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# Portland Observer 42

'City of Roses'



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# A World Beat Music Legacy

## Master drummer's contributions celebrated

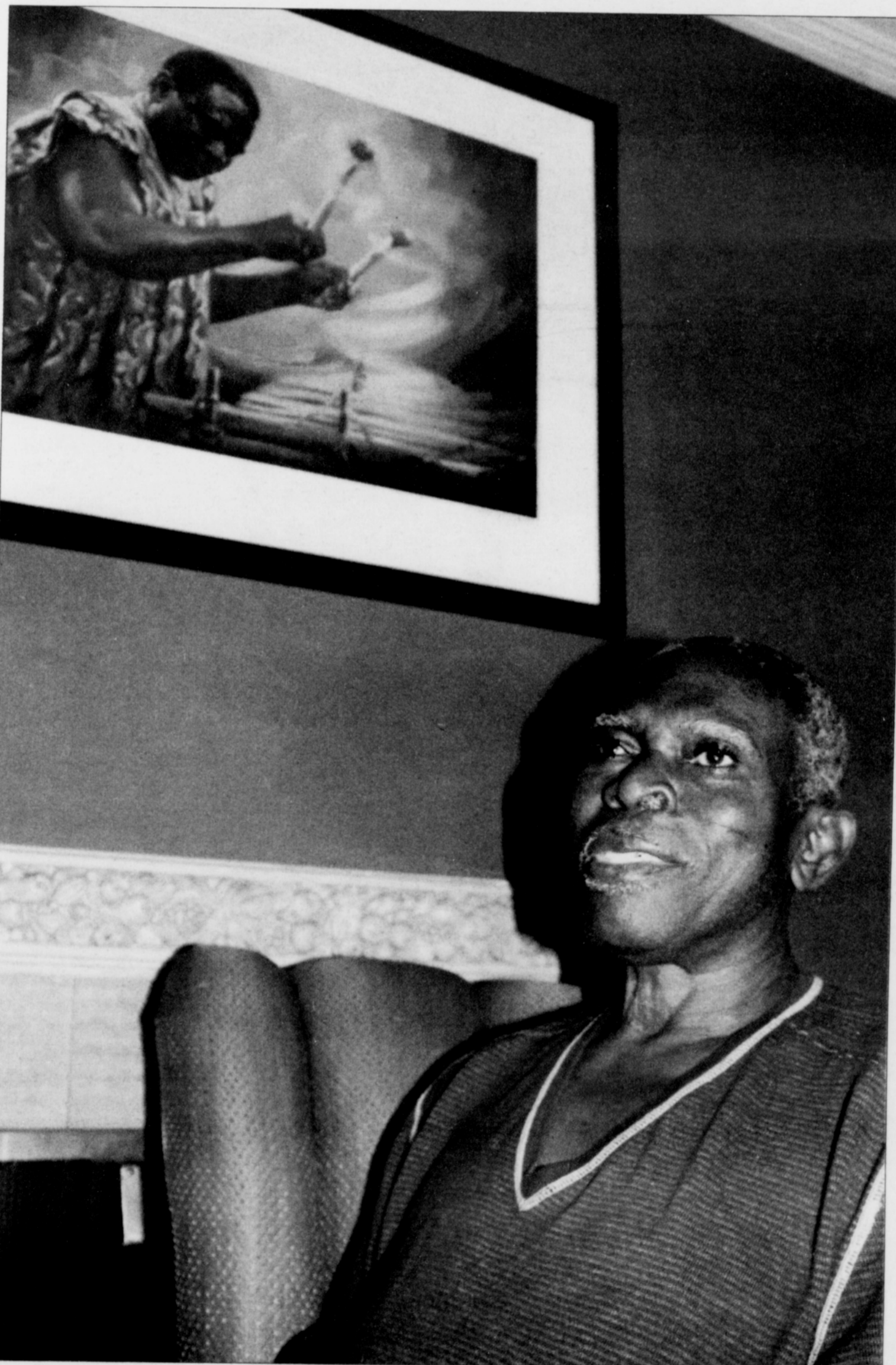
BY CARI HACHMANN  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVE

When drum master Obo Addy first traveled to the Pacific Northwest in the early 1970s after an international music tour, he found Portland to be unlike any other city. Walking on the street, the people were warm and smiled back, but best of all, he had the background to give a voice to an African music scene that was non-existent. He thought, "This must be the place."

Today, there are few who haven't heard or seen Addy perform. Since his arrival in 1978 as the first African musician to settle in Portland, the master drummer and dancer has shared his music with millions, creating a lasting legacy.

With his charismatic spirit, rapid-fire hands, and powerful voice, he has driven thousands of people to dance to the infectious beat of his drums. Touring internationally as a young man and Ga master of Ghana, Addy introduced the genre of music known as worldbeat, or what he describes "a world music" or "music of the world".

"Why not bring our music to people who had never been to Ghana," said Addy, sitting in the



Obo Addy, Portland's master drummer and dancer from Ghana, Africa, will be honored for his decades of music and teaching at a benefit dinner this month.

living room at his home in north Portland, surrounded by the earth tones of West African paintings, masks, and sculptures.

In Oregon, Addy has toured virtually every school in the state, as well as the Cornish Institute and Lewis and Clark College, educating kids of his music and culture. With his wife, Susan, in 1986, he created the non-profit, Homowo African Arts & Cultures, which for over 15-years held an annual festival in Portland celebrating African culture.

Addy was awarded the National Heritage Fellowship Award from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1996, making him the first African-born artist to receive the highest award a traditional artist can receive in this country.

"Through his music and teaching, Obo has affected hundreds of thousands of lives in the Pacific Northwest and beyond," said Susan, "His legacy is being written as he continues to share his talent with young people around the country."

Now, undergoing his second bout with cancer at 75 -years-old, Obo and his wife will celebrate the 25th anniversary of Homowo, recently renamed the Obo Addy Legacy in his honor at a benefit dinner on Saturday, Sept. 24. The 6:30 p.m. event, in the atrium at Emanuel Hospital, which may be one of his last public performances.

Those influenced by Addy will be telling stories and many of his friends from the music industry will entertain, including Janice Scroggins, LaRhonda and Mark Steele, Norman Sylvester, Okropong and Israel Annoh.

Born in 1936 in Accra, Ghana, the son of a Wonche medicine man, Addy was designated a "master drummer" at age six. Raised by his father in a family of 55 siblings, all drummers, dancers, and singers, Addy embodied the values and musical traditions of the Ga ethnic group.

PHOTO BY CARI HACHMANN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

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