

**AWKA ANGLICAN DIOCESAN MUSIC FESTIVAL (2016 - 2020):
A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

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Abstract

The biennial music festival of Awka Diocese is a graded music competition, where various church choirs gather and render pieces, with aesthetic appeal and with a primary aim of raising standards and improving church worship within the diocese. Over the years, Occurrences before, during and after the festival activities suggest that to a considerable extent, the primary aim for establishing the festival has not been achieved, as some church choirs within the diocese do not participate in the biennial music festival and some church choirs who participate have failed to attain the standard expected of them. It is therefore obvious that there are underlying issues around music festival in Awka Diocese. Using interview method as source of collecting primary data, the researcher was able to find out issues plaguing music festival in Awka Diocese, some of which include lack of synergy among participating choirs, use of mercenaries, lack of guide in song selection, incomplete criteria in selection of leadership, etc. Based on findings, the researcher recommends among other things, that the Diocesan authorities should pay more attention to the organization and participation of music festival within the diocese, with an aim of practically assisting to make the festival better.

Introduction

Music has been a part of man's existence from the beginning. As a result it is often said that music is as old as man. Music coexists with man in numerous forms and its functionality is multi-faceted. Man has found a way to include music in almost every human activity as every culture has peculiar ways of making music to suit their occupation, environment and experiences. A culture's inspiration for music making is therefore drawn from its environment, its people's experience and ideas. In his discussion of music, Okafor in Okafor (2019) sees music as:

essentially human activity denoting or expressing human emotions and the relationship of the emotions to the environment... in its truest sense, it cannot exist without man... since each culture has its own collective or individual experiences, ideas, outlook and environment, the organization of sounds into music does vary from culture to culture. (p.1)

Music has been known to be an integral part of man's worship of God and deities, as the case may be. For the worship of God, it features in different services in numerous forms. Different Christian church denominations have different ways and time for expressing music during denominational church services and activities.

Churches in Anglican Communion have different organizations, associations, ministries or groups that function in them, forming part or body of the church. They include: Church choir, Women Ministry (Mothers' Union (MU), Women's Guild (WG), Young Mothers' Fellowship), Fathers' Fellowship, Youth Organizations (Anglican Youth Fellowship (AYF), Gospel band, Boys' and Girls' Brigade, Anglican Boys Association, Girls' Guild (GG) etc.), Anglican Children's Ministry etc. Each of these groups has its various designations within the church, and also participates in music making in their various capacities. The

choir however takes centre stage in music activities since that is its primary and only duty in the church.

Different media have been established through which the choir carries out its musical functions in the Anglican Communion. During church services the choir is saddled with the responsibility of providing music, which serves many purposes in the church. The choir assists through music, in articulating sections of the Anglican Liturgy because according to Okafor (2019:27), "when speech is used alone, it is sometimes difficult to lift important parts of the service above the rest". The involvement of the choir in turn, helps the congregation to practically get involved in the worshipping process. Apart from worship, which is rendered in the Anglican Liturgy, other activities have been established, through which more music can be engaged. An example of such activities is the music festival.

Music festival as it is called in Anglican Communion, Awka Diocese inclusive, is a biennial graded music competition, where every church choir is expected to participate in a given grade, based on their level of competence. The various grades available for participation in music festival of Awka Diocese include: Grade Three, Grade Two, Grade One and Super Grade. There is also a provision for children choirs to participate in the children's' choir grade.

Just as it is with every area of human existence, to be plagued with issues, which sometimes are addressed and sometimes are insurmountable, music festival in Awka Diocese has since its introduction, had its own issues, some of which have been addressed upon discovery and some of which have not been addressed. This work investigates the music festival activities, with the primary aim of bringing to light, some of the issues present and proffering solutions to help alleviate them.

Statement of Problem

The Biennial music festival of Awka Diocese as earlier said, is a graded music competition, where various church choirs gather and render pieces, with aesthetic appeal and with a primary aim of raising standards and improving church worship within the Diocese. Over the years, Occurrences before, during and after the festival activities suggest that to a considerable extent, the primary aim for establishing the festival has not been achieved, as some church choirs within the diocese do not participate in the biennial music festival and some church choirs who participate have failed to attain the standard expected of them. It is therefore obvious that there are underlying issues around music festival in Awka Diocese. This work is geared towards finding those problems and proffering recommendations with a view to alleviating them.

Significance of the study

Since music festival is an important part of church musical activities, this work will serve as a reference material to church choristers, church choir masters, Diocesan music directors, leadership of the Diocesan music festival and leadership of the Awka Diocese, Anglican communion, in their quest to provide solutions to problems which have been laid bare here. It will also be an addition to already existing literature in music scholarship and categorically, music in church worship.

Concept of History

History is the study of records of past events. It is an enquiry into events that have occurred in the past, since the invention of writing and documentation. The period before the invention of writing is referred to as prehistoric period. "History" is an umbrella term that relates to past events as well as the memory, discovery, collection, organization, presentation, and interpretation of information about these events. Historians place the past in context using historical

sources such as written documents, oral accounts, ecological markers, and material objects including art and artifacts". (Wikipedia. Accessed 15th July 2021).

Concept of Festival

A festival is "an organized set of special events, such as musical performances or plays, usually happening in one place, or a special day or period, usually in memory of a religious event, with its own social activities, food, or ceremonies". Vidal in Odeh (2017:25), defined festival as "an annual event or anniversary in remembrance or commemoration of the Gods, spirits, ancestors, kings or a historical occurrence".

In his opinion on what festival is, Ekwueme (2005) explained that it is:

a celebration or a feast or an event featuring music, dance, theatre, masquerades and many others, usually organized in the same venue once in a year. Furthermore, they are landmarks in all societies as they mark special and remarkable events that had occurred in the history of any community. (p 158)

In Cudny's (2014:641) view, A festival is "an organized socio-spatial phenomenon that is taking place at a designated time - outside the everyday routine- increasing the overall volume of social capital and celebrating selected elements of both tangible and intangible culture".

What is Music Festival?

Music festival is an organized event geared towards musical performances, usually with a theme. Performances at music festivals can either be vocal or instrumental. It can feature solo singers, musicians, etc. "A music festival is a community event oriented towards live performances of singing and instrumental playing, that is

often presented with a theme such as music genre (e.g. blues, jazz, folk, classical music,)" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_festival Accessed on the 15th June 2021.)

According to Rudolf (2016), "Music festivals are events consisting of a large variety of bands and musical artists performing shows, on numerous stages, over a period of days to a large audience, usually targeting young people. They can be held inside a stadium or outside at a park, field, desert, forest, beach or on a farm."

Music Festival in Awka Diocese

Music festival in Awka Diocese is a biennial music event, organized by the Diocese, where various church choirs gather and render pieces, with aesthetic appeal and with a view to raising standards. Participating Church choirs are grouped in grades, based on their performance abilities, and are given set pieces, which they prepare and present on stipulated dates. Winners are chosen by selected judges, and these winners go home with set prizes (trophies and sometimes cash by individual donors). In Awka Diocese, music festivals occur in two different stages. There is the Archdeaconry stage which is organized at the Archdeaconry level within the Diocese. Winners of the competition at the various archdeaconry levels meet other winners from other Archdeaconries for the grand finale. There, one of the church choirs is crowned the winner of the festival for that year.

Aim of Awka Diocesan Music Festival

The major aim of establishing music festival in Awka Diocese is to generally improve the musical aspect of church worship, which is primarily anchored by the choir. In church worship, there are praise, prayer, word, thanksgiving, announcement, etc. sessions, and the Choir is usually expected to present an anthem after sermons. This anthem is always expected to re-enforce the sermon given by the priest. To

achieve this primary purpose of improving church worship, several items of the order of service were included in the syllables. The order of service for Anglican worship as itemized by Nwamara (2009) includes:

1. Processional hymn
2. Introit
3. Call for Worship
4. Sentences/Prayers/Vesicle and Responses
5. Canticles
6. Old Testament Reading
7. Psalms
8. New Testament Reading
9. Canticles
10. Announcements
11. Hymn for Sermon
12. Sermon
13. Anthem by the Choir
14. Choruses for Thanksgiving/Special Offering
15. Benediction

Items drawn from the order of worship to make up the syllables of music festival include: hymns, chants, psalms, Song Holy Eucharist (different sessions), Anthems (English and Igbo). It is expected that continuous rehearsals of these church worship items in preparation for the festival will help the choirs attain required and expected standard in performing these items, which will in turn ensure standard musical worship during church services.

Apart from the primary aim which has been stated above, there are other things expected to be achieved alongside the primary aim. The question which needs to be answered now is; has the music festival of Awka Diocese, Anglican Communion achieved the aim for which it was

established? The following sub-topics will point us in the right direction.

Synergy among Participating Choirs

After the introduction of music festival, workshops were introduced as part of the preparations for the festival. Every church choir was and is still expected to send representatives to the workshop, where proper analysis of the selected items will be done. These regular contacts on the other hand, help to grow synergy between the participants. It is expected that every choir that participates in the competition will do so with a required degree of sportsmanship, and since there can only be one overall winner for each grade, others should congratulate the winner and accept their positions with a view to improving their performances and trying again.

A closer view from an observer's perspective shows that the above is not the case. Every participating choir goes there, hoping to take home the trophy. This has over the years implanted, nurtured and shifted the spirit of sportsmanship to the overdrive. Participating choirs, have disagreements after each festival, as the choirs who supposedly lost refuse to accept the result as declared by the adjudicators.

Increased Repertoire

It is expected that continuous participation in music festivals will over the years increase the number of anthems in the church choirs' repertoire. A close look at the statistics shows that not all church choirs participate in the music festival. What that means is that churches who have failed to participate in the music festival of the Diocese are not beneficiaries of the expanded repertoire, courtesy of music festival in the Diocese. Even some of the choirs that participate drop or forget the anthem soon after the competition.

Improved Quality of Solo Performers

As earlier stated, the music festival management board led by the Diocesan music director selects the anthems to be learned and presented by the choirs. Sometimes, these anthems have solos, and it is expected that a member of the choir will take the solo lines. Since no one wants to present an unprepared work, there will be proper coaching of members of the choir, and the best is selected to take the solo part/sections.

The Use of "Mercenaries"

It is gradually becoming a tradition that participating choirs employ the services of professionals to strengthen and make their performances better. This has gone a long way in defeating the aim of establishing the competition. The incorporated professionals come, learn these songs, and return to their various destinations. This also sends false information to the Diocese, as the choir strength which mounts the stage to perform is not actually the actual strength, which will be made bare for everyone to see after the festival. This is equally a sad commentary on the truth and honesty quality of such a religious body. It is simply put as cheating.

Song Selection

Song selection is done by the joint effort of members of the diocesan committee on music festival, led by the diocesan music director and the secretary, who is always a priest. In the Anglican liturgy, there are seasons which take turns to come around annually. They include:

- Advent: A time of expectant waiting and preparation for both the celebration of the nativity of Christ at Christmas and the return of Christ at second coming. It marks the beginning of the liturgical year.
- Christmas: A season set apart for the celebration of Christ's birth.

- Epiphany: A season set apart to celebrate an element in the story of Christ's birth, the visit of the magi.
- Septagesima
- Sexagesima
- Quinquagesima
- Lent
- Easter
- Trinity

According to the Awka Diocesan Music Director, the committee looks at the already existing pieces in circulation and determines the season with fewer pieces in circulation. This is what influences their selection of pieces, as they select pieces that fall into seasons with fewer pieces in circulation. Below are the selected anthems from 2016 to 2020:

English Anthems

Super Grade

2018 - "Praise the Lord with Harp and tongue" by G. F. Handel

2020 - "O come, let us sing unto the Lord" by G. F. Handel

Grade One

2016 - "Let us break their bonds asunder" by G. F. Handel

2018 - "Ye Sons of Israel" by G. F. Handel

2020 - "Kings shall be thy nursing fathers by G. F. Handel

Grade Two

2016 - "Praise the Lord oh my Soul" by Thomas Minton

2018 - "Ye Boundless realms of joy" by G. F. Handel

2020 - "Glory and Worship are before Him" by G. F. Handel

Grade Three

2016 - "I was glad" by T. Crampton

2018 - "The Saviour's Invitation"

2020 - "Rejoice in the Lord all Ye Righteous" by George Elvey

Igbo Anthems

Super Grade

2018 - "Ma unu onwe-unu bu ogbo ndi aroputaworo" by Sir Sam Ojukwu

2020 - "Gozienu Jehova, unu ndi O huru n'anya" by Sir Prof. Dan C. C. Agu

Grade One

2016 - "Ma ndi nele anya Jehova" by Sir Sam Ojukwu

2018 - "Tiwanu Nkpu Onu" by Sir Chuma Chukwuka

2020 - "Nogide nu nime ihunanya M" by Prof. Sir Dan C. C. Agu

Grade Two

2016 - "Nyeny Jehova Nsopuru" by Sir Sam Ojukwu

2018 - "Onye n'adighi n'akukum" by Sir Dr. Ugo Onwuka.

2020 - "Guzosieniu ike N'olu Onye-nwe-anyi" by Prof. Sir Dan C. C. Agu

Grade Three

2016 - "Jubilate Deo" by D. M. Okongwu (Rev)

2018 - "Anyi g'eti mkpu onu"

2020 - "Legide Jisos Anya" by Sir Sam Ojukwu

A close look at the list of anthems above show that selection is not actually done to make up for church seasons with limited number of pieces in supply as was claimed by the music director. Anthems are rather randomly selected. The list also shows that the committee in charge of selection of anthems seemingly has strong ties with the famous baroque composer G. F. Handel, as the majority of the English anthems are Handel's works.

Selection of Adjudicators

For effective completion of the festival, there are judges who are paid to listen to the performing choirs and give scores befitting of the performances. The following are considered in the selection of adjudicators:

- **Formal Music Education-** anyone who will be selected and contracted to be part of the adjudicators for music festival in Awka Diocese, must have acquired a degree in Music.
- **Choral Music Experience** - Experience in choral music is a pre-requisite for selection of an Adjudicator. It is believed that years of active involvement in choral music will apprise one with the required informal knowledge of choral music. This alongside formal music education will ensure constructive criticism of the choirs and appropriate assigning of marks.
- **Composers-** The leadership of music festival in Awka Diocese does not only look out for people with formal music education and choral music experience. They also look out for people who are good composers, and who have composed works that are relevant to the Anglican Communion.

It is important to note that participating judges must not possess all the items listed above. Compulsorily, a selected judge must possess a degree in music with choral music experience but must not be a composer. Although a look at the list of adjudicators over the years shows that composers are always part of the adjudicating team.

Music Festival Leadership

The diocesan music director is by default in charge of music activities in the diocese. He sees to a successful execution of every music project within the diocese. The office of the music director is by appointment. The following are the qualities expected of the Diocesan music director:

- **Enthusiasm** - the music director must show an appreciable level of enthusiasm towards music. He or she must be a lover of music.
- **Experience** - He must have gathered requisite experience in musical activities and leadership. He must be a musician and a leader.

It is important to note that the number one musician in Awka Diocese (the music director) should among other existing qualities, possess formal music training for more effective administration of his primary duties and responsibilities to the Diocese.

Summary and Recommendations

The music festival of Awka Diocese has to an extent achieved the primary aim for which it was established. This does not play down on the presence of issues as enumerated in this work. The leadership of Awka Diocesan music festival should look into the following areas, with a view to effectively improving standard and quality holistically. They should find effective ways of ensuring that every church choir participates in the diocesan music festivals. This will bring about a general improvement in church worship within the Diocese. They should also find ways to eliminate the use of mercenaries so that the lessons learnt from participating in the competition can be beneficial to the church. Song selection can actually be done as proposed, to result in a balance of works in church choir repertoire for all church seasons. Also, in selecting anthems, the committee should try to select a balance of works from different composers, so that different techniques can be imbibed since composers have their individual characteristics which usually reflect in their compositions.

In addition to the already existing criteria for selection of leadership, the Diocese should include a compulsory degree in music. The diocesan music director should be someone who has leadership

experience, is dedicated, has enough practical music experience, exhibits required enthusiasm towards music and should be a musicologist.

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