

# The Legacy of Bernard Woma: A Resource for Independent Study of Dagara Gyil

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# Bernard Woma (1966-2018)

- ❖ Born in Upper West Region of Ghana
- ❖ Began playing gyil at 2 years old
- ❖ Solo xylophonist & later master drummer for the National Dance Company of Ghana
- ❖ Founded the Dagara Music Center

*“As a newborn, Bernard’s hands were clenched in fists as if he was clutching xylophone mallets, a sign that he was destined to become a Gyil player.”*





# Bernard Woma & the Dagara Music Center

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- Where: Medie, Ghana
- When: 2000
- What: Community-oriented, multicultural learning environment
- Why: Aims to educate and empower local and global artists through scholarship and research



# Research Motivation

- Before his passing, Bernard sought to make Dagara music accessible to people outside of Ghana
  - His intention was to educate both Ghanaians and global artists to preserve the traditions and values of the community
  - Bernard studied at Indiana University and State University of New York, Fredonia, where he wrote about the benefits of teaching West African indigenous music outside of the continent
- The goal of this research is to preserve this oral tradition while utilizing pedagogical practices present in West African music, as opposed to forcing this repertoire to fit into the confines of Western European pedagogy

# Objectives

1

Take an oral tradition and make it accessible as a written resource

2

Teach beginner gyil students the fundamental repertoire

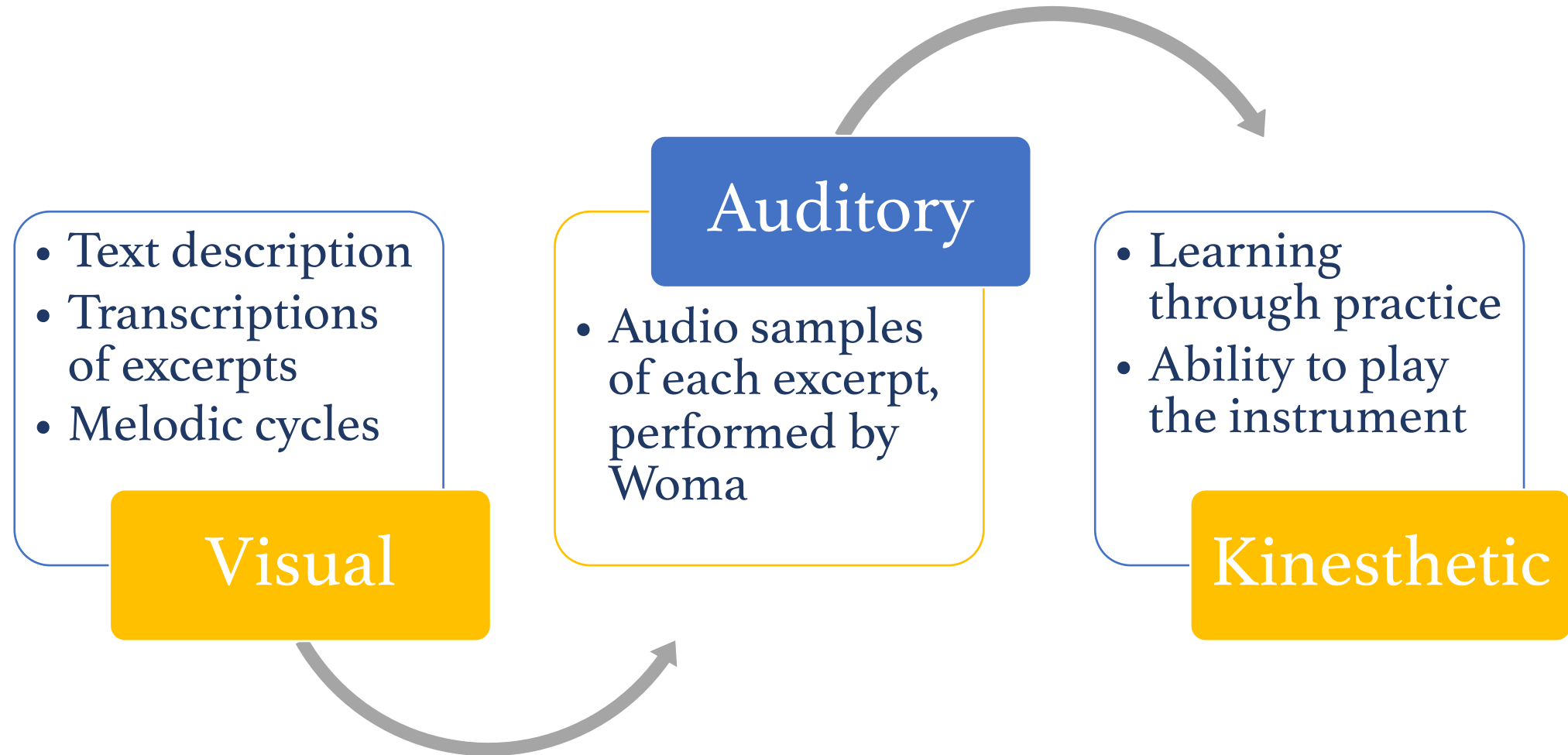
3

Translate gyil repertoire to Western notation

4

Utilize Bernard Woma's pedagogical practices

# Methodology: Triple-Channel Learning Model



**Triple-channel learning:** psychological strategy used in neurolinguistic programming to increase information retention; utilizes three modes of learning—visual, auditory, kinesthetic

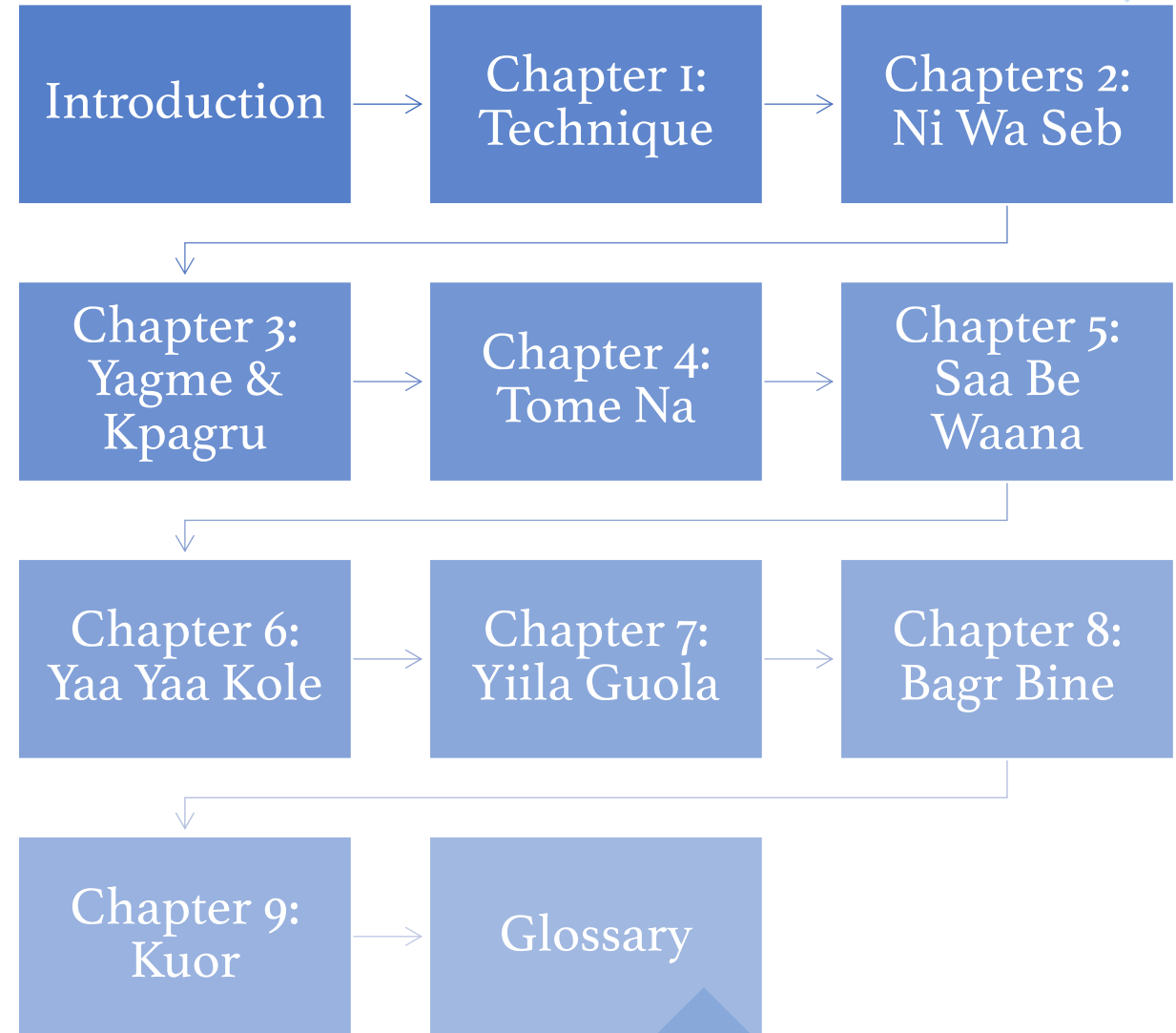
# The Method Book

## What's inside?

- ~Chapters 2-8: each chapter focuses on one traditional Bewaa tune
- ~Chapter 9: focuses on the Kuor (hand drum), often played alongside the gyil

## In each chapter:

- ~Notated breakdown of the “melody” or **yielu**
- ~Example of “accompaniment” or **yagme**
- ~Visual depiction of the melodic cycle
- ~Audio example to accompany the notated figures, taken from recordings of Bernard



Ni Wa Seb (song/yielu)



Fig 2.1 Variation 1



Fig. 2.2 Variation 2



Fig. 2.3 Variation 3A



Fig. 2.4 Variation 3B



Fig. 2.5 Variation 4A



# Ni Wa Seb Solo

Bernard Woma

Line 1



Blue: yielu

Yellow: yagme

Green: solo  
arrangement  
combining  
yielu and  
yagme



With the understanding of the AABB yagme cycle, we can now create an accompaniment pattern with the hand in the lower octave by outlining the necessary bichords. Using either of the repeated octave notes, we can create two options:

Yagme Option 1



Yagme Option 2





# Conclusions

- Triple-channel model communicated information effectively
- I was able to successfully study from the book without much consultation from my mentor
- Our intended audiences background matches mine: intermediate to advanced percussion
  - Ability to read and understand Western melodic and rhythmic notation

# Future Applications

## The method book:

- Create similar resources for other related West African music traditions
- Expand and use the triple-channel learning model for other non-Western music styles

## Personal research goals:

- Studying similar music traditions through the lens of gender, class, sexuality, and race

# References

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