

EGWU-EKPILI IN ANAOCHA COMMUNITY: AESTHETIC AND DYNAMIC USE OF THE FOLKSONGS AS A TOOL FOR SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Many writers on African music have emphasized the extra-musical roles and functionality of traditional music. Attention has been drawn on the place of music as not mere art but as the life wire of various communities, making music a valued product integrated to all aspects of human life in Africa. Similarly, musical instruments have been noted to be significant in the execution of various forms of music, with many communities and cultural contexts utilizing and promoting musical instruments available in their social contexts. The body of musical outputs from Africa constitutes a strong cultural heritage that Africa boasts of and is constantly contributing to the global musical expressions. Indeed, African traditional music permeates the totality of a people's culture and life style. While so many musical traditions and specific styles have been given research attention, some critical and significant musical types remain untouched, denying researchers the inherent potential of such music. Egwu Ekpili ensemble from Anocha in Anambra State falls in this category. This paper, therefore, focuses on the Egwu-ekpili ensemble in Anocha Community of Anambra State with the intent of discussing the nature and specific norms of the music but with particular attention to the communicating power of the music in its peculiar aesthetic and dynamic forms. Attention is also given to the instruments and the uses of the ensemble in the society in the presentation. Data were

collected through interviews, review of related literatures and observation. Findings were made and possible solutions proffered.

Introduction

Anocha is a community in Anambra State, with many forms of cultural expression including traditional musical performances. The musical tradition of the people of Anocha is rich with several varieties featuring instrumental, vocal and a combination of vocal and instrumental ensembles. Many folk songs are performed individually and collectively with many featuring in different traditional events. Some of the folk songs bear extra-musical import and facilitate communication of cultural norms and values among the people. While this is not peculiar to Anocha people, it is a practice that is significant and valued by the people in their music making. Thus music is, quite often, an expression of cultural value beyond the sound and entertainment value of the music. One of such musical types is the Egwu-ekpili. This cultural practice ties with the well-known practice of utilising music as a critical tool for communication, exploring its aesthetic and dynamic nuances.

Music is generally a product of organised sound by man which eventually is employed in various aspects of human life. It could be produced by the musical instruments, human voice or both, as already stated. Music has therefore, traditionally played a very important role in the cultural life of the people and represents a strong Anocha heritage. In certain ways, it is a form of communication and media which plays functional role in the Anocha society. This paper therefore, focuses on the aesthetic practice of utilising folk tunes to communicate messages to the public within the Anocha cultural milieu.

Conceptual Framework

Aesthetics: Aesthetics is the concept that describes the idea of beauty in arts. It generally attempts to capture the notion of value

and acceptability of arts within a cultural context based on the acceptable codes of the people. The culture and the owners therefore define what is acceptable or beautiful in the arts and how such applies to their creative endeavours and well-being. Thus a given musical performance may be exciting and aesthetically valuable based on the functionality and social relevance attached to it. Okafor (2005) affirmed that the essential thing is that:

man consciously sets out to compose music of a certain type, of a certain effect, of a certain use and of a certain shape just as he consciously sets about to combine or assemble certain compounds and elements into a product of a certain type, colour, shape, texture for specific use by targeted customers or users (p. 385).

Folk music is always characteristic in a given culture, signifying several things in the cultural context. Every society extols its own musical heritage and promotes it for the various cultural roles they play. An Igbo adage says: "Nku di na Mba na eghelu Mba nni" (The firewood found in a given town is what is employed in cooking food in the place.) Thus folksongs are not performed for the mere fun of it. It must have a serious purpose or be attached to a serious occasions within or outside the community. In this regard, Nketia (2004) posited that the Yoruba choral groups are not organised on musical value rather, their organisation is based on activities and functions which are considered primary.

Describing Egwu-ekpili, Nzewi (2006) stated that the primary principle of aesthetics in indigenous style is the pure tradition of the group and refusal of the acceptance of modern trends. They are purely native performers, they reject genre at any level with influence of Western tradition. Egwu-ekpili makes use of some selected musical instruments found in Anocha such as *Ichaka*,

(beaded rattle) *Ogene nkpinabo* (double bell), *Elele* (bamboo stick), *Une* (still product of bamboo) and *Udu* (musical pot with double holes). The ensemble occasionally includes *Oja* (Wooden flute).

Dynamics: The dynamics of Egwu-ekpili performance presentation is highly aesthetic in nature. The level at which the performers respond, entertain and play their instruments often stimulate the audience to dance and this leads to the achievement of the musical and social intentions of the music ensemble. There is generally a mutual relation that exists between music, dance and audience during performances. The high level aesthetical and stylistic appearance during performances makes the group very popular in Anocha, making egwu-ekpili to be highly sought after for social events. They perform, play their instruments and sing their folk tunes in good volume and with slow transitions. The audience is also actively and critically involved in the dynamics of Egwu-ekpili presentation. It is often understood that in African traditional music, the beauty and excitements that pull the population or audience may result from the techniques applied in adding melody, harmony and rhythm to the music performance. Dynamics can also be used to dramatise the performance at the end of the music with instrumentalist instrumentation and the response/refrain.

The blending of the instruments also results in an interesting output during the performance, by controlling loudness at the right times in the music.

Messages: Song texts provide access to meanings, values and social issues in various cultural locations. Songs therefore constitute integral part of cultural literature orally transmitted from one generation to another. Quite often indigenous musicians employ local languages in their various dialects to present and communicate to the public the essence of the folksongs and the messages contained in

them. Thus, traditional music makers are known to use vernacular language more often to communicate their music to the society at large to enable the song texts permeate the entire life of the society.

Egwu-ekpili group is an example of such cultural practice. The group's folksongs are presented in the language and dialects of the people which permeate the entire Igbo people added access to the social, cultural and moral meanings and implications of the texts. These feature on such occasions as religious, political, protest, social, rite of passage and Christian activities. Rendering the songs and the messages in local dialects draws the people to the music, making them enticing and artistic in style. Stylistic and dynamic use of the local language and dialects in the song texts provide aesthetic appeal and stimulate communal interest in egwu-ekpili music. The group boasts of very popular and well-known song titles. An example:

1. Ebulu jeman jemanje
Oriaku oriaku inokwa no uno
Oriaku efuomu inokwa na uno

This generally translates to:

Wealth eater, wealth eater, are you in the house?

Wealth eater I am missing, are you in the house?

Social access to the songs by the audience enables aesthetic judgment after each performance. For instance, the people might say "*egwu a atoka*", meaning "the music is very sweet" or "*Ogulu ya ofuma*", "the music was well rendered." Oluyemi Olaniyan in his article in the hand book of methodology in African studies affirmed that in the Yoruba society for example, there are terms used to describe the quality of music performed by any artistes or a group of artistes such terms like "*Ohun Iyo*" (the voice of salt) means it is sweet voice "*Ohun goodoro*", (smooth voice) means sonorous voice, "*Ohun oro*"

(treatment voice) means vibrato voice which is most suitable for the rendition of mournful songs. An artiste who possesses these voice qualities is described as "*Oludun Iyo, ololun gooro*" and '*Olulun aro*', as the case may be (1999: 57).

The above is applicable in Igbo land and in Anocha area. They use the terms "*Onu-okwa*" - partridge voice, "*Onu-ogene*"-bell voice. In Igbo community for instance there are lots and lots of them. In Anocha for example, Egwu-ekpili explores vocal resources for their performances.

Similarly, Igbo highlife songs gain popularity by use of local languages. An example by Osita Osadebe is "*Oso ndi owe ndi*." Blacking's (1976) expression of music as "humanly organized sound" finds validity in the use of folk music in various aspects of human life and in the language accessible to them. Okafor (2005: 385) stressed that "since man uses music to express or communicate an idea or emotion, music then is a language, it universally lies in its occurrence in every culture."

Theoretical Framework

Egwu-Ekpili Performance: The writer anchored this paper on Akpabot's (1986) theory that states that from the day an African is born up to when he attains manhood, marries and eventually dies, music plays a very important part in his daily experiences and the behavioural patterns in a given society (is) to a large extent dependent on their musical life.

Concepts

This theory is in support of this paper that focuses on the music performance of Anocha people with their local instrument and folksongs called egwu-ekpili which is a kind of minstrel music. It sends message, sometimes with proverbs. It gives information to the society. Egwu-ekpili acts as a medium through which information is

disseminated to the community. In Anocha community Eze and Ozo tilted men make much use of the group by hiring them during their celebrations which may be religious, social, kingship coronations, political and rites of the passage and soon.

Members of the communities are also free to invite them during marriage ceremonies, chieftaincy title taking, etc. In general, Egwu-ekpili originated from the gatherings during the moon light games often after supper to tell tales in different village settings. According to Akpabot (1986: 1) "it is not unusual to find musicians in an African villages gathering together after supper to make music in the moonlight for the fun of it."

Egwu-ekpili is popular in Anocha community because of the series of performances they present during events they attend and how they entertain their audiences. Their creative use of folksongs and instrumentation provide exciting moments for the people. They have very good unique local instruments which play speech melody, intricate rhythms and they deliver their messages through songs in rhythmic and artistic manner, delivered with very good tempo and aesthetic cum dynamic moods. There are other musical groups in Anocha community such as Egwu-Ubo, Ogene music, Igba, Ndioma, Odenji, to mention but few. All these groups have their musical out fit with their different instruments. But Egwu-ekpili is highly cherished in the community and has brought more benefits to the community through their performances for the politicians. Such politicians reciprocate the good music presentation by providing social amenities such as street lights, drinking water, tarring of some village roads and restructuring of some school buildings. This is because the folksongs become means of conveying the needs of the people to the politicians. They deliberate on the information and subsequently take action. Egwu-ekpili group therefore plays very important role in Anocha community because through their music presentation, their

messages to the people are passed onto the society and such messages influence the young and old through teaching them good morals, social ethos, etc. These influence and help them to live together in the community.

Their performance songs are determined by the musical context available for that moment. It would be recalled that Fela Anikulapo Kuti also criticized the government and sang about their ills through his style of music called Afro-Jazz, Afro-rock or Afro-beat, but Egwu-ekpili is quite different from the above mentioned though they also talk about societal issues and ills going on in the village or community for corrections. They also sing about anybody with bad character from the women and men in the community. Egwu-ekpili is a very serious group of musicians that perform African traditional music to reform, transform and inform with their pure local instrument that are very unique when compared with other musical instruments. Like *elele* - from bamboo is a talking flute, but is not common instrument. It is locally made and owned by the community. Egwu-ekpili also functions as praise poetry to draw attention to particular matters in the community with the sense of musical rendition style that reflects the mood and manner of application. Egwu-ekpili folk musicians are regarded as good, capable and can utilize compositional materials or devices in the environment. Olaniyan states that African music, therefore, is the music treated, performed and enjoyed by Africans. The music satisfies African idea and attributes of the philosophy of the people in their various cultures. Such music fulfills the usages, role, functions and the artistic and aesthetic phenomena of the people who own the music (1999: 156).

The above statement is not far from the cultural practice within the Anocha community According to Chernoff (1999: 30), African traditional music has been passed on from one generation to another.

The artistes are non-literate but highly imaginative, creative, skillful, resourceful and full of initiative. Similarly, Egwu-ekpili ensemble members are not literate but they are experts on their instruments and folksongs and are people called Nwa egwu / Umu egwu which mean son of music or children of music. It means that Egwu-ekpili performers are quite knowledgeable and the masters of their instruments.

Though these folks performer are called Egwu-ekpili, as the name indicates, Egwu is musicwhile ekpili is rattle, locally made with *Udala* seed or *Ukpa* seed, and is stronger and bigger than *Udala* seed (the local apple). There are other instruments used in the performance of the music such as *Udu* (pot) with two holes on the upper side of the pot. The mouth and a hole by the top side of the neck of the pot with *Ogene mkpi na abo* (twin bells), *nkpo nkpo* called (wood block).

Elele, made from bamboo tree is also used. Amongst the instruments Ekpili is the more sophisticated and plays variations in tone that brings out the aesthetic value of the music. Though all the instruments blend together, the combination also brings out the beauty of the melody and rhythm of the folk music. Folk music is a form of cultural indicator and transmits information to the society. Lomax (1968) affirmed that music is an-all-embracing art within an African society. Folk text has been described as culture agents that reveal a good measure of the people's life, cultural ethics, norms and general pattern of life (p. 41).

The folk songs which the Egwu-ekpili musicians perform are quite many. They are performed with their musical instruments. The folk tunes are either for encouragement, praise, talking about the ill of the community or information they can use.

Examples of the song texts are as follow:

Song for a Lazy Man

1. Ebulu jema je maje
Ebulu jema je ebulu je
Aha Ebulu jema je ebulu je
2. Emehalu bia je olu
Anaghi mu ejeooo (Response)
Na chi mu fulu m n'anya, Iyo
Bia je nku
Anaghi mu eje
Na chi mu fulu m n'anya Iyo
Come and work no I will not work
My God loves me
Come and go to fetch fire wood
No I will not go
My God loves me

Encouraging Folksongs Message of Faith

Call

3. Nwa nne m, nwa nn m
Ebegbuna onwe gi
Chukwu kwu na azu

Response

nwe nchekwube
nwe nchekwube
nwe nchekwube

English

My son, my son have hope
My son, my son have hope
God is at your back have hope

Song for Peace

Call

4. Kwe nu udo, udo o - o
Udo ga-adi, ebe ifunanya di
Ebe afu ka udo ga di

English

Response

Shout peace peace
Where there is peace
that is where the peace will be

Song for Wealthy Man

Call

5. Gbulu tufu

Gbulu tufu

Isi efi, gbulu tufu

Isi inyinya, gbulu-tufu

Kill-down, kill, kill-down

Kill-down, kill, kill-down

Head of cow kill-down, kill, kill-down

Head of horse kill-down, kill, kill-down

Response

gbulu, gbulu tufu

gbulu, gbulu tufu

gbulu, gbulu tufu

gbulu, gbulu tufu

Factors that affect Egwu-ekpili in contemporary times

- **Lack of strong leadership.** Economic empowerment—People that hire them do not really pay what they deserve and this therefore hampers the maintenance of the instruments and hinders the scope of performance and rehearsals. Because of the prevalence of performance, members are sometimes full of ego, pride and boasting affect proper functioning of the ensemble. Life pattern/lifestyle of members also affects the attitude of members to group rehearsals and performances. Every member seems to be a leader unto himself/herself, weakening the leadership structure.
- **Lack of Punctuality to the rehearsals and performance.** Disobedience to the rules and lack of punctuality to rehearsals affect the group. Argument on folk song text selection causes misunderstanding and malice among the performers.

Egwu-ekpili performers are not the conventional trained musicians and this brings inferiority complex when it has to do with educated/elite musicians because they are mainly based in the community where they practice the cultures and term it to be primitive in nature. They feel inferior and try to avoid group

activities. Egwu-ekpili ensemble as an autonomous group contributes to musical performances and musical knowledge in the community.

Recommendations

Because of lack of strong leadership the people that hire them take it to be an unserious group of performers and have no regard or take them seriously. So the group is required to reassess their attitude and leadership structure to enhance the group's reputation. Awareness should be created about what music is conventionally, and the contributions it makes to the society. When awareness is created there would be renewed understanding of the relevance of the music. This would make so many youths in the society to embrace the music. It was said that charity begins at home. The love of music must begin within the life pattern of individuals. Onwuekwe, (2015: 99) stressed that the music of people portrays the way of life of the individuals within the community. In short music is an expression of the people's culture. Anocha community as a whole is endowed with very rich musical and cultural heritage and with such musical awareness the group will be recognized beyond their local community. When a knowledgeable person becomes the leader, there will be a strong group that will give the music a good name and it will remove inferiority complex from the group.

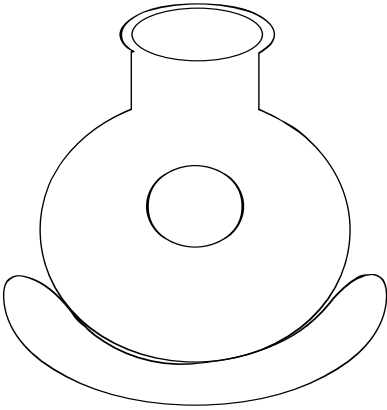
Conclusion

Since attention has been called to the neglect of the ensemble music's existence to the appropriate headquarters, it is expected that there will be a change-in approach in all ramifications of attitude, creativity and performance presentations of the group.

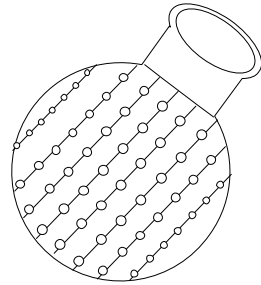
Understanding of musical ideas and knowledge will develop potentially interesting players to join the musical group. Appropriate learning of the music will be done. Members will be more serious with the music practice both in the song aspect and in playing the instruments. The

economic empowerment will be visible and directed, while maintenance of instruments will be achieved. Egwu-ekpili therefore makes significant contributions in the communication of cultural, social and educative messages to the community of Anocha, while contributing to youth empowerment and development in the place. It requires that the group takes their social responsibilities seriously and develop their creative talents for high-level musical performances.

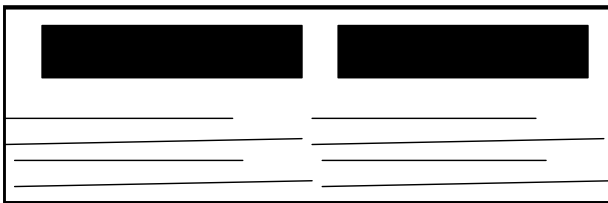
Egwu-ekpili Ensemble Instruments



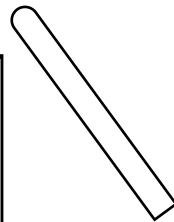
Udu (pot)

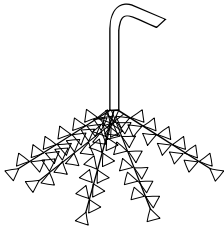


Ichaka

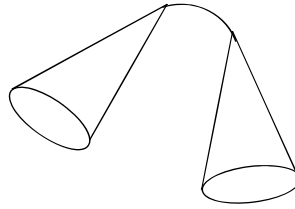


Wooden Block





Udala (Rattle)



Ogene (Metal bell)



Elele (Indigenous Flute)

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