda, biography, films, etc.). Per the categorization as defined by Cohen, et al., the relics of a given period are the photographs, footages of the concert party shows, some selected performances at the Ghana Drama Studio and the Efi Sutherland Drama Studio, as well as those of the Ghana National Theatre; and those items that have unmediated physical relationship with the events include newspaper articles, documentaries, and testimonies of people who have had contact with such elements under study (for instance Prof. Esi Sutherland-Addy). These primary data furnished my research with undiluted first-hand information, and became the source of authentication for the information gathered from the secondary sources.

There are several means by which the primary data, which is the information a researcher receives through first hand observation and investigation, could be gathered. To achieve
the height of this study, however, I employed the semi-structured interviews, and the study of materials and documents to gather information for this research.

3.5.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

To gather more information for the study, the semi-structured interview method was appropriate as it gave room for less formality and yet more interactive interview sessions. This type of interview method gives access to pursue any interesting tangent that may develop in the course of the knowledge sharing because follow up questions could be asked based on the answer given by the interviewee, and provides for the respondents a more comfortable environment with very little inhibitions in expression. This type of interview is held with the aid of an interview guide which could or could not be strictly adhered to. The interview guide captured issues on the history of theatre in Ghana, set design and construction in Ghana; its form, materials used, and its contribution to the growth of theatre in Ghana.

As part of the investigative items for the interview guide, a question that I believe was quite pivotal to my study and attracted a positive, assertive, unanimous response was “Has there been any significant import made on the state of the various subdivisions of performing arts – music, dance, drama – since performing arts was introduced in the early 60s?” My respondents answered in the affirmative for which I enquired further what impact that has been, majorly hitting on the import on scenic design for performances. This question attracted the average response of a positive influence on the sets designed for performances. In that, additional knowledge of the functions and aesthetics as well as the use of colours and shapes in depicting the type, style, mood, and general atmosphere
of the play or performance, contributed to designers coming up with a more urbane and reflective design for the performances. Dr. Ossei Agyemang, who has been involved in theatre since the late 60s and early 70s added that although introduction of performing arts in academia has been of great import to the elements of its subdivision, set design could still be better than as it is. He explained that set designers have currently been boxed up and stagnated with the same process of designing thus producing the same old results.

The use of the semi-structured interview which involves the use of the interview guide provided the avenue to probe further from answers which needed clarification or required follow-up questions. This went a long way to enrich the data collected for the research as I was able to ask questions I had not intended asking but was of essence to the study.

3.5.1.2 Document analysis

O’Leary (2004) argues that document analysis focuses on the collection, review, interrogation and analysis of various forms of text as a primary source of data. Historical research in theatre draws chiefly on these documents as sources of information or data. Cohen et al (2007) have identified these items used for document analysis as including catalogues, archives of official minutes or records, files, letters, official publications, memoirs, films, wills, newspapers, magazines, paintings, among others. For the purpose of this study, the bulk of the document analysis is based on pictures and footages of performances concerning this study. Other documents include newspapers, magazines, paintings and biographies (if any).
In analyzing the pictures and the footages, I considered the principles of design in creating scenery for a theatre performance. Principles of design basically describe the ways that a designer or artist employs the elements of art or design in a work. These principles have been outlined as balance, emphasis, movement, proportion, rhythm, variety, and unity. As these principles help in the appreciation of an art work, I applied knowledge of these principles in the examination and analyses of the available sampled photographs and footages of performances of the Concert Party, National Theatre, and the Efua Sutherland Drama Studio to give descriptions that best reflect the nature of the scenic establishment. Furthermore, I evaluated the space of the performance arena and its influence on the type of scenery established for that particular performance. For instance, in the cases of the Concert Party, most of the performances took place at unconventional theatre areas like market squares, people’s courtyards, etc., and thus posed a challenge in putting up a reflective set design for the performances.

3.5.2 Secondary Sources

The secondary sources of data for a historical research are those items that do not have any direct physical contact or relationship with the event under investigation. These sources constitute data which cannot be described as archetypical to event. In this case, the narrator giving the description of the event was not actually present but has derived that description from another person or source which may or may not have been a primary source. Secondary sources from which I derived data for this research subsume the extant literature on scenic design in Ghana, literature on the history and development of scenic design during notable periods around the world. Similarly, scholarly books
which contain information essential to the advancement of this research; reviews; journal articles and magazines were also consulted for extra content for the study.

3.6 Data Analysis

Cohen et al (2007, p. 461) observe that “qualitative data analysis involves organizing, accounting for and explaining the data; in short, making sense of the data in terms of the participants’ definition of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities”. They add that in presenting and analyzing qualitative data, there is no one single or correct way. In effect then, qualitative data analysis often relies frequently on interpretation. They propose one principle by which the qualitative researcher should abide by: “…fitness for purpose, the researcher must be clear what he or she wants the data analysis to do as this will determine the kind of analysis that is undertaken” (ibid).

As a historical research, this study employed document analytical approach in which it will basically described, portrayed, discovered patterns, and interpreted the findings. This approach of analysis does not delve into content analysis which seeks to “proceed through a systematic series of analysis, including coding and categorization until a theory emerges that explains the phenomena being studied or which can be used for predictive purposes” (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 462). This is not to say the functionality and aesthetics of the scenic design was not considered, but for most part of the analysis, general description and the analysis of the application of the principles of design was employed to achieve the maximum analysis of the documents available.

Taking a set designed for a production at the National Theatre by Mr. Johnson Edu for instance, following the visual analysis of the set based on the principles of design,
subsequently, I considered the impact of that set design on the thematic elements of the production and how best the atmosphere reflected the functions of creating set for a performance.

In conclusion, as this historical research is qualitatively inclined, I exploited some principles guiding a historical research in a qualitative research method to sample my resources – both primary and secondary – in gathering data for the study. The application of such principles as purposive and sequential sampling as sampling methods; semi-structured interviews, and document analysis as instruments for data collection, yielded in the effectual realization of the intended study and contributed to authenticating my findings.
CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

As postulated by Cole (1996), “Access to the past is always mediated through the present, particularly when using ethnographic sources” (p. 35). Though this study is not ethnographically based, Cole’s assertion comes in handy especially when there is very little evidence available for evaluation and report in this historical research work. In this chapter, which dwells on studying the outlook, general facade and the materials used in constructing or building set from 1960 to 2000, I attempt colligating the past and the present, and in some cases, speculate about the past based on the present. The chapter describes the form and performance space of the Concert Party tradition, Ghana National Theatre, and the Efua Theodora Sutherland Studio. It more importantly analyses, and discusses scenery design for each of the theatre forms and spaces for the period from 1960 to 2000. The research questions and the available photographs, and videos generally direct the focus of this chapter. To begin with, I present a brief history of theatre in Ghana.

4.2 The Ghanaian Theatre

Like the Classical Greek, theatre in Ghana has been a long standing custom with the exception that researchers still contemplate the exact period theatre began. In their introduction to the book, Pre-Colonial and Post-Colonial Drama and Theatre in Africa (2001), Losambe and Sarinjeive write that “Whenever the words ‘Africa’, ‘literature’, and even ‘drama’ are juxtaposed, it does not take long for the discussion to become
heated. For example, the question of whether or not drama was present in Africa before the arrival of the Europeans in the late nineteenth century is never quite resolved” (p. vii).

In a rebuttal to this assertion, Sophia D. Lokko (1980) and J. H. Kwabena Nketia (1969) have both in their works confirmed that theatre has existed in Ghana in various dramatic forms. Lokko asserts that

Long before the arrival of European culture in the fifteenth century, Ghana enjoyed a rich culture of pageantry in which gold ornaments and iron played prominent parts. The cults of iron and gold were the foundations on which societies were organised; the gold cult, handed over from mother to daughter, embodied the arts of drama, music and dance, which mothers sought to pass on as richly as they could. Rituals pervaded these rites which developed into ceremonies like initiation. (p. 309)

Like Kerr (1995) who associates the inability of dating the beginning of theatre in Ghana to the complexities posed by the western definition, Banham (2004), in his preface to A History of Theatre in Africa, describes the theatre in African societies as “immense ranging from dance to storytelling, masquerade to communal festival, with a vibrant and generally more recent ‘literary’ and developmental theatre” (p. xv) and as such locating African theatre under the Western definition of theatre, becomes elusive and poses a greater problem. Nonetheless, it is the belief that the Ghanaian indigenous ‘arts culture’ which came in a form of storytelling, impersonations, children’s games, singing, dancing and clapping of hands that are still prominent in the traditional celebration of festivals, rituals, rites of passages, among others, predate the advent of the colonial rule which came along what is now called the Western form of theatre.
Lokko (1980) creates the awareness of the presence of theatre as far back as

when the early tribesman, dressed in the skin of a previous catch, danced and chanted for rain or other benefits. He performed other ritual rites like sacrifices, libation and prayers, ostensibly to invoke other powers to assist in the fulfillment of his needs. So Ghana enjoyed elements of theatre in the rituals of the early tribesman, as well as in the ceremonies of rites of passage which include quite prominent ritual observances at home, in the community, and in other situations (p. 309).

The Ghanaian tradition and culture is swamped with ritualistic initiations, extending from birth to death, and between these ends is a number of initiation processes at every stage of life.

Nketia (1969) describes the Ghanaian arts – music dance and drama – as being an integral practice that is part of the everyday life of the Ghanaian. This description I am in agreement with, noting my daily routine of keeping a home. As I go about my daily duties, I sing sometimes to lessen the feeling of tiredness and at other times, just to keep my day cheerful. At some point in executing my duties, I dance and sometimes speak to myself, laughing at my own jokes; which could in western theatrical terms be equalled to a monologue. Drama in Ghana could be dichotomized into traditional drama and modern drama.

Ghanaian traditional “theatre” is said to comprise rituals, festivals, and dramatized storytelling which are all important aspects of the Ghanaian society, as is deductive of Owusu’s assertion that “… there is the traditional, informal, and spontaneous activity to
be found in villages and towns which may involve people of an entire community or a
section of it” (1983, p. 1). A ritual is an established or prescribed procedure for a
religious activity or any other rite. In Ghanaian traditional culture, rituals dominate the
celebration of traditional events or rites and sometimes an entire event could be
ritualistic. These rituals are usually inculcated in naming ceremonies, puberty rites,
mapping rites, funeral rites, inter alia and involve the whole community. During puberty
rites among the Akans for instance, the initiates are taken to the riverside and bathed with
nyenya leaves. This ritual is to wash off all evil and break family curses as well as to pray
for the protection for the initiates from the gods.

“Religion, myth, and tradition have become the most important sources for dramatic
writing; a significant number of modern West African plays are infused with strong
elements of myth and ritual which dramatists remold from their cultural environment to
suit their thematic purposes” (Owusu, 1986, p. 1). Owusu’s assertion is evidently seen in
Efua Sutherland’s (1927 – 1996) transfer of the ritual of puberty rite into her play The
Marriage of Anansewa (1975) when Aya and Akua bath Anansewa at the earliest dawn
of the day with the nyenya leaves to ward off evil and cleanse her of all “filth” and was
done even before her friends came in to present congratulatory gifts on her passage rite.
This ritual is done very early at dawn with the belief that the early morning dew which is
unadulterated, pure water from the heavens, is an essential element for the purification
process. The use of the early morning dew as part of purification process also appears in
Sutherland’s Edufa (1967), when Abena collects the dew for the cleansing ritual for
Ampomaa. Religion, myth, and tradition have also served as a source of inspiration for
set design in Ghana, particularly for the Concert Party tradition. For instance, in the
1960s and 70s through to the early 80s when concert shows were advertised using billboards and posters, the imageries presented mostly are mythical in nature. These billboards were sometimes used as a background for the acting area.

Another component of Ghanaian traditional theatre is the festivals in which various dramatic elements can be pointed out. Nketia (1969), yet again, affirms that a month does not go by where a locality in Ghana does not celebrate some form of festival. It forms an integral part of our communalism and seeks as a means of upholding our way of life. The festival celebrations “which bear the freight of the past while reflecting contemporary influences” (Gibbs, 2004, p. 159) are loaded with dramatic enactment of the beliefs and tradition of the people with the help of some music and dancing. In the course of the celebration of these festivals, enactment of certain heroic activities is displayed in the view of the celebrants. For example, the hunting of the deer during the Aboakyer festivities of the people of Simpa is a competition among the Asafo groups. Before setting off on the quest, each group offers sacrifices to the ancestral spirits to help them in the hunt and on the next day, they march to the house of Penkye Otu’s house (the god whose instrumentation aided the people of Simpa establish their present settlement) for herbs to be sprinkled on their bodies for their safe return. The group that makes the first catch rushes back home with war songs and shout of victory. This escapade is enacted during the durbar through drumming and dancing.

The demonstration of the escape of the people of Anlo from Notsie during the Hogbetsotso festival is another notable example of dramatic elements in festivals. The performance mainly carried out by the women displays how they poured waste water on the wall surrounding their town until it became soft to be broken. The natives fooled the
wicked king, Agorkorli, by walking backwards creating the impression that they were rather walking towards Notsie and not from Notsie. The dance is performed using the Misego dance, a dance believed to be the one used in organizing the escape.

Last but not least of the components of traditional Ghanaian theatre is the art of story-telling. Owusu, in his Drama of the Gods (1983), posits that story-telling sessions involve the narrative drama that are very rich in teaching moral values. The story-telling sessions are held at a very common location in the village, possibly under a very big tree that is kind to the penetration of the moon light. Villagers sit in a horse-shoe formation around a small bonfire to keep them warm from the biting cold of the night, as the narrator tells the story while involving the audience at the same time. In the course of the delivery, parts of the stories are acted out sometimes with the narrator included. The audiences also play an active role by interjecting their views on the turnout of events, as well as asking questions about the next step of the story. During the story telling, the narrator relays myths, legends and or folktales.

Myths are said to be traditional stories which give insight into the history of a group of people or attempts to explain a natural or social phenomenon, as is derivative of the definition given by Piccardi and Masse (2007). They define myth as:

…a structured narrative, in general derived from oral transmission, and typically created or assembled and perpetuated by knowledge specialists who use supernatural elements and images in order to categorize and explain observed natural phenomena and events that are of perceived vital importance or of special relevance to the social order and well-being of a given culture (p. 17).
There may be varying stories concerning one natural phenomenon. An example of such myths in Ghana is that about why the sky is where it is now. There was a very strong man who lived in a village with his wife and liked eating fufu. He was the best fufu pounder because of his massive strength. At that time, the sky used to be very close to man so much so that it could be easily be touched. Each time this man pounded the fufu, he raised the pestle so high that it hit the sky. The sky, feeling much pain complained over and over again but to no avail. When the sky grew weary of his own complaints, knowing very well that his concerns would not be addressed, slowly moved away form man and is now present at where we see the sky every day.

Legends which are stories about the heroic event of a famous person are also told during the story-telling sessions. A brilliant example is the heroism of Yaa Asantewa, the queen mother of Ejisu who led the Ashanti in a war against the British for the release of their King, Prempeh I. Stories have been woven around this legend to tell of the bravery that existed in the time of old and perhaps to empower women to take bold initiatives in their various communities.

Gibbs (2004) writes that a number of elements have influenced and contributed to the development of a typical Ghanaian theatre tradition which include an array of dances, rhetorical forms, symbols and symbolic acts “but perhaps most important, and certainly the easiest to identify, has been the impact of the cycle of tales associated with the trickster figure of Ananse the spider” (p. 160). The famous Kweku Ananse – primarily associated with the Akan society – usually takes the centre stage of most story-telling sessions. Most folktales are woven around the cunning, trickster, Kweku Ananse but not to diminish the fact that gods or super humans, and humans as well, are also involved in
the stories of Kweku Ananse. There are a countless number of folktales about Ananse: Ananse and the wisdom pot, Ananse and the hat of hot beans, Ananse and the gum man, just to mention a few. These stories end with how Ananse usually ends up trapping himself in his own cunningness and is disgraced by the people he tries to trick. Moral lessons derived from the story telling sessions are discussed and the audiences are allowed to suggest what these moral lessons are. In one case, the Ghana Television (GTV) of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation adopted this Ananse story telling session unto the screen and called it “By the Fireside”. The television show basically targeted children and mainly had children as the performers.

According to Gibbs (2004), “Ananse has inspired several local dramatists, both Akan and non-Akan, who have transformed the tales (anansesem) into plays (anansegro), which have become part of a national tradition of narrative theatre” (160). This evident in the works of playwrights like Martin Owusu, Efua Sutherland, J. C. deGraft, among others, who have drawn inspiration from this “wise” man, Ananse. Sutherland goes further to coin the term anasegro, meaning “spider play” to encompass all the stories that are told of Kweku Ananse. The story-telling sessions may last hours and the narrators take turns in telling their stories but at other times, the audiences are allowed to take turns in sharing stories as well.

These elements of Ghanaian traditional “theatre” have been instrumental in the development of a distinctive theatre that has music, dances and symbolic arts.

According to Rubin (1997):

… during the first decades of the century, the Gold Coast continued to be drawn into contact with other countries through increasing
involvement in the world economy and as a result of the activities of the colonial officers, missionaries and teachers. Imported elements began to be fused with a fundamentally agrarian and pastoral society, and in coastal and riverine areas, with the communities of fisher folk. In terms of theatre, this meant that the festivals, rites, rituals and entertainments of the region (including music, dances and storytelling) which all existed within a specifically West African framework were brought into contact with imported traditions such as school plays, Empire Day celebrations, church cantatas, club entertainments and cinema (p. 131).

An example of such development is the Concert Party tradition in West Africa. This form of “popular theatre”, Agovi (1990) accounts as “a product of urbanization and westernization processes, has drawn inspirations from African indigenous dramatic traditions to express and highlight contemporary problems and sensibility” (p. 1). Although the Concert Party is a product of urbanization, Coplan (1986) in a review of Bame’s Come to Laugh: African Traditional Theatre in Ghana (1985), posits that “The plays are nevertheless always performed in Akan languages and broadly exploit the expressive resources of Ghanaian historical culture, including folktales and songs, riddles, proverbs, costume, political symbolism, ceremonial, magic, and religious ritual. Storylines rarely, if ever, focus on pre-colonial themes however, dealing instead with topical pressure points in contemporary Ghanaian society” (p. 168). In a bid to provide clarification on what the Concert Party is and its need for existence, Coplan (1986) continues that “A concert party is an unrelentingly boisterous multimedia celebration of almost acrobatic expressiveness; an occasion for social affirmation, emotional catharsis, and psychological engagement among performers and audience members alike” (p. 168).
Coplan’s suggestion of Concert Party being a ‘boisterous multimedia celebration’ I do not accede, for there have been countless number of concert party performances without any multimedia applications. Examples can be given of those performances held at the various lorry stations, market squares, and cinema halls, among many others.

Cole (1997, p. 363) explains why this tradition is acclaimed as popular by pointing out four reasons as follows:

(1) Its sociological roots are not in elite and/or privileged minority sub-cultures, but rather in the intermediate and agricultural sectors and the working class. While these audiences statistically constitute a majority population, they nevertheless have limited access to political and economic power.
(2) Travelling theatre shows are popular in the sense that they are tremendously well liked and well attended.
(3) Popular theatre has had a profound impact on other performing arts and cultural forms.
(4) This theatre’s content and form, its subject and mode of rendering, draw upon what ‘Biodun Jeyifo identifies as a 'vast repository of expressive material' available in the everyday popular culture of West Africa (1984, p. 4)”.

This repository Cole again identifies as including slang expressions, political slogans, published histories, traditional folklore, Western vaudeville, and musical riffs from the African diaspora.
4.3 Beginning of Popular Theatre: Concert Party

The Ghanaian Concert Party tradition seems to bear the beginning of documentation of Ghanaian theatre in the early 1900’s, and this assertion Agovi (1990) is in agreement with when he avows that “Unfortunately, we have never had the benefit of such comprehensive documentation on the origins of literary theatre in Ghana during the colonial period. Research and publication on the Ghanaian literary drama have almost always either concentrated exclusively on the Concert Party tradition or on the post-independence works of Ghanaian playwrights” (p. 3). The Concert Party became a dramatic form which quickly spread through the entire Ghanaian populace in the early 1920’s, and drew inspiration from Ghanaian indigenous dramatic elements to tackle contemporary issues. According to Cole (1997), the word “concerts” was absent in historical records until 1933 when a short-lived Accra troupe adapted it and called themselves the Co-Optimists Concert Party. For Cole (1997), even though much scholarship has been produced on the tradition of the Concert Party, adequate accounting on the historical change in this West African popular theatre both within specific travelling theatre traditions and in the transformations in the society, relating to the theatres is still lacking.

Concert Party was named as such, perhaps, on the account of journalists in colonial newspapers (between 1900 and 1946) referring to Western-style performances as “concerts”. These Western-style performances were usually staged in the colonial schools (Sutherland, 1968). The Concert Party tradition has been tagged to have begun with the Two Bobs but history still traces it to the nineteenth century before Teacher Yalley’s beginnings. Cole (2001: 56) cites Bame confirming that “Previous scholarships on the
concert party have dated its origin to the mid-1920s, when a man named Teacher Yalley began performing in the Optimism Club in Sekondi”. She explains further that the existing materials on the tradition reveal that concert performances began in coastal cities of colonial Ghana in the nineteenth century, some three decades before Yalley’s heydays. Yalley who was a head-teacher of his school began his career in the 1918s at his school’s Empire Day (May 24th) when he joked, sang and danced, wearing fancy dress, wig, moustache and the make-up of an American black-and-white minstrel (Barber, Collins, and Ricard, 1997). He hired a brass-band which usually marched and campaigned through the town, ending outside the theatre to commensurate his shows which lasted for three hours. Yalley’s comic performances were assisted by a trap (i.e. jazz) drummer and harmonium player. These ‘artists’ served the audience with the then current popular ballroom dance tunes of ragtime, foxtrots, quicksteps and waltzes. Influenced by his teaching career, he held his shows in the English language and the tickets to the shows were expensive. Then the constituents of his audience were mainly the educated black elite.

Concert party later became popular under the aegis of the Two Bobs. Bob Johnson, in an interview with John Collins held in May 1974, indicated that his first group, named the Versatile Eight consisted of the “three principal characters of all subsequent concert parties: the joker, the gentleman and the lady impersonator”. This group performed at the Sekondi Methodist School after the Empire Day parades through the town, with Bob himself in black face, playing the joker. Bob, who earned his nickname from the seamen who visited the Optimism Club, attributed the success of his performances to the wild combination of the Western black face minstrels and the mischievous, trickster Ananse –
the hero of Akan folklore. The African-American comedy team, called Glass and Grant, also made a positive impact on his performances, Johnson attested. This group was brought to Ghana by Alfred Ocansey who was a film distributor and a cinema hall owner. The Glass and Grant were understudied by the Ga Comics, Williams and Marbel. Johnson described their shows as professional, vaudeville and high-class affairs. Collins (n.d) posits as follows:

By the late 1920's, the concert party tradition had therefore begun to divide into two distinct varieties: the upper-class shows of Yalley and the Accra Vaudeville on the one hand, and Bob Johnson's schoolboy sixpenny shows on the other. In 1930 Johnson went professional (with Bob Ansah) when he formed the Two Bobs and the Carolina Girl that staged for villagers and the urban poor. In short, Johnson 'hi-jacked' the genre from the elite - which was lucky for Ghana as the high-class variety gradually died out.

This explains why most scholarship tends to give much accreditation to the Two Bobs as the leaders of the Ghanaian Concert Party tradition. Not only Yalley’s shows died out but that of other amateur groups were left to fend for themselves and neglected without the backing of official sponsorship. Agovi (1990) explains that this was why the concert parties took to the roads as a travelling theatre, creating audiences in the rural and urban areas whose patronage was able to sustain them. According to Efua Sutherland (1970) the shows put up by the Two Bobs were given pre-publicity by a masked bell-ringer wearing a billboard, which was cheaper than hiring out a full brass-band. Bob Johnson popularized the Concert Party by turning it into enactments of Ananse stories and travelled the villages, bringing the show to the masses that had no access to television.
Bob Johnson, in 1935, became the joker for the Axim Trio while E. K. Dadson played ‘Susanna’ and Charlie Turpin, the ‘gentleman’. Their shows began with comedies which lasted for half an hour during which music was given by the local brass-band hired for the night. After the comedies came, the actual play which went on for an hour or two, “and was performed in English, but with an occasional translation into Akan, since their audience were less westernized than those of their high class counterparts” (Collins: n. d). Another distinction between the two varieties of concert tradition was that Johnson infused local highlife songs in addition to the popular western songs. The concert tradition of the Axim Trio then became the prototype on which subsequent concert groups were modeled.

E. K. Nyame, a highlife guitar band leader, made a major contribution to the Concert Party tradition when he set up his own group in 1952, calling it the Akan Trio. In his group, his own bandsmen took the roles of the actors and became the first ever to have performed exclusively in the Akan language. Within a few years, other guitar bands sprang to follow in the steps of the Akan Trio, while existing Concert groups also stretched the tentacles of the small musical sections to full guitar bands. Some notable Ghanaian Concert groups which sprang up in the fifties and sixties were the Kakaiku's group, the Ghana Trio, the Jaguar Jokers, Onyina's Royal Trio, Kwaa Mensah's group, the Happy Stars (of Nsawam), I.E. Mason's (in which Koo Nimo made his debut in 1968), Yamoahs, Doctor K. Gyasi’s Noble Kings (the first to use keyboards and horns), the Workers Brigade concert party, and later F. Kenya's Riches Big Sound, Nana

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5 As retrieved from http://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/African%20Journals/pdfs/glendora%20review/vollno4/graa001004022.txt

69
Ampadu's African Brothers, Okukuseku's group and Efua Sutherland's Kusum Agoromba. Kakaiku’s concert party was the groundbreaker in expanding the cast of the concert parties from small trios to larger casts.

In 1960, a Concert Party Union was formed, called the Ghana National Entertainments Association (GNEA). Along with it came the establishment of the concert format: “a highlife band which would play for the audience to dance to for hours, before the show started; an introductory sequence of dances, comic monologues, and sketches; a play, shot through with highlife – sung by the characters and accompanied by the bands, still sitting at the side of the stage – followed by a final session of highlife dance music for the audience” (Barber, Collins, and Ricard: 1997, p. 38). Speaking at the World Theatre Day in Accra, on the 27th of March 2013, John Collins explained that “the concert party theatre which flourished in the 1950s started dying in the late 1970s as a result of the numerous coup d'états, which affected night life and the people who patronize such programmes.” The intervention of ‘Keysoap’ reawakened the concert tradition, thence the Keysoap Concert Party which advertently gave birth to other groups as the Agya Koo Concert Party, the Adom Concert Party, just to mention a few.

4.3.1 Set Design for the Concert Party

As has been discussed in chapter two, scenic design has undoubtedly become part and parcel of the total theatre experience. Today’s mode of scenery design bears much appreciation to Craig-Appia movement, as propounded by Nicoll (1958), where the uninteresting, drab, and inappropriate flat painted scenery was replaced with more functional three dimensional structures which would complement the three-dimensional
actor. This movement is what has worked and contributed to the general outlook of the theatrical scenery for the stage performances in Ghana since its inception.

In my quest to dig into the past to uncover the nature of scenic design, beginning with the Concert Party, I engaged in different levels of interviews with a number of designers, theatre practitioners and lecturers who imparted knowledge to enable me gain more insight into this historical study. Altogether, I was able to interview eight respondents out of a total of twelve. Speaking to the likes of John Djisenu, Ossei Agyemang, David Amoo, Johnson Edu, Martin Owusu, Esi Sutherland-Addy, Joojo Quantson, and Ako Tetteh, and briefly to John Collins, I was enlightened about the nature and the developmental stages of Ghanaian theatre in general, and more importantly on the form of scenic design within the year range upon which this study is based.

John Djisenu, in an interview on 18th July 2016, narrated his experience of the Concert Party when he was growing up as a child at Nkawkaw. For him one of the major attractions of the Concert Party in the 1960s was to have characters such as Super O. D. who would dress up, using “tapori” as a bow tie around his neck, wearing a comic costume and a thick, white make-up on his face. He would perform ridiculous antics in front of their sprinter bus which had been hired by the Troupe. Super O. D. would

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6 John Djisenu is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana. He is the pioneer in the introduction of Set Design and Costume Design as a course in the Department of Theatre Arts and has a lot of experience to his credit.

7 His actual name is Osonoba Kwaku Darko, born on the 12th of January 1935, and a native of Agona Sewdru in the Central Region. He started out with Appiah Agyekum Concert Party as a backing vocalist. His joking skills which he acquired from his mother were soon in high demand and thus started hopping from one Concert Party to another until he finally settled with Oppong Kyekyeku’s Guitar Band. The troupe enacted the famous legend of Aku Sika which made the troupe gain favour with one of GBC bosses who asked that the group start a series of Akan Drama on GTV. At this stage the troupe changed their name in October 1972, from ‘Oppon Kyekyeku’s Guitar Band’ to ‘Osofo Dadzie Group’.

8 This is a wooden, mini pestle that is used in crushing vegetables in an earthenware pot.
perform ridiculous pantomime with music provided from the bus. He usually exhibited his shows at the market places or where people had gathered at Nkawkaw, for instance, around the lorry or taxi station areas. This, for Djisenu, was a mode of publicity to attract audiences for their Concert shows. According to Djisenu, (18/07/2016), another form of publicity the Concert Party troupes employed to gain audiences for their shows were bits of the scenery of whatever performance they would put up. The Concert Party plays almost always revolved around themes or characters. These characters often revealed themes of domestic nature, such as a faithful wife mistreated by the husband; a wealthy man exploited and drained by his relatives, etc. More often than not, the play involved complete reversals of fortunes: from health and beauty to sickness; from rags to riches; from respect or popularity to contempt and abandonment. Examples of such themes were mostly injected with some imagery depicted in the posters or signboards.

The bits of scenery were sometimes painted on pieces of cloth and hung on the sides of the bus. Ossei Agyemang\(^9\) confirmed that “elaborate posters were used to attract the audience”. These posters had all the delightful visuals relating to the performances.

Not only were posters made to publicize the shows, but additionally huge signboards or bill-boards, over a meter-and-half high and wide, depicting key scenes from the drama, were either propped up against walls, and electric poles to attract attention and promote discussion as people walked or rode by. The names of the Bands or Concert Troupes providing the evening entertainment, and titles of the shows usually appeared above or below the posters. The names of the Bands were written in white or blood-red block

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\(^9\) Ossei Agyemang is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana and is currently the Head of the Theatre Arts Department
letters, whereas the titles of the shows were in smaller, cursive letters. For every “concert”, about three to five boards were usually created or commissioned by the troupes. Figures 4.1 to 4.8 exhibit illustrations of billboard paintings used in such advertisements.

These bill-boards presented in the three connatural instances below, were painted by one man by name Mark Anthony, whom the Haggerty Museum of Art describes as a Ghanaian master artist. Collins (2007, p. 20) writes that “the mural artist Mark Anthony became a sign-writer for commercial enterprises and local separatist churches in the late 1950s, and from 1966 he was the first to paint the cartoons used by the touring concert parties that depicted scenes from their current comic plays…” In Rafael Francisco Salas’ review of Mark Anthony’s exhibition at the Haggerty, he writes that “Anthony distills dramatic highlights from the productions, the theatrical scenes crafted by local playwrights that appear to have all of the drama, myth and violence necessary to keep an audience rapt”. The creatures and scenes in Anthony’s paintings are said to have been reinterpreted from B-rated horror movies, Bollywood musicals popular in Ghana and the earlier traditions of vaudeville and Christian revivals. In Anthony’s paintings done for the concert shows, he made an interesting combination of shapes, sizes, lines, mass, measurement, among other elements of design to create a realistic impression on the viewers, and to closely establish perspective.

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10 Rafael Francisco Salas is a painter, the Chair of the Art Department at Ripon College and a regular contributor to the Art City blog. This quotation was retrieved from his Review: Mark Anthony at the Haggerty, which was published on the Art City blog at [www.jsonline.com/artcity](http://www.jsonline.com/artcity) Date accessed 05/03/2016
This bill-board presents a symmetrically balanced painting. In symmetrical painting, each side is the mirror-image of the other. Looking at this painting, each side differs a little from the other. The elements that qualify it as symmetrical are the shapes, colour and sizes of images on either side of the painting. It is noticed that the huts are of the same colour and texture. The same applies to the two mythical creatures torturing the man. The ‘god-tree’, which serves as the central focus for the painting, has similar size, shape and colour of branches on both the left and right sides. The bush and fence in the background are similarly identifiable on the left and right sides of the tree. Variety is represented by the use of different colours, different shades of colours; for instance, the shades of brown used in colouring the tortured man is different from the brown used for the huts, and is different from the brown used for the ground and the ‘god-tree’. The shapes and sizes of
the entrances of the caves differ as well. The blue sky and the green bush is a break-away from the general brown colour palette used in the painting, thereby creating interest and breaking monotony. The larger scale of the ‘tree-god’, coupled with its centralized position and the hue employed, suggests an emphasis on the tree-god as the main object of attention. The repetition of lines in the ‘tree-god’ creates a sense of rhythm and movement where our eyes are carried from the top of the painting to the bottom.

Fig. 4.2 A different painting for the same show by City Boys Band, designed by Mark Anthony
Figures 4.2 and 4.3 on the other hand can be classified under asymmetrical paintings. Unlike a symmetrically balanced painting, each side of an asymmetrically balanced painting does not mirror the other. In these two paintings (figures 4.2 and 4.3), each side of both paintings does not mirror the other. Mark Anthony arranged three small images on the side to balance a large one on the other side, as is evident in figure 4.2. The variations in colours, lines, shapes, texture and forms in these paintings impress interest in the minds of the viewer. Particularly in figure 4.3, the texture, shape and form of the mystical bird breaks the monotony of the human figures, gives life to the painting and becomes the centre of attention as well.

Three different advertisement boards for a concert show by City Boys Band were painted with the title “Ωdeyee Wu a Yedeno Kɔ Fie”, as seen in figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3. “Ωdeyee Wu a Yedeno Kɔ Fie” literally means “When a Royal Dies, We Take Him
Home”. ‘Home’ here could refer to the special rites that are performed for chiefs to get them into the ancestral world. It could also represent those sacred spaces reserved for the burial of royalty. In Ghana, a royal is seen as the custodian of the land, so when such a person passes on into the land of the dead, rituals are performed for the peaceful repose of his or her soul. In the Akan ethnic group for instance, when a person of royal blood dies, particularly outside his dominion, and there is no performance of death rituals, it is believed that the spirit is tortured and not allowed entry into the ancestral world. His spirit lingers on without peace and rest. Anthony relays this ritual and belief in his painting, as seen particularly in figure 4.1 and possibly in figure 4.2 as well.

As Concert Party comes in three folds; the musical, the comedy, and the drama; the advertisement boards were well representative of the components of the theatre production. The songs composed and sang for the Concert Party shows were usually in a story form. Nana Ampadu and his African Brothers Band’s rendition of Aku Sika is one clear example of such compositions. The song projects the story of how Aku overcame ‘orphan-hood’, under a stepmother to become the wife of a Chief; her defeat of jealous rivals who wanted her marriage with the Chief to end because of a deformity she had (when she was a child, her hand got caught in a trap set by her father to catch rodents destroying his farm, thus she was left with only one arm); she remained married to the Chief and became known as the woman with a gold arm, thereby earning the name Aku Sika. Other examples of such story-songs include City Boys Band’s “Nya Asem Hwe”\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{11}\) Literally translates as “get into trouble and see”, for it is in the face of trouble that one gets to see the true friends
“Nko Besie”\textsuperscript{12}; African Brothers Band’s “Esiene Bi Ye Nkrabea”\textsuperscript{13}, among others. These music themes were also represented on the bill-boards publicizing the shows.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{signboard.png}
\caption{A signboard painted for A. B Crentsil’s Ahenfo Band’s show with the title “Ama Wonyowego Antwa Akron a…” Designed by Mark Anthony}
\end{figure}

From the above illustration (fig. 4.4), although the image on each side of this painting does not reflect the other, there is a sense of balance achieved with the image size and shape on each side. Emphasis is placed on the woman in the eggshell through the employment of contrast in colours. The brightness of the egg shell, and the high value of white in the colour of the rocks attracts the attention of the eye, at first sight. That

\textsuperscript{12} Meaning “back to the starting point”. Every effort that has been expended has been in vain, thus taking him back to the very beginning

\textsuperscript{13} Translates as “some trials are fixed in our destinies”. Such trials, we can do nothing about but to face them
notwithstanding, movement of the eye is taken from the left of the painting to the right, to follow the story being impressed upon the viewer. The shades of grey used for the trees and the rock on the left of the painting, balances the high value of colour on the right. To break the monotony of the shades of grey, the green of the grass and the blue of the sky effects some level of interest.

Fig. 4.5 A second painting for the same Band’s show “Ama Wonṣọko Antwa Akron a...” Designed by Mark Anthony

Unlike the first painting (fig. 4.4) for the show, this painting lacks the sense of stability when the weight on each side is examined in that, the imagery on the left of the central vertical axis outweighs that on the right. On the left of the axis are a woman carrying a bucket, a headless monster, the sea or river, and part of the body of a goose. On the right,
however, are the remaining part of the body of the goose and the sea. With this, attention is instantly drawn to the left side of the painting, upon first sight. Predominantly, the palette of blue and grey scale which is evident in the sky, the sea, the shirt of the woman, the bucket, and the goose, overshadows the other colours used. To break away from the background color of blue and grey scale, the contrast established by the shades of brown in the colours of the monster and the cloth of the woman arouses interest. This sharp contrast, particularly of the monster, enforced the emphasis in the painting.

Mark Anthony’s paintings for the performance “Ama Wonyonko Antwa Akron a…” by A.B Crentsil’s Ahenfo Band literally translates as “If you don’t allow your neighbour to earn nine…”. This title is actually an incomplete proverb in the Akan language. It continues as “…antwa du” (…you can’t have ten”), meaning, if a person does not want his or her neighbour to succeed, he or she should not expect to succeed either.

In the following instances, three different paintings were done by Mark Anthony for Super Yaw Ofori’s Band’s show entitled “Kora Twe Bi Ye Esan” (some kinds of feminine rivalry are burdensome).
This painting (fig. 4.6) is one of the easiest, of the three paintings for this Concert Party performance, to understand and relate. Anthony carries the viewer through a journey of a close-to-life farm. Through the artistic combination of colours, line, space and form, he amazingly enforced three-dimensional perspective particularly of the farm. The different shades and tints in the green of the trees define the horizontal background of the farm, whereas the interesting combination of the varied shades of green grass and brown earth establish the vertical background. Equal distribution in the amount of colour in creating the imagery enacts proportion in that, the freshness in the green of the grass (achieved through the use of high values) is proportionately balanced by the rustiness in the darkness of the cocoa tree leaves. The balanced use of grey established depth and
distance. No colour over shadows any but they all complement each other to create a sense of harmony.

![Fig. 4. 7“Kora Twe Bi Ye Esan” performed by Super Yaw Ofori’s Band. Designed by Mark Anthony](image)

Like figure 4.5, this painting is default of the appropriate balance and proportion considered for art. The weight of the painting is tilted towards the left in comparing the colossal size of the two monster heads, the gorilla, and a mystical lion, to the small size of the vulture, the deer, and the man on the right. The choice of colour for the images on the left of the painting also contribute to creating imbalance undeterred by the amount of high values in the colours of the images on the right. Emphasis therefore is automatically drawn to the monster heads and the gorilla on the left.
On the left corner of figure 4.8 is seen a body covered in blood. A man wrapped in white possibly symbolizing a ghost chases the two men in blood-stained shirts on the corner right of the painting. This imagery Anthony artistically places against a vista of a corn farm and a thick forest. The predominant palettes defining the vertical background are green, chocolate brown, and a grey-scale, whereas the horizontal background is defined by shades of earth brown.

In figures 4.6, 4.7, and 4.8, it can be deduced that the paintings follow and present a storyline. In the first painting, a hunter sees a deer devouring the cocoa fruit of a cocoa farmer. As to whether he shot the deer or not, in the next painting, the deer is seen between the beaks of a vulture suggesting that the deer has now become a victim of
another. At first the cocoa farmer was its victim. The flight of the vulture is directed towards two horrifying creatures wearing snakes as their hair. Beneath these horrific creatures sit a gorilla (possibly an ape) and a mystical lion. In the third painting, a person is stabbed by two masked men, and lies bleeding on the ground. The person’s ghost appears to the two men, perhaps to haunt them. ‘Kora’ basically means someone’s rival in marriage, especially for the affection of the same lover. The extent to which some of the rivals could go to win the attention and affection of a person could be extreme.

The cocoa farm in this scenario could be very symbolical, representing a very rich man (to be a cocoa farmer in those days meant wealth as cocoa was one of the main goods exported in Ghana) who is committed to more than one woman. This causes rivalry between the women of sole ownership of both husband and properties (inheritance). As was evidence of these paintings, passersby derived various implications of the imageries in the paintings which in turn heightened their level of curiosity to find out what actually happens in the story. These billboards not only served the function of publicity, but also ended up on the Concert Party stages as backdrops for scenery.

As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, the Ghanaian Concert Party performances were majorly delineated by myths, legends and folklore. The storylines presented a blend of humans and non-humans (gods, demi-gods, spirits, etc.) In effect, the imagery presented in the paintings, particularly of the animals or creatures were not real. Most of these creatures which were painted were mythical (see figures 4.1 to 4.5 and 4.7). Designers of the costume for the performances likewise strived to bring into reality the images portrayed in the belief system. An example is shown in the illustration in figure 4.10 where an actor wears a costume suggesting a monster with tusks. In such manner
myths did contribute to the spectacle which was portrayed in the billboard painting for Concert Party performances.

In a telephone conversation with Professor John Collins (15/02/2016) who was actively involved in the Concert Party, being a member himself of the Jaguar Jokers at one time, he stated that Concert Party performances in Ghana, in the 1960s to its dying out phase in the 1970s through the 80s had little or no scenic design attached to their repertoire. This was attributive of the travelling Concert Party groups, performing at such places as courtyards, market places, lorry stations, etc. As a result, these groups travelled light usually going along with their musical and sound instruments, as well as their costumes and props, but with little or no scenery construction by virtue of its voluminous nature. Ultimately, they resolved to the usage of the bill-boards placing them at vantage points and more importantly at the entrance of the place of performance.

According to Djisenu (18/07/2016), most concert troupes used painted fabrics as bill-boards and backdrops which were easily transportable. Where there were no wall paintings, they made do with the bare stage, as is seen in figure 4.9. To create the scenery for a Concert Party production, the performers basically set up the sound equipment on the raised platforms on which the performance would take place. Because of the musical interjections during the comic show and the play performance, the musical instruments and the microphones for the performers were well-aligned such that communication between the performers and the musical instrument players was greatly enhanced. This mostly became the formal presentation of the stage scenery of the Concert Party productions.
In some cases, similar to the illustration in figure 4.9 below, the stage allocated for the performance had entrances and exits or the platform created as the acting area for the performance was demarcated by use of curtains or pieces of draped cloth. This was the case particularly when the show was put up at people’s courtyards and cinema houses. In the years prior to the 1960s, Concert Party entertainment gained ground as a popular theatre art form and ‘compound houses’ accommodated them. With a gate at the entrance of the enclosed compounds, such available spaces became appropriate venues for the trouping Concert groups as it allowed them the opportunity to collect gate fees. When demarcated with curtains or cloths, the verandahs of the various houses in the compound provided for the performers space for costume change, and entrances and exits onto and off the acting space. This stage form resembled a replica of the Greek skene.

Fig. 4. 9 illustration of a concert performance, displaying no scenery design in view
Discussing the topic of set design for Concert Party performances, prior to the National Theatre days, Joojo Tetteh Quantson\textsuperscript{14} (29/02/2016) revealed that sometimes, live plants, broken branches, shrub or bush, in addition to the painted canvas, or printed fabric, were used in creating the scenery for the performances. This form of scenery creation existed for some period of time until the Concert Party performances were moved into the National Theatre in the wake of resurrecting a dying tradition in the 1990s.

Similarly, cinema houses were built in the late 1950s, early 1960s with most of them owned by Ghanaians and the former Ghana Film Industry Corporation. There were the likes of Rex Cinema (Accra Central), Orion (Kwame Nkrumah Circle), Globe (Adabraka), Oxford (Accra New Town), Roxy (Kwame Nkrumah Avenue), Royal (Adabraka), Orbit (Kaneshie), Opera Cinema (Accra Central), Regal (Osu), Picorna (Mamprobi), Palladium Cinema (Accra Central) and Sid Theatre (Dzorwulu). Some of these cinema houses have collapsed, while the remaining standing few have been metamorphosed into restaurants, churches, and venues for screening football matches. Some of these cinema halls used to double as venue for travelling Concert groups to put up their shows during the 1960s through to the 80s.

With scenic design and construction being out of the equation (before the National Theatre revivals), unconsciously, efforts were made to make up for its absence by use of props, costume and make up. Concert plays which had hideous characters or giants, or mystical creatures were represented on stage by creating costumes that revealed every detail of such characters, as well as making the performers up in accordance with the

\textsuperscript{14} Mr. Joojo Tetteh Quantson is currently the head of Scenic Design department at the National theatre. He has almost twenty years of experience in theatre as he started practicing in 1996 with a group known as the Vision Group at the Accra Centre for National Culture.
character descriptions. In spite of the fact that these costume designers had had no formal education on costuming for the theatre, their works were exceptional. A representation of such costume is seen in figure 4.10. In Cole’s *Stage Shakers*, a video documentary of the Concert Party in Ghana, produced by Kwame Braun, one man who had been costuming the performers in the Adehyeman Concert Party was asked how he learnt to sew. He disclosed that he learnt how to sew all by himself, and that it was an indwelling skill he possessed.

![A performer costumed to have been some kind of a mystic creature, with a woman bound up in ropes](image)

**Fig. 4.10** A performer costumed to have been some kind of a mystic creature, with a woman bound up in ropes

Catherine Cole, who has written extensively on the Ghanaian Concert Party tradition, witnessed her first Concert Party performance when she came to Ghana on a pilot trip to research on the topic in 1993. Her arrival coincided with the funeral of a prominent
Concert Party dramatist of that time, Lord Bob Cole. She gives a vivid description of the stage of the Concert Party at the funeral ground as follows:

…a poor one with inadequate lighting and electrical circuitry that caught fire midway through the wake. The audience area had no seats until the spectator themselves sought out benches and chairs…. Though the concert venue was poorly equipped and had no seats, spectators thronged the stage. They stood, sat on the ground or brought benches of their own. They cheered for the “Bob” solo comedians, wept during a dramatized widow’s lament, and sang along with familiar highlife songs that saturated nearly every scene. (1996, p. 28)

By the 1970s, the once upon a time vibrant popular theatre tradition which had reached its peak in the 1950s began to decline in its patronage. Collins (2013) attributes this to the numerous coup d’états, political unrest and economic instability that arose during the 70s. Concert Party troupes struggled to keep the tradition on its feet but kept failing by virtue of the fact that people stopped patronizing the performances. Curfews precluded people from staying long hours outside of their houses. Since this popular tradition was an all-night performance, it had become cumbersome for even the performers to hold such long hours of entertainments because they could not travel at certain hours of the day, and this inadvertently affected them financially. Most of the Concert Party performers had no extra source of income as they had fully committed their entire lives to this travelling theatre.

Cole (2001) asserts that a substantive increase in access to television in the various households in the Ghanaian society, coupled with the availability of Ghana films shot on consumer-grade VHS video, contributed to the further diminution of the popularity of the
theatre tradition by the 1990s. In her 1995 documentary video of the Concert Party, Cole
avows that by the time the video was recorded, only two Concert Troupes were
effectively touring, namely Adofo City Boys, and the Akumapem Boys. One of the
performances captured in her documentary was a performance of the Jaguar Jokers at a
town named Teacher Mante in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

The Jaguar Jokers’ performance entitled Onipa Hia Moa meaning ‘People need help’,
presents a story of Kofi and his wife who were living a comfortable life until Kofi’s aunt
struck him (Kofi) with sickness, by means of juju. Apparently, Kofi’s aunt had
knowledge of the ₵20,000 (old Ghana cedis) Kofi had given his mother when she last
visited him. This caused her displeasure when Kofi gave her ₵4,000, which was lesser
than what Kofi’s mother received. Envy engulfed her, pushing her to strike Kofi with
sickness using black magic (juju). Kofi’s wife left him upon a fellow female friend’s
advise that taking care of her sick husband was a waste of time when there were more
avenues to make money in Nigeria. Opia (Kofi’s friend), advised that a pastor be
consulted because he believed Kofi’s sickness was spiritual. The aunt was found out and
she confessed her deeds. Opia and Kofi’s mother were his caretakers until he fully
regained his health and wealth. Kofi married a new wife and lived a happy normal life
again.

The documentary revealed no significant change or improvement in the mode of scenic
design for the Concert Party stage. The performances were put up in courtyards and had
platforms of arranged cement blocks with planks of wood laid over them. In the instance
of the Jaguar Jokers’ concert show, the platform was raised close to a verandah so they
could use the space on the verandah as a backstage for change of costumes, and other
backstage activities. The verandah was blocked off with what appears to be the 6 yards cloth that Ghanaian men usually wrap around their shoulders. A little space was left at the left side to serve as an entry and exit unto and off the stage. The band was located on the upstage left of the demarcated performance area, but not on the platform since the platform was not large enough to accommodate both the performers and the music players.

![A picture showing the set design, and nature of stage of the performance of “Onipa Hia Moa” by the Jaguar Jokers](image)

*Fig. 4. 11 A picture showing the set design, and nature of stage of the performance of “Onipa Hia Moa” by the Jaguar Jokers*

With the storyline presented in the performance, it is derivative that there was not any established link between the theme of the performance and the set design. It was basically a means to achieve an end and not to add any meaning to the entire performance. Diakhate, Eyoh, and Rubin (2001, p. 144) have summarized the description of the set
design for these concert party shows as “rudimentary equipment that design appears to have eschewed: a curtained-off section of the performance area provides a dressing space where costumes – often elaborate, stylish and authentic – are changed”.

In 1994, when Cole arrived in Ghana for her yearlong research, the Ghana National Theatre had begun a Concert Party revival series. In partnership with the Keysoap group, (a soap making brand, under the auspices of the Unilever Brothers Ghana Limited) and the Ghana Television, ([GTV] of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation), the Ghana National Theatre strived assiduously to resuscitate the dying, if not dead, theatrical tradition of the Concert Party. It devised a regular concert party series that appealed to a cross-section of the society, thus filling its expansive and often empty auditorium. The weekly broadcasts on GTV greatly enhanced the Concerts’ reputation. Additionally, the National Theatre domesticated some aspects the Concert Party’s vulgar and unruly elements.

With this reawakening came a more refined model of set design for the concert performances. The transposition from the open-air courthouses, lorry stations, and market-squares unto the huge stage of the National Theatre presented some deficiency in stage balance in relation to the actor size. To complement the three-dimensional actor on stage, the designers resorted to a three-dimensional setting in portrayal of a real life locale of the performance.

In the following figures presented, there are no dates availably attached but they are estimated to have been taken between 1994 and 2000. Similarly, the sets designed are not credited to only one person as it was majorly a team work. In an interview session with
Ako Tetteh (29/02/2016), he affirmed that set design during the National Theatre Concert Party revival was not a task meant for one person. The technical team of the National Theatre was in charge of the designing and construction of the sets for the shows. He added that there were times the directors of the show came up with an idea of the design for the technical team to put up. For the period of the early years of the revival of the Concert Party tradition (circa 1994), sets designed were modeled against the general outlook of a traditional Concert Party stage where they majorly used painted canvases as backdrops. A general set design was constructed for the weekly show, which comprised of a main background of painted flats, about twelve feet high, at the upstage center and two flats flanking the left and right of the stage. On the main background were painted images of the rudiments of a traditional Concert Party – Bob, the gentleman, and the lady. On the background was also imprinted, the title of the show (which is Concert Party) and the name of the main sponsor of the event (the Keysoap brand of Unilever Brothers Ghana Ltd.) and their catch phrase; “the tradition goes on”. Attached to this background were eight-feet- high flats. Painted on these flats was a vista of a township along the beach in Ghana. Figure 4.12 is a visual representation of such set designed.

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15 Ako Tetteh works with the technical team at the National Theatre and was involved with the concert party performances as a designer some years before they were transferred to the National Theatre stage and continued working with some Concert Party troupes during the National Theatre revival. He was a director once for some of the Concert Party groups at the National Theatre.
Ako Tetteh and Joojo Quantson (29/02/2016) confirmed that the set design for the early years of the revival of the Concert Party bore no direct meaning to the shows put up. An example is the set design in figure 4.12. Christo Asafo’s performance of “Onipa Trim Ye Sum” which translates as *Man is wicked* was about an unfaithful woman who was found out and because of that, her marriage ended. Per the theme of the play and its corresponding set design seen in figure 4.12, Tetteh and Quantson’s testimony of the lack of relationship between the play and the background design, is confirmed. Tetteh (29/02/2016) added that concentration was not on the technicalities involved in the production, but rather on the acting, the costume, and the message in the play which had
to be relayed to the audience. In the light of that, a general set was designed and constructed which was used for most of the weekly shows of the Concert Party.

Between 1996 and 1998, there was a gradual but significant development in the scenery for the shows. The one-time huge background with its accompanying side sets were now broken apart into individual sets. Design for the Concert party stage was imperceptibly moving towards the concept of three-dimensional realism. Designers for the shows were coming up with impressions of three-dimensional huts, houses, and even forest. These made-believe set designs were created using ply woods and canvases. The forest landscape was three-dimensionally painted on a huge canvas and rigged on one of the bars in the fly. Additionally, there was a cut out of tree stumps and trees which were painted on ply woods and braced at the back to enable it stand.

![Concert Party production with a different set design on display](image)

**Fig. 4. 13** Concert Party production with a different set design on display
Figure 4.13 presents a cross-section of the three-dimensional painting which was gradually developing on the Concert Party stage. In the picture is seen a three-dimensional hut painted in blue with the impression of windows on the sides of the door of the hut. On stage left of the hut are two other huts but this time, two-dimensional. At the background are the name of the sponsor and the show. To break the monotony of the brown palette seen in the colour of the stage, the wall, and the two-dimensional huts, the blue colour of the hut enlivens the visual image. Variation is also introduced in the huts by varying the height and shade of brown of the huts. One important thing to note is the two-dimensional painted forest backdrop. This backdrop was used for most, if not all the Concert Party shows held in the National Theatre.

Fig. 4.14 A picture displaying a three-dimensional setting, with elements of sponsor (Key Soap) also on display
In figures 4.14 and 4.15, a façade of three-dimensional houses were created using flats with an impression of widows painted on them. Both houses had base borders; one in brown and the other, in black. The repetition of shapes and lines in the base border of the house painted with cream creates an element of visual interest. This also effects a sense of rhythm and movement. Another element used in establishing variety is the three-dimensional impression of a pillar, which is seen on the blue house (fig. 4.14). This vertical line then becomes a break in the predominant horizontal lines. The blue curtain, which was hung in the doorway of house on the left, worked in contrast to the brown palette that defines the colour of the house. In like manner, the contrast in the colours of the blue house and the brown window add to the visual interest of the design.
An interesting addition in scenery is seen in figure 4.16. In between the hut and the house, was an interesting impression of an anthill. The repetition of the lines and different shades of brown impresses a visual movement of water eroding the sand of the hill. Once again, in this picture, the horizontal borders represented on the house works in contrast vertical lines dominating the hut and the anthill. The sharpest contrast employed in painting was the white colour of the house as against the brown of the hut and the anthill, to break the boredom generated by the tones of brown.

The scenery designed for the performance of a Concert Party productions at the National Theatre usually had a permanent backdrop which was used for the weekly performances. This backdrop presented forest scenery with a representation of sometimes just tree trunks, as well as the full view of the trees, as is seen in figures 4.12 to 4.16 above. This
forest backdrop was utilized to depict the nature of Ghanaian households at that time. Until recent times, though there still are few in existence, the Ghanaian society was very “family-oriented with regard to extended relations. Places of habitation were put up to accommodate every member of the family; ranging from the parents to grandchildren and even great grandchildren. By so doing, the final outlook of the structure became square-like with a gate at the entrance into the enclosed compound. There usually were trees dispersed on the compound to serve as shade. Thus the trees in the background coupled with the painted three-dimensional structures could be connected with the appearance of a traditional Ghanaian compound house thereby achieving the effect of realism. Although Ako Tetteh (29/02/2016) admitted that the presence of the forest backdrop had no relation to the shows, another probable reason for its existence was to unconsciously establish the contrast of the new and the old; rustic versus urban or metropolitan; tradition and the contemporary. Tetteh explained that the forest background became relevant in establishing spectacular entrances of ghosts or mythical creatures, and also for the depiction of forest scenes.

Through the studying of the sets, I observed that there always was the representation of the key soap brand hung very close to the set. At first, the words “KEY SOAP” were drawn on plywood and cut out before hanging, as seen in figure 4.13. It was a marketing strategy to inform the audience of the corporate body (Unilever Ghana Ltd.) in charge of bringing them such hilarious entertainment. This later changed to the three-dimensional representation of the key soap bar drawn and cut out from plywood and hung above the set. Furthermore, I realized that there was a set of scenery that was juggled and rearranged for every week’s performance. This observation was confirmed by Quantson
(29/02/2016) when he stated that “they had something like a stock set that they reshuffled weekly for the different performances”. Examples of the reshuffled sets are seen in figures 4.14 and 4.16. The house-like structure painted cream and chocolate brown for a weekend’s performance in figure 4.14 is seen again in figure 4.16, only this time the colour of the house has been changed from cream and brown to white and brown, with a different colour of curtains in both instances. A similar instance is presented in figures 4.13 and 4.16. In these figures, it is realized that the same hut was used for both performances. The disparity is the variation in colour, design, and positioning.

The National Theatre Concert Party shows were sponsored by the Keysoap brand of Unilever Ghana Ltd and that influenced the outlook of the set design for the performances. Johnson Edu16 (04/04/2016), in an interview, admitted that the Keysoap Concert Party deviated from the original form where stories were based on myths and the stories were spectacular. He proceeds to say that the Keysoap Concert Party being a corporate event produced by Unilever Ghana Ltd. was a marketing strategy and a vehicle to project their corporate brand. In view of that, the various elements of the performance had to be reflective of the brand: portions of the set stood for the product which is keysoap; the colour code of the brand had to be featured in painting the set; there had to be characteristics of the product displayed in the set.

According to Ako Tetteh (29/02/2016), the Keysoap Concert Party brand instituted an annual competition in the 1994s, and 95s, where the best Concert Party group was

16Johnson Edu is currently a Lecturer at the Creative Arts School, University of Education, Winneba and is in charge of scenic, props and costume design and construction in the Theatre Arts Department. He was appointed as the Technical Director for the National Theatre in 1997 after two years of National Service at the same place (1994-1996) where he was the brain behind set design and props making for performances held at the National Theatre during his tenure of office.
awarded with some prizes. During the period of competition, the groups brought out their best in terms of costume, set, props, stories as well as the acting. The performance had to be spectacular to be able to win an award, yet characteristics of the brand were still inculcated in the set and props used. Figures 4.17 and 4.18 present a visual representation of such competitions.

**Fig. 4. 17** An illustration showing the set of the finals of the concert party competition for the year 1999
In these images, it is noticed that as usual the *keysoap* bar, with its corresponding programme title, “CONCERT PARTY”, was drawn on plywood, cut out and hung from one of the bars in the fly. In addition, “Who is Who Finals ’99” which was the competition’s tag, was also drawn, cut out, and hung right beneath the “CONCERT PARTY”. The set design was rather simple but elaborate with a blend of the various elements of design to achieve a unified artistic whole. Such elements include shapes, forms, lines, and mass, etc. The main background was painted turquoise blue¹⁷, and the pillars, coffee brown¹⁸. Variations in the lines and shapes, colours, including objects,

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¹⁷ It is possible the original paint of the set is a little different from what is seen in the photograph as sometimes the accurate colour was not captured when a picture was taken.
¹⁸ As has been said of the turquoise blue, same applies to the coffee brown. There is the probability that the original colour differed a little from what is seen in the photograph, possibly resulting from years of storage.
displayed on the set, projected the principle of variety to break the monotony presented by the plain colour background. The contrast posed by the three-dimensional, vertical pillars flanking the left and right sides of the main background also adds to creation of variety. The horizontal rhythmic flow of the designs on the background was contrasted by the angular lines of the centre piece set.

Moreover, the three-dimensional pillars at the opposite ends of the set balanced out the angular lines presented on the set. Audiences attention was drawn to the centre of the set as emphasis was placed on the center design piece by use of colour, shape, and design – the high value of beige used on the centre set, together with the sharp contrasting colour of circles of coffee brown; the triangular shape of the centre in comparison with the rectangular shape of the background; the presence of the door which served as the main entrance and exit onto and off the stage. This centre piece was defined in a triangular configuration with the base projected out to form rectangles at both ends and coated in a hue of beige. Upon closer look, the centre set bears resemblance to a crown. This impressed visually on the audience the main purpose of the show, which is to crown the winner of the competitions

Two levels of shelves were attached at each side of the slope of the triangle, on which the consolation prizes – boxes of keysoap – were placed. Some of the boxes of keysoap were placed at the base of the triangle as well. On this center piece were painted keys in addition to the circles. The keys were also painted on the base of the pillars, as well as on the flat on the right of the triangle. It was against this background that all participating troupes in the competition performed.
Quantson (29/02/2016) admittedly revealed that, for the few ensuing years that the concert party performances were still viable at the National Theatre of Ghana, a new form of scenery progressively developed. With the advancement in the technology of design coupled with the influx of designers who have undergone massive training from tertiary institutions (University of Ghana and University of Cape Coast), a new form of scenery design emerged. Designers partially deviated from realistic sets to representational sets. A number of Concert Party groups were subsequently established, some by private institutions and others by corporate bodies as a marketing strategy while still adhering to the canons of the Concert Party – educate on morality, Godliness, and accepted social conventions, and entertain. Examples of such were the Chocho Concert Party, Adom Concert Party, among others. For these groups, set design became and heavily aesthetic in nature compared to the previous designs. An instance is provided in figure 4.19 below.
This set represented a modern architecture in a much modernised, urban centre. The windows on sets, which used to be mere three-dimensional impressions, are now carved out of the flats. These windows sometimes had plastic sheets pinned on them to establish the effect of glass. The height of the set on the right of the figure suggests either a storey building or the main building, where as those on the left indicate that they are perhaps rooms of the boy’s quarters of the main building. Instead of plain painting, the textured effect created on the storey building stimulates the feel of terrazzo tiles. In addition, sometimes multiple colours were used to paint one set house.

Quantson (29/02/2016) regards this new form of set design as an epochal phase in scenery design where there is a significant departure from the old, flat, two-dimensional form of scenery establishment; as per those performances of the concert party of old; to a
more refined nature of set design that considers the mood, the spirit, the concept and the production style. This improved form of scenery continued not only for concert party productions but was also seen in other performances at the National Theatre and other performance spaces such as the Accra International Conference Centre, the Centres for National Culture, and the Efua Theodora Sutherland Studio.

4.4 The National Theatre of Ghana

Gibbs (2004) espouses that after financial constraints, brought upon by political unrest, which nearly threw then budding theatre in Ghana into a comma, stability was established after the young flight lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings seized power following a coup on 31st December 1981. By then, politics had been knitted with arts once again. It was during this period that National Festivals of Arts and Culture (NAFAC) were promoted at various levels that led to the celebration of the Pan African Festival which became operational in December 1992, and has been celebrated bi-annually since then. It was once again during this period of politics being knitted into arts that the National Theatre of Ghana was constructed.

The National Theatre edifice is as a result of a long-standing relationship between the Chinese Government and the Government of Ghana. Dr. Ben-Abdallah, who was by then the Deputy Minister of Culture and Tourism, was instrumental in the negotiations that brought about the magnificent structure. The foundation stone being laid on 8th March, 1990, the Chinese completed the construction of the Ghana National Theatre in 1992 and on 30th December, 1992, it was opened. The commissioning of the building saw the coming together of the three main performing groups, which were the Dance Ensemble,
the National Symphony Orchestra, and Abibigromma to put up a massive performance, followed by a performance by a national troupe from China.

Sitting on an area of 11,896 square metres, the theatre has three performing spaces: the folk place, a 300 seating capacity space; the 400 seating capacity exhibition hall; and the three-tier 1,492-seat proscenium arch. The latter, covering an area of 440 square metres, happens to be the performance space in which most known theatre performances are put up. The proscenium stage is endowed with an orchestra pit mechanized to sink into the ground curtailing the acting space, allowing room for other purposes such as orchestra seating, or as an extra acting space on a lower level. The orchestra pit used to be regulated to about four (4) levels but presently, it is sunk to the bottom and moved back to the top. Above the stage of the proscenium stage exists a very high fly space. In this space are located thirty-six (36) functional pipes or bars for light and scenery rigging. Out of the thirty-six pipes, only six (6) are mainly purposed for the rigging lights, although the others could be used as and when a production demands it. Thus the remaining thirty are available for rigging scenery, drops, draperies and other related design elements.

These pipes are manipulated electronically from the fly gallery. The fly gallery which is an enclosed space located above the stage in the fly houses equipment that works the bars and the orchestra pit. A total number of seven (7) curtains; comprising two (2) front wine curtains – one regulated vertically and the other horizontally, two (2) green curtains, two (2) scrims, and the cyclorama; furnish the huge stage. Six (6) pairs of legs supplement these curtains and enhance marking of the acting space on stage, as well as the service of closing off excess space after construction or set up. The auditorium is also equipped
with a sound control room, lighting control room, director’s observatory, a film projecting room, and a presidential box.

The national theatre had formerly produced three to four productions a year; some of which included Derek Walcott’s *Playboy of the West Indies* and August Wilson’s *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* (Riccio, 2007). The nature of vastness of the main performance space posed some challenge to which directors, lighting and scenic designers from outside Ghana braced themselves with. Gibbs (2004), cites examples of how during the early years of 1994, director Anton Phillips and lighting designer Larry Coker were flown in by the British Council to work on Trevor Rhone’s *Old Story Time*; Femi Osofisan produced his own play, *Nkrumah Ni...Africa Ni*; and Steven Gerald from the University of Texas directed *The Playboy of the West Indies* by Mustapha Matura.

There are three performing groups residing in the National Theatre namely: the National Theatre Company (sometimes called the Abibigromma), the National Dance Company, and the National Symphony orchestra. Abibigromma was originally established at the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, in 1983. It was formed as a model to facilitate teaching, research and experimentation. In 1991 some members of the troupe were taken to the National Theatre to form a resident group of the newly-built National Theatre. The resident group of the National Theatre were renamed the national Theatre Company while the remaining members at the School of Performing Arts maintained the name, Abibigromma. However, most times, both groups are referred to as Abibigromma.
4.4.1 Set Design for the National Theatre

With the opening of the building by the end of 1992, the management of the institution (Abibigromma) produced four plays after which the Concert Party basically took over the performances at the National Theatre. A. W. Tamakloe directed Yaw Asare’s *The Leopard’s Choice* in January 1993, for which John Djisenu was the set and lighting designer. The setting of the play is an imaginary rich kingdom in Africa.

![The set of Yaw Asare’s *The Leopard’s Choice*, 1993. Directed by A. W. Tamakloe. Set designed by John Djisenu](image)

With the artistic incorporation of light, the set reveals an impression of a setting in a land of riches – gold for that matter. The designer employed earthy colours as the palette for the two-dimensional set. There were series of five flats successively propped up, from downstage of either sides of the stage, leading up consequentially to the back wall which
stretched from upstage left to upstage right. On each of these detached flats were drawings depicting objects relating to nature. The forms and shapes represented on either sides of the background were different from each other. In as much as they were varying shapes, in terms of position and size, they were symmetrically balanced. On the main background upstage centre were abstract shapes and forms painted in purple.

![Fig. 4. Snippets of the set design of Yaw Asare’s The Leopard’s Choice (1993). Set designed by John Djisenu](image)

The main back wall is symmetrically divided in two with an opening of about 4ft left in between to serve as entrance and exit. In front of the space left as an entrance in background set, was a platform covered with fabric, resembling a leopard’s skin. Leopards skins pasted on either walls defined the space leading to the entrance. The stools of the king and queen were placed on the platform. Stools for sub-chiefs and elders were positioned stage left and stage right of the platform. In establishing contrast, the
designer employed colour and texture which were abstract shapes and forms on the two-dimensional setting; the leopard skin covering on the platform, and on the stools.

In July that same year (1993), Djisenu again designed the set for two productions put up by the National Theatre Players (Abibigromma) namely: *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* written by Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Micere Mugo, directed by Dzifa Glikpoe, and *If Only the Night Could See* written by Nabie Yayah Swaray, directed by Mohammed Ben Abdallah. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is a play which basically tells a story of the trial of Dedan Kimathi who was the leader of the Mau Mau movement of Kenya and his persistent refusal to surrender to the British imperialism. The designs for the production simulated four main acting areas which were the court, the prison, the forest, and the street scenes.

![The court set for The Trial of Dedan Kimathi. Designed by John Djisenu. Directed by Dzifa Glikpoe (1993)](image)
In the setting of the courtroom, the designer installed the judge’s seating on a dais at the upstage left. The dock for Dedan Kimathi, who was on trial, was positioned upstage centre to reinforce his role as the lead character around whom the plot is developed. This dock was also mounted on a higher plane than the seating area for the defence counsels, the peasants, and the middle class. On the immediate right of this dock was placed the seating for Kimathi’s defence counsel, followed by that of the peasant class, located down-right centre. To the immediate left of the judge’s dais was the sitting place of the middle class. The seating are for both social classes appear tiered to enhance audience visibility of all performers. The arrangement of this courtroom setting depicts a deviation from the usual rectangular setup to a rather triangular setup. In projecting the rigidity of court proceedings, the designer majorly employed angular shapes which are seen on the back wall in a form of imprinted doors and windows; and the judge’s dais. The design resonated a warm feeling as it was dominated by caramel-brown. To offset a rather monotonous colour palette of the set, the designer made use of the green tormentors draped behind the seating positions of the peasants and the middle class; and gauze draped in front of the medium purple curtain.
Fig. 4. 23 The prison set for The Trial of Dedan Kimathi. Designed by Djisenu. Directed by Dzifa Glikpoe (1993)

Fig. 4. 24 The street scenes performed in front of the curtains. Designed by Djisenu

For this scene, no major set was specially designed. The acting space in front of the closed stage curtains characterized the design for the scenes held on the street as shown in the above illustration.
The forest scene design (fig. 4.25) delineates soft scenery rather than hard scenery. The imagery of the tall trees were outlined in a grey scale and leafy green on a fabric and cut out. These individual trees were rigged from the fly on different pipes to illustrate the dispersed nature of trees in a forest. The cyclorama is visibly seen behind the rigged trees with its lighting colours suggesting an effected combination of sunrise, sunset and night.

Nabie Yayah Swaray’s *If Only the Night Could See*, directed by Mohammed Ben Abdallah was another set designed by John Djisenu. The sinister events of the play were set somewhere in an imaginary village called Kissy-Mess-Mess in Sierra Leone in 1950. The major concern of the play is the extreme behaviour of men who are greedy for power and indulge in crimes against humanity in the pursuit of power, position and fame. For this production, there are four scene changes namely, the main house, the street, the forest, and the cemetery.
For this production, the designer created a compound house which was roofed with decrepit iron sheets, made limp with rain and dirt. The interior of one of the rooms was attached to the house at stage left. Disjointed wooden rails shaped in a form of a hollow rectangle were planted few feet away from the individual doors to demarcate the veranda. This compound house which was positioned in the usual box formation was finished off using steps, advertently placing the ‘locus in quo’ on an elevated plane. The sullied appearance of the iron sheets used for the roofing does not corroborate with the fineness revealed in the block, suggesting of a freshly repainted house. Ochre-brown served as the dominant colour palette for this setting, with the cream colour introducing variety.

The second scenery was the street scene (fig. 4.27) where the night time rituals were performed. Like the design for the street scene in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathhi*, the
actions of the scene were set in front of the stage curtains. In addition, the gauze was draped in front of the curtains with a piece of table serving as the supplementary scenic element for this scene.
The forest scene (fig. 4. 28) was the third scenery change and had soft scenery like the street scene. By way of painting a vista on flats, the designer illustrated the forest setting. The designer chose to sparingly paint a few old, dried up trees in shades of grey. The grass and shrubs afar were also in a scale of grey. Against this same backdrop was the cemetery scene held as seen in figure 4. 29. Furthermore, three-dimensional tomb-stones served as the indication of a cemetery.
In February 1994, Anton Phillips directed *Old Story Time* written by Trevor Rhone. The play, predominantly set in an unnamed parish in rural Jamaica and urban Kingston, between 1960s and 1980s, tells a story of a woman, Mama, who wants the best for her child, Len, and so isolates him from his peers in the neighbourhood, forcibly encouraging him to study. The result is Len obtaining a scholarship to go to a University in the U.K. Len travels the world, obtains a PhD and acquires an excellent job in banking in Kingston, Jamaica. However, she castigated her son against his own race and pushed to get him to marry a white woman. Although he tried to follow his mother’s advice, he ended up marrying a black woman, Lois. The story culminates in Mama using juju on Lois to get her out of her son’s life. Discovering the wrong she has done Lois over the years, she apologizes and is forgiven at the end of the play.
For this play production, the set was jointly designed by Anton, Djisenu, and Amoo. The execution was done by Amoo and the National Theatre stage carpentry team. The play had two settings which inadvertently required designing two different sets of scenery for the performance. On one side was the setting in an unnamed parish in rural Jamaica; on the other side was the setting in Kingston, the capital of Jamaica. Instead of the two sets as established by the playwright, three different sets were created by the designers. The first depicted the exterior of a dilapidated cabin; the second revealed its interior; while the third was the living room in the city.

![Set design for Old Story Time at the National Theatre of Ghana, 1994. This side of the set represents the setting in Kingston, Jamaica](image)

The setting in figure 4.30 shows a realistic living room. There are two separate wall shelves positioned at both sides of a curtained off entrance at upstage centre. The three-in-one sofa was placed in front of the entrance, with ample space left between the sofa
and the entrance for easy movement; with the single sofa down stage right. A short room divider stands down stage left of the three-in-one sofa. The sofas and a centre table rest on a brown centre carpet. In decorating the set to establish the realistic style, the designer used decorative props. A framed picture sits on the left wall shelf and a flower in a vase, in the right wall shelf. The main colour palette of the living room is blue. The design exhibits several repetitive patterns: the wall shelves, the door, and the sofas. Variation is introduced in the curtain at the entrance, by way of using horizontal lines and plain colours with circular designs as dominant design elements in the curtain. While the height and width of the shelves remain the same on both sides, the pattern is varied by having mainly decorative props in one, and a stack of books in the other. Variation is further enhanced by the different tones of blue used in the wall trimmings and the sofas. While the set is not symmetrically balanced, the placement of the various elements creates a sense of asymmetrical equilibrium. In this design, emphasis was directed towards the upstage center by placing majority of the elements there. The flowery curtains also accounted for the placement of emphasis on the upstage center of the set.
**Fig. 4.** The second setting for *Old Story Time*, representing the rural setting in Jamaica, (1994).

In this design, the choice of furniture and room arrangement rightly suggested rural environment and defined the poor nature of world of the inhabitant, Mama. In the interior of the cabin was positioned a mini cupboard on the right of a curtained window. On the left side of the window hang a piece of cloth to balance the cupboard. In front of the window were a table, chairs and what looks like a small bench. The exterior of the cabin, which was detached from the room set, had a chair, a stool and a foldable table placed in front of it. The entire set made use of colour contrast. The lower part of the living room was finished in pale blue to mildly contrast the sharpness of the navy blue colour of the sofas. Similarly, the variations in the tones of brown on the exterior of the cabin contrasted with the warm colour of the interior of the shack. The contrast in the colours of the shack and the living room represents the emotional stance of the inhabitants, i. e.
Mama and Len respectively. Mama is very hard on the inside, harbouring hatred towards people of her own race, while Len is peaceful within and with other people.

In 1995, the National Theatre Players, also known as Abibigromma staged *Ancient King* at the National Theatre.

![Fig. 4. 32 The set design for the production of Ancient King in 1995 by Abibigromma. Set designed by Johnson Edu](image)

The set designer for this production was Johnson Edu, an erstwhile technical director of the National Theatre. For this play, Edu set out to create a replica of the setting of traditional cave men. He constructed series of huge rocks using canvas, layering a rock-like skeletal wooden frame. These models he painted in tones of brown and grey to create the impression of life-like rocks. He placed these rocks one on top of the other, and finished it off by painting human and animal figures on them. These figures suggested the lives of cave men as hunters or possibly farmers. His design, symmetrically placed,
evokes an earthy feeling. A closer look at the rocks at the upstage centre impresses upon the audience two lying wild animals, probably tigers to either express the strength or lifestyle of the protagonist; as a hunter.

An Elizabethan period play, William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was produced at the National Theatre in 1997, for which Johnson Edu once again designed a set.

![Fig. 4.33 A Midsummer Night’s Dream produced at the National Theatre in 1997. Set designed by Johnson Edu.](image)

With the play set in Athens, Johnson employed enormous, decorated pillars; magnificent chandeliers; rich, heavy, velvet curtains draping from the very top of the entrances, down to sweep the ground at upstage centre, coupled with stylistic stairways; to communicate the affluence that characterized Greek Athenian architecture. Two chandeliers hung on
the middle beam which joins the pillars on stage left and stage right. To achieve the likeness of chandeliers, lights were lighted directly above them to create the impression that the chandeliers indeed lighted the stage. Emphasis is placed on the upstage center and its immediate right with the elaborateness of the velvet curtains and a stairway, and an extravagant background. A serious drama or tragedy is mostly characterized by dark colour palette, and dominating hard, angular lines. For a set design to communicate comedy, mostly cool, bright, and grey colours, and soft edge lines are employed. Although the play is comic in nature, the designer, in a frantic gesture to recreate an accurate representation of a seemingly real Athenian Palace, the colour palette employed by the designer evokes the feeling of gloom but spectacular. To establish proportion, the designer properly balanced the asymmetrical set at the upstage centre with an enormous painting flanking the upstage right while the stylistic stairway occupied the upstage left. The vertical lines created by the series of pillars on stage left and stage right, as well as upstage centre, would be visually boring had it not been complemented by the horizontal lines of the beams joining the pillars; the swags of the curtains; and the curves in the concrete-like border of the stairway.

With the National Theatre in collaboration with Unilever Company to revive and rebrand the Concert Party, the resident performing groups; National Theatre Company, National Symphony Orchestra, and the National Dance Company; shared stage with the Concert Party troupes, alongside other private groups that put up various performances at the National Theatre. As has been described under the sub-heading of set design for the Concert Party, at the beginning of Key Soap Concert Party era, representationalism was the order of the day. The designers basically erected flats with comic figures, and
sponsors’ logo and labels painted on them, without actually considering their aesthetic and functional aspects. The performances that were put up by the resident performing groups and other individuals had set designs that were detailed and close to perfection in terms of the justifications of set design in any theatre performance. Examples of such set designs are Djisenu’s set for The Leopard’s Choice, If Only the Night Could See both 1993 (seen in figures 4.19, 4.20, 4.25, 4.26, 4.27, 4.28 and 4.29), and the set for Old Story Time, 1994 (seen in figures 4.30 and 4.31). The set designs were tailored towards the concept of realism and sometimes included elements of symbolism in achieving the desired effect. Examples can be given of Edu’s designs for Ancient King, 1995 (as seen in figure 4.32) and A Midsummer Night’s Dream, 1997 (as seen in figure 4.33). Johnson Edu (04/04/2016) revealed that when funds were readily made available to the designers, they went out of their ways to bring out their best possible. This was particularly visible with the works of renowned set designers such as John Djisenu and Johnson Edu, between the early 1990s and 2000.

4.5 The Efua Theodora Sutherland Studio

Currently located on the University of Ghana Campus, the Efua Theodora Sutherland Studio (E.T.S. Studio subsequently) has a seating capacity of a maximum of four hundred people. It was primarily redesigned and rebuilt for research, workshops, and performances by the three main academic disciplines of the School of Performing Arts: Theatre Arts, Music, and Dance Studies Departments. The edifice has its two entrances structured in a stool form. The multi-functional studio with a proscenium stage; an arena stage which is more inclined towards the traditional mode of Ghanaian storytelling; and
an end stage; was modelled to incorporate the Western and African Performing Arts. Characteristics of the proscenium stage include a height of 4.2 metres; depth from the proscenium arch to the back wall of 6.4 metres; width of the proscenium from right to left of ten metres; and area coverage of 286 square metres for the stage. The arena stage has the measurements of 9.7 metres in length, and covers an area of 248.2 square metres; whereas the end stage is 4 metres long, 10 metres wide, and its stage wall has the height of 2.4 metres.

Outlining the space above the proscenium stage is a shallow fly within which is found five bars for rigging of light. The front-of-house lighting bars are located on the left and right sides of the stage. These rigged lights are channelled through a dimmer pack where the DMS cables are run to the console. Also available at the performance space are front-of-house speakers which serve as the output from the phantom microphones run into the sound mixer. Usually laptops are the medium through which pre-recorded sounds are played. The light and sound are controlled from the lighting and sound control room located in the space in the stool-shaped structure on the left facing the proscenium stage.

From an aerial perspective, the proscenium stage bears the shape of a traditional stool but with a linear top rather than the curved top which the entrances to the studio possess. The arena stage is situated between the proscenium and the end stage and is shaped in an octagonal form. The end stage faces the proscenium stage, a few feet smaller and rectangular in shape. The structure presents an open-air auditorium which makes it one of a kind in Ghana. Within the studio is located offices allocated for scenery, light, sound, costume design and construction. Female and male changing rooms with their respective washrooms as well as places of convenience for patrons, and a snack bar are also found.
in this facility. This studio is open to other users both within and outside the university. The E.T.S. Studio has not always been called that, but used to be known as the Ghana Drama Studio.

Dr. Efua Theodora Sutherland, a playwright whose import on the development of theatre in Ghana cannot be overemphasized, is counted among the forerunners of the literary drama phase. As part of her contribution to the development of the Theatre Movement in Ghana, she instituted a programme which she called “The Ghana Experimental Theatre”, an experiment based on the storytelling art in Ghana. It was under this programme, that the Kodzidan, a story house for the preservation of oral literature in, Atwia Ekumfi in the Central Region of Ghana was constructed. By 1961, The Ghana Drama Studio was established with some funding from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Government of Ghana.

The Ghana Drama Studio was an open-air courtyard theatre originally located at the site of the current National Theatre. It was razed down to make way for the construction of the National Theatre. In 1993, the Ghana Drama Studio was rebuilt at the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana. The Ghana Drama Studio has since been named the Efua Theodora Sutherland Studio. Various experimental productions of new Ghanaian and other African playwrights were held in the Drama Studio. Sutherland herself wrote several works for children including two animated rhythm plays: *Vulture Vulture!* and *Tahinta* (both in 1968).
4.5.1 Set Design for the Efua Theodora Sutherland Studio

Like the Concert Party tradition, there was little consideration given to set design and construction in the then Ghana Drama Studio. The studio was among other things, an experimental ground for playwrights who wrote for children to teach, counsel, train and encourage. Esi Sutherland-Addy (07/07/2016) recounts that as a little girl, she followed her mother during some of the sessions at the Ghana Drama Studio and as far as she could remember, there was no elaborate use of set for their performances or experiments. Sometimes, the performances were spontaneous thus focus was on content and action more than the description of an appropriate environment for the action. She successfully searched through her mother’s very old pictures kept neatly in an album, and retrieved photographs of some of the activities held at the studio, out of which I sampled two that are relevant to this research.

Fig. 4.34 A performance of Sebastian Kwamuar’s The Perpetual Stone-Mill at the Drama Studio. Specific date of performance unknown but held in the early 1970s.
In creating the scenery, two flats were joined to form a unit set, and were positioned on the up stage left and up stage right. A space was created at the upstage centre, between the two sets. In front of the set up stage left is a bench.

![Image](image1.png)

**Fig. 4.35** A performance of Sebastian Kwamuar’s The Perpetual Stone-Mill at the Drama Studio. Specific date of performance unknown.

Similarly, in figure 4.35, for a different scene, the stage props change from a single bench to three logs located in front of the set upstage left and an entrance between the two flats. The same set-up was used for a different experimental performance; *Oh, Ghana Motion!* as seen in figure 4.36 below.
This form of stage setting was, as Sutherland-Addy revealed, the basic setting used for most of the stage performances. Not only was this setting used for children’s activities alone, but also for some performances of the Ghana Studio Players, Kusum Agoromma, among other performing troupes. Martin Owusu (26/05/2016), asserted unequivocally that during the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of the Drama Studio he directed Sutherland’s “Odasani”, a translation of Everyman and was performed at the Studio. He revealed that there was no elaborate set design employed. According to him, the band that played for the performance was situated stage right of the performers. He equally attested that performances at the Studio used very little set. When asked about any evidence of documentation of the performances at the Studio, he disclosed that when the Studio was demolished, instruments such as sound system (speakers, gramophones, microphones, etc), important documents (including photographs of events at the Studio), and other valuables were haphazardly dumped at the Estate Section at the University of Ghana and the rains destroyed them all. Vital information, in forms of pictorial documentations,
memos, etc was thus lost. He concluded that before the demolition of the Studio, performances that were put employed minimal set.

Since the commissioning of the newly rebuilt performance studio and renamed the Efua Theodora Sutherland Studio, the space has hosted performances from the School of Performing Arts, as well as serving people both from and outside the university community. Sets designed for performances at the E.T.S. Studio appear to follow trending styles of realism, naturalism, and surrealism. In 1995, Johnson Edu, designed another set for the stage production of *Pepper Soup* which was performed at the E.T. S. Studio. The set design was moulded against the concept of realism.

![Fig. 4. 37 The set design for Pepper Soup at the ETS Drama Studio (1995). Set designed by Johnson Edu.](image)

Repetition of regular patterns, shapes, or forms generates monotony. There were several repetitive patterns exhibited in the door trim pattern, the window motif, the shapes of the
background paint, the design of the fences. The vertical lines created by the outlining of the background paint, and the door were interrupted by the horizontal lines produced by the fence and the window. The designer predominantly employed two bright colours; off-white and green, and beryl green.

Aaron Yeboah, a diploma student in 1997, designed scenery for Ama Ata Aidoo’s Anowa, directed by Awushie Abui Fiadjoe. The play had two major settings; Oguaa and Yebi.

![Colour rendering of setting in Yebi for Anowa. Designed by Aaron Yeboah Annan. Directed by Awushie Abui Fiadjoe (1997).](image-url)
In creating the setting for Yebi, the designer constructed a single-room-structure. Attached to this structure were bamboo fence located further right of the structure, and fence made of wood which stretched from upstage to down stage right. The fences were used as demarcation for the acting area, suggesting the space of inhabitation for the characters. Between the bamboo fence and the structure was a wooden gate that guarded the entrance into the outer courts. A three-dimensional tree painted on a canvas, hung on the back wall of the stage was located right behind the gate. The use of the sky backdrop and natural shrubs portrayed the highway scene. Variation is introduced in the fences by varying their height and width. Likewise, contrasting surface textures – the smooth feel of the wood of the fence, the rough and jugged look and feel of the bamboo fence – add to the visual interest of the design. Other elements found on the stage include a tripod
wood stove, stool, utensils, and were positioned centre right beside the wooden fence. A lazy chair was also provided at centre left.

Fig. 4. 40 The set design for Oguaa in the production of Ama Ata Aidoo’s Anowa. Designed by Aaron Yeboah Annan. Directed by Awushie Abut Fiadjo (1997).

The illustration above was the design for the setting for Oguua. In Oguua, Kofi Ako had become wealthy and had numerous servants and workers at his beck and call. Annan designed the setting as a living room with stuffed sofas flanking both the left and right sides of the acting space on stage. In the space between the arranged living room settees was furnished with a centre carpet used as an embellishment to reiterate the wealth of Kofi Ako. On the background set up stage was a window trimming on which rested a portrait of Anowa. The window on the background appears to be an impression rather than an actual window. Although it appears the set is symmetrically balanced, upon
closer scrutiny, it is revealed that it does not possess the mirror-image balance. While there are three single stuffed sofas on stage right, only one three-in-one stuffed sofa is seen at stage left. In addition, there were coffee tables placed immediate down stage and up stage the sofas at stage right, while only one is seen at the immediate up stage of the one at stage left.

Aaron Annan again worked on the design for *This is our Chance* written by Ene Henshaw and directed by Nana Afrakoma Appia, performed at the E.T. S. Studio in 1997. The design presents a fascinating combination of lines, forms, and shapes to create visual interest. The set had two doorways rounded at the top, on the left and right of the background set.

*Fig. 4.41* Colour rendering of the set for Ene Henshaw’s *This is Our Chance*. Designed by Aaron Yeboah Annan. Directed by Nana Afrakoma Appia (1997).
An impression of broken marbles was used as the trimming of these two doorways to create the effect of texture. At the top of each doorway were series of triangles drawn in dark tones. The designer positioned a three-dimensional pillar and a flat with a curved top, between these two doorways. The horizontal lines painted at the top of the arched background coupled with the vertical lines created by the long spears standing underneath the horizontal lines were a break off from the soft edges produced by the enormous dart board, the doorways, the pillar and the arched background. Set props used to decorate and define the locale included a bow and a back whisk hung on the dock located down stage left and down stage right respectively.

December 1998 saw an African theatre performance directed by one of the performing arts moguls in Ghana, Dr. Mohammed Ben Abdallah. He directed his own play; The
Witch of Mopti at the E. T. S. Studio for which John Djisenu designed the set. The play is based on the conflict between witchcraft and political power in the Sahel Regions of Africa.

Fig. 4. The set design for The Witch of Mopti. Directed by Mohammed ben Abdallah. Designed by John Djisenu (1998).

The designer established two playing fields of two planes: a lower plane and an upper level. The lower level playing space was defined by steps and blocks or levels of varied lengths, sizes and heights, distributed unevenly on the front and side of the platform that characterized the upper level. These three-dimensional individual structures lead to the higher level playing field. Present also in this lower level was a well at down stage right. Design features that defined the upper playing field included three vertical cloth hangers
located at the upstage centre, up stage left, and stage right; and steps at the up stage right which led to another higher level.

Six horrific masks lined up from the left corner to the centre of the top edge of the back wall delineated the space where the steps led to the higher level. Encased around the masks was the huge tree behind the E.T.S Studio. The positioning of the horrid masks allineated underneath the wide, thick branches created the ghoulish effect associated with superstitions surrounding witchcraft. The designer’s choice of earthy tone colours suggested the huskiness that characterizes the Sahel regions.

The University of Ghana celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1998 and as part of the celebrations, Martin Owusu directed his adaptation of William Shakespeare’s Hamlet; Hamile (Prince of Tongo) at the E.T. S. Studio. The set designer for the production, John Djisenu created architecture suggestive of savannah or dry land with reference to Tongo in the upper East Region as the setting of the play. The set placed on two levels – the top and bottom levels, denotes a palace with the focal point placed at the upstage centre.
The back wall which served as the focus of the set comprised of three faux openings unevenly spaced, with the main the middle one designed to create an impression of a bottle towering above the other two on either sides. Proceeding down stage left and right were the set walls in which was carved an opening leading into and off the acting space. Decorative set properties varying from dried animal skins, to horns, and blinds or curtains, embellished the rather seemingly baked set. By the use of earthy tone colours as the base palette, and subdued forms and shapes the designer reiterated the locality of the events of the play. The big tree at the back of the studio is representative of the baobab tree which characterizes the dry northern regions of Ghana.

In another development, some set designs for performances at the E.T.S. Studio were also representational as was the case of some of the Concert Party sets. The set for the performance of Sackey Sowah’s *Firestorm* is an example. The designer put up a palace in
the midst of rocks. *Firestorm* is an African play with a set design of a palace moulded against the Western design of a castle (fig. 4.45).

*Firestorm* tells the story of a handful of girls led by Naaba who were banished from their village because they refused to be in arranged marriages. In their fight against the domineering role of man, they confronted other girls to defy the choice of marriage arranged for them. Although banished from the village, the girls continue their revolution from the bush until Naaba, the leader, is condemned to die but the other girls are freed.

![The production of Firestorm in 1999. Set designed by Johnson Edu.](image)

*Fig. 4. 45 The production of Firestorm in 1999. Set designed by Johnson Edu.*

Unlike it is typical of Johnson Edu to create three-dimensional setting (as seen in his previous designs in figs. 4.32, 4.33) this western type of castle was painted on the flats
with a projection of the pillars’ capitals. The shafts of the pillars were characterized by repetition of bold vertical lines which were interrupted by the horizontal line projected in the centre and at the top of the castle impression. The rocks, which defined the left and right spaces of the castle, appear to have been painted on pieces of canvas and rigged from the flys.

In subsequent years, the production style of realism, sometimes combined with selective naturalism, continue to dominate majority of the play productions at the E.T. Studio. Designers of the various performances endeavour to stay true to their source of inspiration in adding to the meaning of the play. Examples of scenery designs for such productions are illustrated in figures 4.46 and 4.47.

Fig. 4. 46 Set design for J.P. Clark’s Song of a Goat performed the E. T. S. Studio. Designed by Philip Sarpong, 2001.
Philip Sarpong’s design for J. P. Clark’s Song of a Goat was clad in earth tones to represent a realistic rural setting. Set in a village in the Delta province, Nigeria, Song of a Goat tells the story of the supposed bareness of Ebiere when it is her husband, Zifa who is impotent. It is suggested by the Masseur that Ebiere lays with Tonya, Zifa’s younger brother. The couple vehemently refuses but eventually Ebiere gives in to the seduction of Tonya. When Zifa finds out about the infidelity he slaughters a goat and asks his brother to put the goat’s head in a pot which is too small for it. Zifa contemplates killing his brother but Tonya takes his own life by hanging himself. Zifa also drowns himself in the sea and Ebiere miscarries the baby.

Sarpong’s use of the sky backdrop and the trees effectively created an effect of a typical village household structure in an African setting. The entire structure on stage were three-dimensionally created using thatch as roof for the hut and galvanized sheets as roof for the single house structures. Also found on stage was the shrine for Masseur, located up stage right.

*Fig. 4. 47 The production of Miss Julie at the E.T.S. Studio. Written by August Strinberg, and directed by Baaba Lindsey. Set designed by David Amoo (2005).*
Similarly, David Amoo designed a realistic set for the production of August Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* put up at the E. T. Studio in 2005 (fig. 4.47). The story talks about Julie who has broken off her engagement and is drawn to Jean, and educated valet who works for her father. Jean is engaged to Christine who is a cook. The relationship between Julie and Jean escalates to love and one night the love is consummated. The two subsequently battle for the upper hand in the relationship. Jean convinces Julie that the only means of escape is to commit suicide. The design of the scenery demonstrated the interior of a house. The furniture, piano, flower pots and their arrangement shown in the design suggested a waiting area in a hotel or guest house. The use of bricks in the left corner of the structure served as a sharp contrast to the plain colours in the set, to create visual interest.

### 4.5.2 Set Design for the Amphitheatre and the Dance Hall

Before the reconstruction of the Studio at the School of Performing Arts, the first batch of students of the School either used the Amphitheatre behind the Commonwealth Hall; the Institute of African Studies quadrangle; or the main Dance Hall (now known as the Mawere Opoku Dance Hall) of the Department of Dance as their laboratories or training grounds for their practical works, among other activities. By virtue of the distance between the Amphitheatre and the then Ghana Drama Studio, the students were compelled to showcase excerpts of performances at the Ghana Drama Studio to invite the general public to the shows at the Amphitheatre.
Illustrations of sets designed for student performances at the Amphitheatre Common
Wealth Hall and the Dance Hall are shown in figures 4.48 and 4.49 respectively. In 1987,
Fati Ansah directed Mohammed Ben Abdallah’s *The Alien King*.

![Fig. 4. 48 A perspective drawing of the set design for the performance of Mohammed Abdallah’s The Alien King. Directed by Fati Ansah. Set designed by Fati Ansah (1987).](image)

The director was also the set designer for the performance. *The Alien King* was set in
Hausaland and in a period before the reign Islamic preacher, reformer, scholar and
statesman of Usman Dan Fodio. The specific place was Kano, in the house of Sanussi,
the Mallam. The designer employed such items like Hausa basket, woven spiky Hausa
hat, Cairo stool, and fan as set props to establish the locale and expose the audience to
Hausa culture. The design demonstrated a two dimensional set furnished with abstract
images, figures and shapes in tones of blue and white.
Although there were students who made an excellent attempt at set design and construction, the discipline gained full academic consideration in 1991 when John Djisenu introduced it as an academic programme of the Theatre Arts Department.

With the introduction of the programme, set design for theatre performances and other performing arts gained an extra fineness in development as is evident in the set designed for the performances at the E.T.S Studio and the National Theatre as well as other performance spaces such as the Amphitheatre and the Dance Hall (Mawere Opoku Dance Hall). Designers, most of whom were students then, begun to consider all the factors that contribute to the effective understanding of the play. Factors such as: the evocation of mood (atmosphere, feeling), definition of the world of the play (time, place, economics, etc.), reinforcement of production style, etc became pronounced in the designs of the sets. A Film Africa’s production of Kwaw Ansah’s Mother’s Tears held at the Dance Hall is an illustration of such types of set design.
Fig. 4.49 A production of Kwaw Ansah’s Mother’s Tears by Film Africa in 1994. Set designed by Johnson Edu

The cross-section of the set design in fig. 4.49 reveals a clearly realistic play and had the set clearly defining the world of the play, the economic stance of the characters, and the mood of the play. The three-dimensional ‘building’ (mud house) with roofing suggested a village setting with occupants who are poor, considering the extent of the cracks in the ‘building’. Beneath the windows stage right was hung fishing net revealing the dominant occupation of the characters; fishing. The design was tailored towards realism and selective naturalism. Located down stage right, behind the fence was a plantain tree. The dominant lines in this design were the horizontals and verticals used to define the outline of the set as well as the windows and door. These sharp angular lines were occasionally softened by the sweeping curves of the cracks. Likewise, the dark tones demonstrated in no particular repetitive pattern on the walls were alleviated with brown tones.
In conclusion, from the analysis of the data collected, it is revealed that set design in Ghana from the Concert Party tradition has undergone major changes. With the movement of the Concert Party to the National Theatre, set design developed to accommodate the vastness of the stage. What used to be a backdrop of cloth, or painted canvases or boards became a two-dimensional set of painted structures or townships on flats and positioned stage left, right and up centre of the acting space.

At the Drama Studio, per the data collected, it was noticed that little or no elaborate set design was used for the performances until the edifice was moved to the campus of the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana. Before the building of the Efua Theodora Sutherland Studio, students used other available performances spaces such as the Amphitheatre, Commonwealth Hall; the Dance Hall of the Dance Department and the Quadrangle of the Institute of African Studies. Students managed to put up set designs for their productions but with the introduction of set design as a programme first at the diploma level, more refined and defining sets were constructed for performances at the Efua Theodora Sutherland Studio.

The students who studied scenic design were also challenged to practice their skills at the National Theatre as well, leading to the developmental level in scenery design and construction for performances at the National Theatre among other performance spaces such as the Accra International Conference Centre and the Centres for National Culture. Set design, with its introduction as a programme, has developed gradually into the concept of realism, naturalism, and representationalism.
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a summary of the whole thesis is presented. This summary covers a recapitulation of the purpose of the study, the research questions or hypotheses addressed, the highlights of the pertinent literature reviewed, an overview of the research methods employed, the analysis performed on the data and a statement of the main findings. The summary is followed by conclusions as well as recommendations based on the findings of the study. I then close the chapter with suggestions for further research.

5.2 Summary

The problem that this study seeks to address is to contribute to filling the gap that exists between practice and intellectual engagement with respect to set design in Ghana. What this means is that although set construction has been part of the whole theatre experience, scholars in Ghana have not expended adequate energies to bring it more into the limelight in terms of presentation in scholarly writing. This work is a step in that direction as I devote some intellectual attention to set design in Ghana in terms of its history. There is no defining document that focuses on the history and development of set design in Ghana. Available information on scenic design in Ghana is scanty, fragmented and scattered in different writings such as directors’ prompt copies, project works of scenic design students. The existence of this gap in academic writing was the driving force for this study. The objective of this study was to analyze the history and development of set
design in Ghana from 1960 to 2000, systematically placing the stages in chronological advancement per decade. Specifically, the objectives of the study were:

1. To trace the beginnings of set design and construction in Ghana, using the Concert Party tradition.
2. To describe pictures of various sets designed within the period with the aim of pointing out the developmental stages.

The study was pursued under the aegis of a qualitative mode of enquiry meaning qualitative research approaches were employed for the selection of participants, collection and analysis of data. The data for study consisted of photographs (of performances collected from the National Theatre Library, personal pictures of notable set designers like Johnson Edu and David Amoo, and some extracted from videos of Concert Party performances put up within the year of consideration) and interviews with purposely selected persons who have had some direct or indirect relationship with the topic of study. In addition to these, newspapers, magazines and paintings were analyzed.

5.3 Summary of Findings

Upon the analysis of the data collected, I observed a difference in the structure of the sets used by the Concert Party tradition between the years of 1960 and 1990, and the National Theatre revival series. Concert Party traditions of the early years (1960-1990) used minimal set which basically comprised of backdrops of cloth, painted canvases or/and bill-boards that separated the acting space from the backstage space. These painted canvases and bill-boards bore images of thematic relevance and expression of the
performances for which they were made. The canvases and bill-boards were also used as elements of publicity for the shows. This tradition employed minimal set for their performances because it was a travelling theatre. The troupes tended to travel very light, thus very little room was available for set design. In other instances, where there were no opportunities for the demarcation of the acting space and the backstage, the performers put up shows against the plain background of the stage. Extra items seen on the Concert Party stage included the microphones, musical instruments and other few stage properties used.

When this travelling theatre tradition almost died out as a result of the political instability in the nation, it took the vision of the Key Soap brand of the Unilever Company and the collaboration of the National Theatre of Ghana to revive it in the early years of 1990. The numerous coup d’états with their accompanying curfews prevented the night-long concert shows from being held. Performers were unable to travel, particularly for long distances, since they could be caught after curfew. Most of the performers depended solely on the revenue generated from the performances and had no aside jobs. In the light of the restricted movement, performers became economically unstable and were not able to meet the financial demands of putting up shows. The National Theatre revival series brought a new trend in set design for the performances. The stage for the Concert Party had expanded; hitherto, plans were made to fill up the extra space of the enormous stage of the Theatre. Set designs for the Concert Party during this period were inclined towards aesthetics more than balancing them with functionality in the sense that the set in themselves provided little information about the plays for which they were built. Flats were painted with comic figures to suggest the form of production. At other times, in
addition to the painted comic figures usually placed on upstage-center, designers erected some vistas of villages, sea shore with coconuts trees, and huts on upstage left and upstage right of the stage. This design sometimes communicated the description of the environment of the performance.

After the Ghana Drama Studio was razed to the ground, the magnificent edifice of the National Theatre was commissioned in 1992. Performances at the National Theatre had well refined and defining set designs. The set designs were refined to give further details about the characters and about the stories that were being enacted (example see figs. 4.28 and 4.29). By the time of the commissioning of the building, the School of Performing Arts had begun training students in this field. This contributed to the difference in designing and presentation of sets for performances at the National Theatre of Ghana. The sets designed for the performances followed the ideals of the concept of realism, naturalism, representationalism. For other performances, designers inculcated some elements of symbolism to communicate and add meaning to the play. During this period (1992 – 2000), the stage of National Theatre was shared by the Concert Party troupes and the resident performance groups of the Theatre; the National Dance Company, the National Symphony Orchestra and the National Theatre Players (Abibigromma). A difference was clearly seen in the sets designed for the Concert Party and that of the resident groups, as well other productions that used the National Theatre stage. When budgets were approved for the construction of sets, designers did finer jobs and put up spectacular designs.

During the 1960s, with the help of the Rockefeller Foundation, and support from the government, Dr. Efua Sutherland built the Ghana Drama Studio. This studio was
purposed for experimenting with playwrights who wrote mostly for children and to push the agenda of a National Theatre Movement. In the period of 1960 until its relocation to the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana in 1990, Dr. Sutherland and her crew worked very little with set design. An interview with her daughter, Prof. Esi Sutherland, revealed that minimal set was used. The set usually had no specific elements painted on them; elements which could relate to and add more meaning to the performance. They basically joined flats and placed them sparingly on the stage to demarcate the exits and entrances for the performers. Use was made of stage properties but not extravagantly; some few chairs and benches, or logs and other hand props.

After being relocated to the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana the Ghana Drama Studio was renamed Efua Theodora Studio (E.T. S. Studio) in 1993. Performances in the newly-built E.T. studio realized a new form of set design as compared to the former one. This was also reflective of the presence of students who were being trained as professional set designers in the diploma programme at the School of Performing Arts. Designers begun to regard all the factors that contribute to the effective understanding of the play. Some of these student-turning-professionals were fed to the National Theatre. During this period at the E. T. S. Studio, the same ideals of realism were dominant. At the same time, some set designs for the performances at the E. T. S. Studio were also representational as was the case of some of the Concert Party sets.

5.4 Conclusion

From the summary of the findings, it is clear that changes have occurred in the design and construction of sets between the specified periods. Set design in Ghana has
developed from a mere back drop of cloth or canvas through a two-dimensional representation of townships or setting, to a three-dimensional realistic set. For the duration of the Concert Party tradition in the years of 1960 to early 1990s, there was a minimal use of scenery for performances. The Concert Party at that time was a travelling theatre tradition. Troupes moved from town to town to put up shows at the market squares, lorry stations, people’s compound houses, etc. They traveled with the band that usually played for them. This implied that the musical instruments would occupy part of the bus, followed by the sound systems, properties and then costumes. This left little or no room for any elaborate set design. This tradition chiefly made use of backdrops of cloth or canvas which had images of the major thematic element of the play. The images were as well painted on boards which served as tools for publicity. In the absence of the canvas backdrop, the bill-board was used as a background for the performance. Similarly, the usual six yards cloths usually used by Ghanaian men were also draped as backgrounds for the shows. For the Concert shows, performers fundamentally demarcated the acting space from the backstage using the backdrops. Particularly with performances at compound houses, the cloths were draped in front of the verandahs to distinguish the acting space which was in front of the cloth from the backstage, which was the verandah.

The National Theatre in conjunction with the Unilever Brothers, Ghana organized revival series for the Concert Party tradition when it almost collapsed as a result of the numerous curfews, consequential of the coup d’états in the country. The changes in set design occurred when the Concert Party moved to the National Theatre. For a while, during the early years of the revival, set design had a facelift from cloths draped as backdrops to the
construction of flats with illustrations of the rudiments of the tradition, as well as some village imagery. Between 1996 and 1998, set design for the Concert Part revivals developed into a two-dimensional painting of houses, structures, trees, shrubs, etc. on flats. The trees and shrubs (suggestive of forest) were painted on khaki material and rigged from the fly. This backdrop was flown down consequently in almost, if not all the performances. In front of the forest background was the two-dimensional set designs. By the year 1999, three-dimensional representation of setting was gradually gaining grounds in the designs for the Concert Party shows. Pillars were built to create a realistic effect. Additionally, structures were painted and built establish the concept the realism.

While the Concert Party revivals were taking place, the resident theatre group of the National Theatre; the National Theatre Players (Abibigromma) were also producing theatrical shows. These performances attracted the expertise of such designers as John Djisenu. Like the Concert Party revival series, set design for National Theatre performances in the early 1990s were two-dimensionally painted and constructed. With the contributions of such foreign designers as Anton Philips, set design developed from two-dimension to three-dimension realistic sets. Designers made use of the curtains and tormentors to efficiently achieve the mounting of individual structures rather than constructing a box which is enclosed by the audience. Selective naturalism was effected for some designs for performances of the resident theatre group.

At the Ghana Drama Studio between 1961, when it was established and 1989 when it was relocated to the School of Performing Arts, set design was very minimal. It was revealed that sometimes, performances employed no set design. The little design used was a plainly painted flats mounted sparingly on the stage. After the relocation of the Studio to
the University of Ghana campus in 1993, set design and construction for performances was modeled against two-dimensional representation. By 1995, set design for the performances at the Efua Theodora Sutherland Studio was gradually developing into three-dimensional realistic designs. Structures were erected to show the top, side and front views. Designers such as Johnson Edu, and John Djisenu constructed sets that resembled real houses and sometimes finished off the scenery with natural trees and shrub. Diploma students at the time such as, Aaron Yeboah Annan, and Philip Sarpong effectively tried their creative hands on the concept of three-dimensional painting to effect realism.

Per the analysis and descriptions of the set designs in this study, set design in Ghana as concerns the Concert Party, National Theatre and the Efua Theodora Sutherland has steadily developed with each design style dovetailing into the other. The use of backdrops (soft scenery) was not sidelined when there was a buildup in two-dimensional design (hard scenery). In similar vein, three-dimensional design was exploited together with two-dimensional style of designing. Development of set design in Ghana could be attributed to technological advancement and the need to bridge the gap, and the inflow of professionals and trainers in the set design industry. Secondly, the introduction of set design as a programme of study in the University in the early 1990s also influenced the elevation of set design for performances in Ghana.

One major limitation of this study however, was the difficulty presented by the lack of dating in some of the documents used for analysis. Some photographs, particularly those of the Concert Party, had no dates. This intricately rendered categorization into periods problematic. Consultations were made and people who were once part of the productions
gave rough estimations of their dating. Based on these estimations, analysis were made and conclusions drawn.

5.5 Recommendation

From the findings and conclusion of this study, I make the following recommendations:

1. Due to the difficulty encountered in getting visual materials for study, I encourage a fuller documentation of works of artists, directors, and designers. These forms of documentation of performances must include dates, names, picture description and so on. This will enable future researchers have the necessary materials for analysis.

2. Future researchers can focus on how technological advancement has influenced the advancement of set design in Ghana. Some of the techniques for set construction and scene changing in some of the performances at the National Theatre as described in this work would not have possible without the use of advanced technology. A deeper focus on this technological advancement might reveal further developmental traits in set design which were not captured in this current study.

3. The Theatre Arts Departments in the various Universities in Ghana, as institutions for learning and research should establish an archive where people with relevant documents of performances will be encouraged to send copies. While these documents will serve as primary objects of research, they will also serve as a backup of the original documents for the owners.
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Interviews

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Interview Guide

Section A: On the Concert Party Tradition

1. What inspiration accounted for the establishment of the Concert Party?

2. Who were the pioneers or pacesetter of this tradition?
   a. Who and what were their target audience?

3. Was there any form of scenery established during the early years of the tradition?
   a. What form did the scenery take?
   b. What was the motivation for the use of that form of scenery creation?

4. What would you say contributed to the use of that form of scenery design?

5. Did it make any contribution to the performance?
   a. What were some of these contributions, if there were any?

6. Performing Arts was introduced as an academic discipline in 1962. Has this introduction made any impact on the later designs of set for the Concert Party especially for the revival series?

7. Are there any readily available documents of the performances for analysis?

Section B: On the Ghana Drama Studio

8. What influenced in the institution of the Drama Studio?

9. Was there any new form of Ghanaian theatre in relation to the Drama Studio?

10. How were the set designs for performances at the Drama Studio like?
11. Did the form of set design add meaning to the play performed?

12. Was there any development in the nature of set design for the Studio in comparison with that of the Concert Party?

Section C: On the National Theatre

13. What is the history behind the National Theatre?

14. During the Concert Party revival series were there any sets created for the performances?
   a. What forms did they take?
   b. Did they make any impact on the performance?
   c. What were the basic materials used in the construction?
   d. Were there specific people in charge of designing set for the performances?
   e. Did the themes in the play influence the types of sets designed?

15. On the average how many performances do they resident groups; National Theatre Player (Abibigromma), National Dance Company, and National Symphony Orchestra put up in a year?

16. What were the set designs for their performances like, particularly those of the National Theatre Players?

Section D: On the Efua Theodora Sutherland Studio

17. Before the Drama Studio was relocated to the School of Performing Arts, where were performing arts students holding their practical lessons?
18. When was set design introduced as a programme of study in the School of Performing Arts?

   a. Has it made a significant impact on the outlook of set design for performances both in the Studio and other performance spaces?

19. In your view, do you think there has been some development in the general facade of set design in Ghana?

20. What is your take on scenic design in present day for performances or productions?
Appendix II: Introductory Letter

The Director
Ghana Television
P.O. Box 1633
Accra

Dear Sir,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION
HARRIET M.A. ADJAHOE
INDEX NO.10507271

This is to introduce to you Harriet M. A. Adjahoe, a final year MPhil student with the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ghana.

As part of the University’s regulations for the completion of the MPhil program, Harriet must fulfil the requirements of research which is titled: *History of Set Design in Ghana: A Study of Production of the Concert Party, National Theatre and the Drama Studio, 1960 - 2000.*

To enable her achieve this, she needs your permission to review some pictures and footages.

I will be glad if you could please assist her in this pursuit.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

DR. AGYEMAN OSSEI
(HEAD OF DEPARTMENT)
Appendix III: Request for Documents for Analysis

Harriet Mawukplorm Abla Adjahoe  
Department of Theatre Arts  
School of Performing Arts  
University of Ghana  
Legon  
16th May 16, 2016  

The Director  
Ghana Television  
P. O. Box 1633  
Accra  

Dear Sir/Madam,  

REQUEST FOR PICTURES AND FOOTAGES FOR MPhil THESIS  

I am an MPhil student of the Theatre Arts Department at the University of Ghana. My thesis project is History of Set Design in Ghana: A Study of Productions of the Concert Party, National Theatre and the Drama Studio, 1960 – 2000. To enable me achieve the requirements of this project, there is the need to study pictures and videos of these aforementioned productions, as well as venues for theatre productions.  

It is my belief that Ghana Television (GTV), as the premier broadcasting station in Ghana and having archival data accrued over the years, will be of immense help to achieving my aim. In view of this, I wish to request your kind permission to be granted access to the materials which will be of great help to my thesis project.  

Counting on your cooperation.  

Thank you.  

Yours Sincerely,  

Harriet M. A. Adjahoe
Appendix IV: Interview Recruitment Letter

Date: 10th February, 2016

Harriet Mawukplorm A. Adjahoe
Graduate Student
Theatre Arts Department, School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana

Dear Prof. Martin Owusu,

INTERVIEW RECRUITMENT LETTER

You are invited to participate in a research project titled History of Set Design: A Study of Productions of Concert Party, National Theatre, and the E. T. S Drama Studio, 1960-2000 to be conducted by Harriet M. A. Adjahoe from the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana. The research is geared towards analysing and documenting the trends in the developmental process of set design in theatre productions in Ghana.

Scenery has gradually gained significant role in the Ghanaian society, being evidently recognized in our theatres, schools, social events and even churches. Despite its importance in our quest for globalization, scenic design, including other aspects of theatre productions, such as lighting, costume and make-up, sound, are lacking in documentation and scholarly attention. To this effect gathering literature on trends and developmental processes of these aspects of theatre in Ghana, becomes problematic. By interviewing key informants, the researcher hopes to collect data and analyse to inform the study of scenic design; its trends and developmental stages in Ghana.

You have been selected to participate in this study because of the great achievement you have attained in your contribution to theatre development in Ghana. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview, lasting between 10 to 15 minutes, from February to March 2016. Interview venues and time schedules will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking hand written notes the researcher will audio tape conversations for transcription and validation purposes. This will be done with your consent. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Your consent to participate in this interview, as indicated below, demonstrates your willingness to have your name used in any resulting documents and publications and to relinquish confidentiality. Your participation is voluntary. I anticipate that the results of the study will be of great benefit to the Ghanaian theatre and the academia. However, I cannot guarantee that you, personally, will receive any benefits from this research.
CONSENT FORM

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the researcher at (0200986174 or ablaboni@gmail.com or Mr. John K. Djisenu at 0266702694). If not, please read and initial each of the following to indicate your consent

[ ] I consent to the use of audiotapes and note taking during my interview.
[ ] I consent to my identification as a participant in this study.
[ ] I consent to the potential use of quotations from the interview.
[ ] I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organisation with which I am associated.

[ ] I wish to have the opportunity to review and possibly revise my comments and the information that I provide prior to these data appearing in the final version of any publications that may result from this study.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate; that you not waiving any legal claims, right or remedies. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without any penalty. You have been given a copy of this letter to keep.

Name: ____________________________________________

Signature: ________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________

Thank you in advance for your interest and consideration.

Sincerely,

Harriet Mawukplorm A. Adjahoe
Graduate Student
School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana