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Ownership and contracting in Ghanaian film music: An exploratory study of practitioners' accounts

Ownership and contracting in Ghanaian film music: An exploratory study of practitioners' accounts

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Abstract
Film music is both an expressive component of cinematic storytelling and a form of creative labour whose value depends partly on how authorship, ownership, licensing and remuneration are negotiated. This study examines the copyright-related experiences of film music composers and sound practitioners in Ghana, focusing on copyright awareness, contractual arrangements, attribution, remuneration and digital distribution. It draws on a qualitative design and semi-structured interviews with ten practitioners who had worked in both the Kumawood and Ghallywood film production contexts in Ghana's film industry. The accounts are analysed thematically to examine how copyright is understood and negotiated in professional practice. The findings point to uneven copyright literacy, variation between formal and informal contractual arrangements, and uncertainty about the rights attached to commissioned music and its subsequent circulation. One participant recognised that digital platforms simultaneously expand the reach of creative work and complicate efforts to protect and monetise it. The analysis situates these experiences within the political economy of Ghanaian audio-visual production, where creative collaboration takes place under differing conditions of training, resources and bargaining power. Rather than treating copyright protection as a matter of legislation alone, it can be observed that its practical effectiveness depends on legal knowledge, clear written agreements, accessible rights management support and the capacity of composers to negotiate the terms of their labour. Given the small qualitative sample, the findings are analytically indicative rather than statistically representative of the Ghanaian film industry.

Introduction
Film music shapes the emotional, aesthetic and cultural interpretation of audio-visual narratives (Herget, 2021; Kalinak, 2023). It is also intellectual property with economic value for composers and filmmakers (Rutschman, 2015; Taylor, 2023). Ghana's celluloid, television, video film and digital production histories have created opportunities for original scoring and the use of indigenous musical expressions (Garritano, 2013; Meyer, 2015). Yet soundtracks are collaborative: directors, producers, composers, arrangers, performers and sound professionals may contribute to a single work. This raises questions about authorship, ownership, attribution, licensing, remuneration and subsequent use. Ghana's Copyright Act, 2005 (Act 690), as amended by Act 788, provides a statutory framework,

but legal protection does not ensure that practitioners understand or exercise their rights. Uncertainty may concern commission fees, ownership of recordings, permissions granted to producers, or reuse in trailers, promotion and digital distribution.

These issues extend across African creative industries, where audio-visual works circulate digitally and draw on contemporary composition and inherited musical traditions. Ownership and commercial exploitation intersect with recognition of creative labour, equitable remuneration and indigenous cultural expressions (De Beukelaer & Fredriksson, 2019; Dugeri, 2024). De Beukelaer and Fredriksson (2019) discuss figures supplied by Ghanaian collective management organisations to estimate music's contribution to national output, highlighting a disparity between music's economic contribution and royalties documented in that context. Digital circulation expands visibility while complicating attribution, rights management and identification of rights holders (Jedlowski, 2017; Marks, 2017). Copyright challenges must therefore be examined within specific industrial, cultural and legal settings.

Research on Ghanaian music copyright has considered folklore, piracy and audio-visual infringement (Collins, 2006; Agyei, 2023), but less attention has been paid to how film music composers and sound practitioners negotiate rights in everyday production. Agyei (2020) observes that "though researchers allude to the challenge inherent in enforcing intellectual property protections beyond state's borders, none have proffered measures and recommendations that will limit the problem. The international nature of the challenge dictates a both regional and global solution" (p. 397). As Kumawood and Ghallywood films circulate beyond Ghana, localised understandings of music-use are insufficient. This study addresses the empirical gap by examining practitioners' understanding of copyright protection and their negotiation of ownership, licensing, attribution, remuneration, contracts and digital distribution. It also identifies strategies for improving awareness, protection and fair payment.

The Significance of the study

The study examines copyright infringement through the experiences of creative practitioners who use music in films. Recent Ghanaian cases involving state agencies and broadcasters illustrate the consequences of copyright disputes ("GBC loses case against GHAMRO," 2024; Joy Entertainment, 2024). Such disputes may be avoided or reduced when users follow established copyright principles. As Kirui and Owoaje (2026) observe, "While the impacts of technology on music and the failures of intellectual property (IP) law have been well documented" (p. 30), practitioners' everyday navigation of copyright also requires attention.

Issahaku (2024) reports that films in Northern Ghana could face bans if copyright law is actively enforced. The reported concerns include using graphic works, billboards and music without owners' consent. Issahaku warns: "You see movies where actors use various music tracks without seeking professional advice or getting consent from the artists. These graphic designs, drawings, artworks, and music are intellectual properties. If they are registered under the Copyright Administration, the owners can sue filmmakers at any time and potentially receive significant compensation," (Issahaku, 2024). This illustrates why copyright practice matters to an industry in which music scoring and composition are central. It highlights the need for context-specific support across Ghana's production sector. rights awareness and practice clearly.

Literature Review

Copyright, authorship and indigenous musical culture

Copyright protects eligible creative works against specified unauthorised uses. Ghana's Copyright Act, 2005 (Act 690), as amended by Act 788, provides the main framework for musical works, sound recordings and audio-visual works. Section 76 defines an audio-visual work as a series of related images that create an impression of motion, with or without accompanying sounds. It defines an author as "a person who creates a work, and in the case of cinematographic work or sound recording means the person by whom the arrangements for the making of the work or recording is undertaken" (p. 30). Film scoring must distinguish a composition, recorded performance, sound recording and completed film because each may involve different contributors and rights. Authorship concerns creation; ownership concerns rights held under law and contract (Nwabachili & Nwabachili, 2015). A composer's contribution does not automatically establish control over every later use, and payment for commissioned work does not necessarily establish that all rights have been transferred. Sections 5, 6, 7, 9 and 76 address economic and moral rights. In Ghana, reported violations of musicians' economic rights remain a concern (Abu Andani, 2017; Mensah, 2023). FIPAG president James Aboagye has argued that copyright law is ineffective in protecting creators (Mensah, 2023), while the Copyright Office has maintained that rights holders do not always activate available legal remedies (Ghana Business, 2019). Section 7 further provides that "in the absence of any contract to the contrary' the economic right in a work vest in the person who commissions it, where the commissioned author created the work in the course of the commission" (p. 6). Section 76(b) also "states photography not comprised in an audio-visual film" (p. 30). The Act's definitions of "audio-visual work" and "author" are relevant because they identify the protected work and the person responsible for its creation. An author "means a person who creates a work, and in the case of cinematographic work or sound recording means the person by whom the arrangements for the making of the work or recording is undertaken" (p. 30).

Agyei (2023) highlights the difficulty of determining creative rights in collaborative audio-visual production. Film scoring may involve directors, producers, composers, arrangers, performers and sound professionals (Faulkner, 2017). Where agreements do not specify each contributor's responsibilities and rights, distribution can complicate authorship, attribution and ownership. Analysis must therefore consider both statutory law and the practices through which rights are negotiated.

Copyright also intersects with indigenous musical traditions and cultural expressions. Collins (2006) identifies tensions between copyright, folklore and music piracy, particularly between individualised authorship and collective musical practices. Section 4 of Act 690 vests rights in folklore "in the President on behalf of and in trust for the people of the Republic"; section 17 makes those rights perpetual, while section 44 restricts certain sales and adaptations without written permission from the National Folklore Board. Indigenous music may involve shared repertoires, communal performance and inherited rhythmic patterns that do not align neatly with individual authorship (Boateng, 2011). These issues arise when films incorporate indigenous melodies, songs, rhythms or instrumental traditions.

The legal implications depend on the material used and the nature of the creative contribution (Rahmatian, 2011). An original score inspired by a traditional rhythm, an arrangement of an existing song and a recorded cultural performance raise different questions about originality, attribution, permission and recognition.

Film scoring, creative labour, contracts and remuneration

Creative labour encompasses the intellectual, artistic, technical and organisational activities involved in producing and circulating cultural products (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). Creative work involves tensions between artistic autonomy and commercial imperatives, often exposing practitioners to precarious employment, uncertain remuneration, competition and self-exploitation (Taylor, 2023). Moyo et al. (2025) note that "music artists continue to lose potential revenue due to illicit online access" (p. 60). Film music composition should therefore be understood as both artistic expression and professional labour shaped by budgets, deadlines, contracts and bargaining power. Caves (2000) explains that contracts allocate responsibilities, risks, rewards and decision-making authority in creative industries. These perspectives are relevant to Ghana, where unclear agreements about ownership, attribution, licensing and payment may undermine composers' interests. Taylor (2023) also foregrounds the labour involved in producing music for screen media. Film scoring involves composing, arranging, selecting and integrating music into an audio-visual narrative. Directors, producers, composers, editors and sound personnel can influence its structure, instrumentation, timing and emotional character; agreements should clarify their respective contributions. Licensing matters when productions incorporate existing songs or recordings (Ali, 2026; Tushnet, 2014). Rights in a composition may differ from rights in a recording, so permission for one does not necessarily authorise use of the other (Brauneis, 2014; Livingston & Urbinato, 2013). Reuse of a score in trailers or advertisements may also depend on the original agreement. Section 76 further defines public performance and public places, including cinemas, concert halls, bars and other venues (pp. 32–33). Public disputes have involved Wendy Shay's reported threat to sue Netflix producers over use of her song (Odoom, 2021), and musicians Worlasi and DJ Azonto's objections to political campaign use of their music without approval (Ameyaw Debrah, 2024; Bongo Ideas, 2020). Such cases underline the need for public understanding of copyright and music-use. The Act's definition of public performance also refers to "broadcasting" and "communication to the public"; it defines a "public place" to include venues to which the public may gain access, with or without payment (pp. 32–33).

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework connects digital distribution, copyright management and the working conditions of music practitioners. Digital channels including streaming services, social media, video-sharing platforms and television expand the circulation of films and soundtracks (Donoghue et al., 2021). They also raise questions about attribution, licensing, rights management and the identification of rights holders. Ewick and Silbey's (1998) concept of legal consciousness helps explain how people understand and engage with law in everyday life. Although their work is not about copyright, it illuminates how creators interpret ownership, contractual obligations and infringement, and how they respond through formal institutions or informal practices. Film music may circulate within a completed film, promotional extracts or other audio-visual content (Cuelenaere, 2024); authorisation depends on the rights involved and the permission granted. Digital circulation can make monitoring difficult: practitioners may need to identify who uploaded a film, whether a soundtrack has been reused independently and whether use is authorised (Li, 2020). Ewick and Silbey identify three orientations to law: "before," "with" and "against" the law. These describe law as authoritative, as a resource used strategically, or as a system resisted or challenged. Applied here, the framework helps interpret how composers understand ownership, negotiate contracts and respond to unauthorised use. The extent of these challenges among Ghanaian practitioners is an empirical question, not an automatic consequence of technology. These issues also matter to African audio-visual industries, where local productions and musical expressions circulate across borders and platforms (Asante, 2025; Kirui et al., 2025; Langevang et al., 2026). Copyright management must therefore be considered

in relation to cultural, contractual and technological conditions. Macaulay's (1963) work on exchange relations further draws attention to planning, anticipated contingencies and legal sanctions in contractual relationships. He cautions that "Not only are contract and contract law not needed in many situations, their use may have, or may be thought to have, undesirable consequences. Detailed negotiated contracts can get in the way of creating good exchange relationships between business units" (p. 15). He also states that "contract is not treated as synonymous with an exchange itself, which may or may not be characterised as contractual. Nor is contract used to refer to a writing recording an agreement" (p. 3). These insights help distinguish written instruments from the broader relationships through which practitioners exchange services and negotiate rights.

Existing studies identify three related concerns: the gap between legal protection and enforcement; complex authorship and ownership in collaborative production; and the interaction of indigenous musical culture, creative labour and economic interests (Baloyi, 2014; Moyo et al., 2025). Collins (2006) examines Ghanaian musical traditions and copyright, while Agyei (2023) addresses infringement and enforcement. This study addresses an empirical gap by examining how composers and sound practitioners experience copyright in Ghanaian practice.

Methodology

Research approach and design

The study adopted a qualitative, interpretive design to examine film music composers' and sound practitioners' experiences in Ghana. This approach suited questions about how practitioners understand copyright and interpret relationships among creative work, ownership and remuneration. The exploratory study does not estimate the prevalence of infringement across the industry. Informed consent was obtained to publish anonymised data. Ten practitioners were purposively selected for at least five years' experience in film music composition, scoring or sound production. Face-to-face interviews took place in Accra between 27 August and 19 September 2026. Practitioners based in Kumasi completed an online questionnaire, followed by telephone calls for clarification. Participants had worked in Kumawood and Ghallywood contexts. These prominent production settings were selected because all participants had experience in both. The sample provides variation and depth, not statistical representation. Producers, entertainment lawyers, music publishers, collective management representatives and copyright administrators were not included, which limits the range of institutional perspectives.

Table 1: Summarised data of participants

Participant	Number of years in film sound scoring/ composition	Qualification	Kumawood experience Sound scored	Ghallywood experience/ sound scored
Participant 1	5	BFA	2	1
Participant 2	23	MA	13	7
Participant 3	30	MPhil	5	4
Participant 4	7	MFA	2	2
Participant 5	9	Diploma	3	2
Participant 6	18	Senior High School	9	1
Participant 7	7	Diploma	3	2
Participant 8	16	PhD	3	1
Participant 9	14	BFA	4	3
Participant 10	17	SHS	7	1

Data collection
Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and online questionnaires. Five participants in Accra were interviewed face-to-face; practitioners in Kumasi responded online and were contacted by telephone for follow-up clarification. English was used. The guide covered professional experience, creative practice, cultural identity, copyright awareness, ownership, contracts, remuneration, professional relationships, digital distribution and infringement. Questions elicited accounts of actual production practice rather than testing legal knowledge against a predetermined score.

Data analysis
The interview material was analysed thematically through repeated reading and qualitative content analysis. Responses were first organised deductively around the interview domains; meaningful segments were coded and grouped into subcategories. Recurring patterns and differences were then compared across participants and research questions. The analysis focused on professional practice and cultural identity; copyright awareness, ownership and protection; contracts, remuneration and power relations; and digital distribution. Quotations are retained to foreground participants' accounts and distinguish reported experience from interpretation.

Findings and discussions
This section analyses accounts from ten practitioners, identified as P1–P10, who had worked in Kumawood and Ghallywood contexts. It examines professional experience, cultural and narrative influences, copyright awareness, ownership, contracts, remuneration, professional relationships and digital distribution. Participant quotations foreground reported experiences; interpretation is related to the study's research questions and relevant literature.

Professional experience, creative practice and cultural identity
Participants described varied professional pathways combining formal training, apprenticeship and practical experience. One practitioner noted that independent filmmakers sometimes combine directing, composing, recording and sound editing (P10, Personal Communication, August 2026). P1 described emerging technologies: "in this digital era, a lot is going on and technology is evolving. Now about to get the new experience with some technologies." Asked about technical challenges, P1 responded, "that he has not encountered any technical challenges" (Participant 1, Personal Communication, August 2026). These responses suggest that entry into composition may precede sustained exposure to its commercial dimensions.

P2 reported scoring approximately twenty films and explained: "I studied Film Sound Production that's how I became involved in composing and scoring films" (P2). P7 described an experiential pathway: "I have worked on countless numerous films and documentaries. I have a studio. But I have no sound education in Film music. I understudy someone and now owns my personal studio" (Personal Communication, September 2026). These accounts show that formal education and experiential learning both contribute to professional practice. P2's workflow involved script reading, consultation with the director, composition, synchronisation, revision, mixing and delivery. P3, with thirty years in the audio-visual industry, described pre-production meetings, research, hiring musicians and studios, recording and post-production: "Receive brief, attend pre-production meetings, ask relevant questions, research, begin writing/composing, contact and book musicians and studios, receive first cut as a guide for studio-work." (Participant 3 Personal Interview; September 2026). Work may continue through rerecording, mixing and mastering. P3 explained that "mostly, the director or production manager hired by the production house discourse and pays sound and music composers. There is often no industry fixed rate for payment and the percentage to pay at any stage" (Participant 3 Personal Interview; September 2026). P4 said payment and contextual agreement were "Mostly made based on mutual agreements based on the nature of the project; independents of

commissioned" (Personal Communication, August 2026). For three independent films, P4 reported no signed contract, although an amount was agreed.

These accounts frame film music composition as artistic, technical and collaborative labour. P9 stated: "Since composers must interpret narratives, respond to directorial intentions, coordinate with other production personnel and ensure that musical elements correspond with the film's visual and emotional structure, there is need to have film education to score film sound" (Participant 9, Personal Communication, August 2026). The contrast between P1's emerging experience and P2's and P3's established workflows illustrate varied professional trajectories. P6 connected musical choices to cultural interpretation and copyright: "I have seen most filmmakers who just slap any sound or music into a film without either weighing the cultural or meaning behind that music or the copyright implications. Since most of these locally made films do not travel outside of Ghana, they rarely receive copyright infringement suits from their owners. But one day, these can lead someone into trouble" (Personal Communication, September 2026). This is a participant's assessment; local circulation does not remove copyright obligations.

Technical competence and copyright literacy emerged as distinct forms of professional knowledge. P5 observed that "it is possible that most sound composers may possess artistic expertise but very much ignorant about the copyright legislation undergirding music and sound production environment where ownership, payment schedules, licensing and third-party use are documented" (Personal Communication, September 2026). This is a practitioner's assessment, not a general finding about all composers. Cultural identity and narrative interpretation also informed musical decisions. P1 identified "Culture" as an influence. P2 explained: "I consider the story, genre, characters, emotions, culture, and dialogue. I also follow the director's vision to ensure the music fits the scenes and enhances the audience's experience." P3 emphasised "originality and desire for excellence and authenticity and relevance to the image and overall narrative is key." P8 and P10 reported composing alternative soundtrack options, while P7 and P9 said films they watched informed their choices. These accounts position music as an interpretive practice shaping narrative meaning and emotional expression. Music is not simply a technical layer; it can carry cultural meanings that affect representations of people and places.

Copyright awareness, ownership and protection of creative rights

Copyright awareness emerged as a central concern. Asked who owns music composed for films and how ownership is negotiated without a contract, participants gave varied accounts. P1 acknowledged limited knowledge: "I have little knowledge of the copyright law and its implication" (P1). P9 and P10 had not encountered infringement in their own practice. However, the absence of a reported incident does not establish that infringement is absent; it may reflect limited exposure or monitoring. P2 described having "a very fair idea on copyright laws concerning film music composition and use" and reported no unauthorised use. Asked about infringement, P2 said: "None yet Because make everything from scratch without sampling" (Participant 2, Personal Communication September 2026).

P2 associates original composition with a lower risk of some disputes, but creating music from scratch does not eliminate questions of co-authorship, performers' contributions, sound recording ownership, synchronisation permissions, contractual transfers or subsequent use. Copyright concerns therefore extend beyond sampling and copying to the arrangements governing original works. Section 76(d) defines a "sound recording" as "work that results from the fixation of a series of musical, spoken or other sound, or of a representation of sounds but does not include sounds accompanying a motion picture or other audio-visual work regardless of the nature of the material objects in which those sounds are embodied" (p. 31).

P3, who operates a sound studio, described his copyright knowledge as "Basic" and said he was "developing a legal framework which would guide the intellectual property of their music" (Personal Communication; August, 2026). This suggests that the perceived need for formal protection can persist among experienced practitioners. Production expertise does not necessarily bring equivalent knowledge of licensing, rights administration or enforcement.

Participants understood ownership differently. P1 said: "I sometimes feel like signing every agreement with the client before commencing to score music for them. This is most times tedious" (P1). P2 described collaborative creation: "Myself and other producer who helped in the creative process." (P2). P2 added: "Contracts are always drafted and negotiated to have my own and reserve all right to my music and other creative assets." (P2). This account suggests both independent and joint creative arrangements. Section 9(6) states: "an assignment or licence of a jointly authored work is 'subject to the authorisation of the joint authors" (p. 8). P3 described ownership as "Personal" while reporting that a legal framework was being developed and that arrangements were mostly informal. These accounts range from tentative reliance on agreement to explicit contractual negotiation; they do not establish that the arrangements are legally equivalent. Macaulay's (1963) account helps explain the importance of evidence when informal relationships break down. Section 9(4) of Act 690 states that "assignment of copyright shall be in writing and signed by the owner of the copyright or by the person authorised by the owner of the copyright for the purpose" (p. 7). The statutory wording that an assignment or licence of a jointly authored work is "'subject to the authorisation of the joint authors" (s. 9(6), p. 8) reinforces the need to identify contributors before rights are transferred. Macaulay (1963) observes that "contracts are carefully negotiated" (p. 8), underscoring the evidentiary value of clear terms.

A composition, performance, sound recording and permission to synchronise music with moving images are distinct interests. A composer may create a score, musicians perform it, a producer finance the recording and a filmmaker obtain permission to use it. Rights depend on the circumstances and applicable law. Participants' accounts reveal their understanding and reported arrangements but cannot, without the relevant contracts and facts, establish legal ownership of a particular work. Practitioners need guidance to identify rights created, retained, licensed or transferred in each production.

Copyright is both a legal entitlement and a professional resource. Its practical value depends on composers' ability to document contributions, negotiate terms, identify relevant rights and pursue remedies. The findings support education on commissioned composition, co-authorship, recording ownership, licensing, attribution, royalties and digital exploitation. They also raise questions about bargaining power: composers dependent on producers for commissions, payment, recognition or future work may have limited capacity to negotiate. Legislation alone cannot ensure control when rights are not understood or recorded clearly.

Contractual arrangements, remuneration and professional power relations

Participants described varied contractual and payment practices. P2 reported that contracts were routinely drafted and negotiated, whereas P3 characterised arrangements as "Mostly informal." P4 and P10 said formal or informal arrangements depended on the project. Under Act 690, an assignment must be "in writing and signed" (s. 9(4)), while a licence "may be oral, written or inferred from conduct" (s. 9(5), p. 8). Informal arrangements may therefore create implied licences. P8 described late commissioning: "sometimes they finish editing the first draft of the film before they call me for create sound for them" (Participant 8, Personal Communication, September 2026). P3 stated: "payment is done based on agreements, or token is given afterwards." and added: "Part-payment is done from start or mid-way, and remainder paid after delivery." Staged payment is not inherently problematic;

uncertainty arises when amounts, deadlines, ownership, permitted uses and remedies are unspecified. P2 reported: "The provisions are that I receive all royalties and credit as the original owner of the film music." This account concerned commercially viable films. The evidence points to variation rather than a single industry practice. P2 explained: "The amount charged for a project often depends on project's budget, film length, musical complexities, the composer's experience, the types and number of sounds to be scored and the agreement with the producer or director". These statements further illustrate how project scope and informal payment practices shape negotiation.

P3 described the commercial environment as: "Its too much of a free market situation. The non-existence or non-enforcement of film music business regulations is a nemesis." This is the participant's perception, not proof that Ghana lacks legislation or institutions. The Copyright Office, Copyright Monitoring Team (s. 50), Copyright Tribunal (s. 51) and collecting societies have oversight roles. P7 said: "I can sometimes use a filmmakers logistics for personal productions at a discount hire fee because of my working relation as a sound composer for the media house" (Personal Communication, August 2026). P9 stated that "my remuneration as a sound composer is often based on my demand from creative industry and professional negotiation" (Personal Communication August 2026). P2 explained that fees depend on "project's budget, film length, musical complexities, the composer's experience, the types and number of sounds to be scored and the agreement with the producer or director" (Personal Communication, September 2026). Income is therefore shaped by production resources and negotiation as well as creative effort.

Copyright issues should be considered across Kumawood and Ghallywood production contexts, without treating either as uniform. Projects differ in budget, distribution, production structure and contractual practice. This sample cannot rank the two contexts in copyright protection or remuneration. Comparative research should consider industry affiliation alongside experience, training, project scale and access to legal support.

Professional relationships and creative autonomy also shape contractual outcomes. P1 emphasised agreeing on musical direction: "So basically you need to come into the contractual agreement based on the type of scoring a client wants and the type of project that scored music would be used for." (Participant One, Personal Communication, September 2026). P2 said: "Good communication with the director, producer, and sound team helps me share ideas on how best to enter into a contract and how to improve the music for a client." P2 added that "ownership depends on the mutual agreement made before the execution of the project" (P2), while P3 observed: "The better relations they have, the better the atmosphere for great creative work." Consultation and shared expectations support coordination among composers, directors, producers and sound teams.

Collaboration does not necessarily mean equal decision-making power. Directors may shape aesthetic direction, while producers influence creative possibilities through budgets, commissioning and distribution. Composers negotiate artistic preferences within professional and financial constraints. Creative autonomy and copyright ownership are distinct: freedom during production does not necessarily confer control over later use, and ownership does not guarantee artistic independence. Contracts consequently structure authority, agency and economic power in film production.

Digital circulation and monetisation implications for the Ghanaian film industry

Digital distribution expands the circulation and potential commercial life of film music, but can complicate attribution, ownership verification, monitoring and revenue collection. P2 described this tension: "Digital platforms help me reach more people and share my music easily, but protecting my work and earning money from it can be challenging" (Personal Communication, September 2026). Wider accessibility does not necessarily produce effective protection or sustainable remuneration. A

score may also appear in promotional materials, social media, soundtrack releases and other channels; payment entitlements depend on the agreement, applicable law and nature of the use. Digital distribution is therefore an extension of production's contractual and copyright relationships, not merely a technological issue.

Practitioners must document authorship, secure attribution, monitor circulation and negotiate digital exploitation. These issues may be especially consequential for independent composers without ready access to legal or administrative support. Online visibility creates opportunities but does not guarantee control or an equitable share of revenue. Effective participation in digital markets depends on rights documentation and the economic conditions under which composers work.

The data do not establish the prevalence of digital infringement among participants. P2 described difficulties protecting work and earning money but did not identify specific incidents, platforms or losses. Similarly, no reported infringement does not prove that infringement is absent. Further research should distinguish documented unauthorised use from concerns about attribution, monitoring and monetisation.

Written agreements should specify the rights granted, scope and duration of use, payment obligations, attribution and treatment of music used beyond the original film. They should address soundtrack releases, promotion, reuse and subsequent licensing where relevant. Documentation cannot eliminate disputes but can reduce ambiguity. Under Act 690, section 7 vests economic rights in the commissioner by default unless the contract provides otherwise; an assignment must be written and signed (s. 9(4)), and moral rights cannot be transferred (s. 9(1)). Producers must identify the author on an audio-visual work's label or container (s. 10(1)–(2)).

At policy level, the findings support closer examination of how copyright protections operate in practitioners' working conditions. The study did not independently assess participants' legal knowledge or verify every reported dispute with clients.

Conclusion

This study examined copyright challenges experienced by Ghanaian film music composers and sound practitioners, focusing on awareness, ownership, contracts, remuneration, professional relationships and digital distribution. Participants described uneven copyright knowledge and variation between negotiated contracts and informal practices. These differences may complicate ownership, payment, attribution and subsequent use. Digital platforms were seen as expanding circulation while making protection and monetisation difficult. Practitioners' understandings and contracting practices may not always reflect statutory provisions governing commissioned works, especially where agreements are made without adequate consideration of copyright. Recognition of creative labour in Ghana and Africa requires attention to individual rights and the cultural contexts of music production. Given the small purposive sample, findings are indicative rather than representative. They support practical copyright education, clearer written agreements and accessible guidance for composers and producers.

Copyright education should be strengthened for composers, sound practitioners, filmmakers and producers through training and collaboration among educational institutions, industry associations, the Copyright Office, GHAMRO, ARSOG, the National Folklore Board and the National Film Authority. Training should address ownership, licensing, attribution, royalties, commissioned works, and distinctions among compositions, performances and sound recordings. Section 76 clarifies that a "sound recording" means "work that results from the fixation of a series of musical, spoken or other sound, or of a representation of sounds but does not include sounds accompanying a motion picture or other audio-visual work regardless of the nature of the material objects in which those sounds are

embodied" (p. 31). Written commission agreements should specify rights, payment schedules, permitted uses and conditions for subsequent exploitation.

Public agencies, professional associations and industry stakeholders should improve access to copyright guidance, dispute-resolution support and digital rights management education. Transparent remuneration and recognition should be promoted, with interventions responsive to independent production, collaborative networks and unequal access to professional resources.

Future research should include regional film sound practitioners beyond Kumawood and Ghallywood and examine awareness, ownership, contracts, remuneration and digital distribution. Comparisons should consider experience, training, budgets, legal support and industry roles.

Further studies should include producers, entertainment lawyers, music publishers, collective management representatives and copyright administrators. Research should examine access to enforcement and how digital platforms facilitate or hinder protection. This would distinguish legal, institutional, educational and contractual challenges and inform policies that strengthen copyright practice and the sustainability of Ghana's film music sector.

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APPENDIX

Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire for Film Music Composers in Ghana

Section A: Background and Professional Experience

1. Could you briefly describe your professional experience as a film music composer in Ghana?
2. How many years have you worked as a film music composer?
3. How did you become involved in composing and scoring music for film, and what has your experience been like so far?
4. Can you describe the process you normally follow when composing and scoring music for a film, from receiving the brief to delivering the final score?
5. What factors influence your musical decisions when scoring a film, such as the narrative, genre, characters, culture, dialogue, or director's expectations?
6. Which film industry do you work with?
7. How many films have you composed/ scored music for?

Section B: Copyright and Ownership

8. What copyright issues or challenges have you encountered in your work as a film music composer in Ghana?
9. How would you describe your knowledge and understanding of copyright laws as they apply to film music composition and ownership?
10. Who normally owns the copyright to the music you compose for films, and how is ownership determined or negotiated when there is no contract?
11. Have you experienced situations where your music was used, reproduced, distributed, or modified without your permission or appropriate compensation? If so, how was the matter handled?

Section C: Contracts, Relationships and Remuneration

12. How are contractual arrangements between you and film producers or directors normally negotiated?
13. What provisions concerning copyright ownership, licensing, royalties, credit, reuse, and payment are typically included in your contracts?
14. How do relationships between composers, producers, directors, and other members of the film production team influence your creative freedom and ownership of the music?
15. How would you describe the adequacy and fairness of the remuneration you receive for composing film music in Ghana? What factors influence the amount you are paid?

Section D: Digital Distribution and the Future of Film Music

16. How has the growth of digital platforms such as YouTube, streaming services, social media, and other online distribution channels affected your work and the use of your film music?
17. What new copyright, ownership, payment, or music-use challenges have emerged because of digital distribution?
18. What changes would you recommend improving copyright protection, contractual practices, remuneration, and professional opportunities for film music composers in Ghana?