

TRADITIONAL AFRICAN MUSIC IN SCHOOLS: METHODS, APPROACHES AND STYLES IN YORUBA APALA

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ABSTRACT

Teaching is a pedagogical activity that requires the transmission of knowledge, ideas and values from the teacher who possesses a mastery of the subject matter to a learner. The practice of African culture is one of the most considerable reasons why it is expedient to inculcate the knowledge of traditional customs in a socio-cultural and artistic manner. Moore (1982) states that teaching is intent that someone should learn something. Without intention, whatever the person is doing is not teaching. Moore puts it more clearly; that a teacher is one who intends to take pains to see that knowledge is acquired by varying his methods if necessary to bring about learning. A teacher assumes responsibility towards his pupils. The word responsibility is very significant to the success of teaching. Consequently, this study embarks on the methodological approach to executing the delivery of knowledge of *Apala* music to students by encapsulating the socio-cultural background of the Yoruba music and its aesthetic values. This is realised by outlining the stages of delivery so as to encourage the appropriateness of African cultural values.

INTRODUCTION

In preserving Yoruba *Apala* music culture, the following stipulated guidelines are adhered to considerably:

Historical and Sociological Traits of *Apala* music

Names and Biographies of *Apala* Music Practitioners.

Characteristic Elements of *Apala* Music as evident in their works

Techniques of Performing the Music

Pre-performance / Pre-concert

Concert

Evaluation

Historical and Sociological Traits of Apala Music

The chronological view to the evolution of *Apala* music, its development among the Yoruba community and its socio-cultural assessment in view of oral tradition is expedient so as to validate the knowledge of music and preservation of culture. Authenticity of an art is validated by its cultural traits, therefore there is need to trace the emergence of the art and its practice so as to substantiate the efficacy of the music custom. In line with the above view Tracey (1969) said: "All African "music" like the ethnic groups themselves, share a common heritage but each has developed its individually in strict segregation from the race."

The statement above expresses that various concepts in African culture bring about diversities in traditional music and yet the distinctive characteristics in the socio-cultural

medium are not the only picture that evolve from the study of African music. According to Nketia (1966),

The musical heritage of contemporary Africa is the music associated with traditional African institutions of the pre-colonial era. It is music which has survived the impact of the forces of Western forms of acculturation, and is, therefore, quite distinct in idiom and orientation from contemporary popular and art music.

Hence, there is need for educating and emphasizing the cultural development in Apala music that invariably help in conserving the history of African music culture.

Apala (or Akpala as pronounced) is a musical genre, originally derived from the Yoruba people of Nigeria. It is a percussion-based style that developed in the late 1930s, when it was used to wake worshippers after fasting during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. The rhythms of apala grew more complex over time, influenced by Cuban music and eventually became quite popular in Nigeria.

Instruments of Apala include a gourd rattle (sekere), thumb piano (agidigbo) and a bell (agogô), as well as two or three talking drums. Apala, a traditional style from Ogun state, in Nigeria, became very popular in the 1960s, led by performers like Haruna Ishola, Sefiu Ayan, Kasumu Adio, and Ayinla Omowura. Ishola, who was one of Nigeria's most consistent hit makers between 1955 until his death in 1983, recorded apala songs, which alternated between slow and emotional, and swift and energetic. His lyrics were a mixture of improvised praise and passages from the Quran, as well as traditional proverbs. His work became a formative influence on the development of Fuji style.

Haruna Ishola is undoubtedly the most well-known performer of apala in Nigerian history. Although others may hold a contrary view that Ayinla Omowura is the most well known and the most successful musician of Apala. Both of them played an integral role in the popularization of the genre and it is distinct from, older than and much more difficult to master than Fuji music. Although Ayinla Omowura died in his forties in 1980, he recorded more than 20 LPs and remarkably, all were very successful. Although Fuji music remains the most important form of traditional music amongst Yorubas in Nigeria, apala is still very popular amongst Muslims of the Yoruba tribe. Special mention must be given to Haruna Ishola's son, Musiliu Haruna Ishola, who is often credited with revitalizing the apala genre and spear-heading the apala-resurgence of the 2000s.

With his 2004 album (entitled Soyoyo), Musiliu has succeeded in bringing apala music to a wider, younger audience, thus breathing new life to the genre and keeping the tradition (and his father's legacy) alive. He is credited with re-popularizing a genre that was fast becoming the preserve of older Yoruba Muslims. The success of his Soyoyo album meant that a younger (even Christian or Animist) generation of Yorubas have now demonstrated a renewed interest in apala music. His songs can often be heard on popular radio stations across Yoruba land.

Apala is a style of vocal and percussive Muslim Yoruba music that emerged in the late 1930s. Under the influence of popular Afro-Cuban percussion, apala developed into a more

polished style and attracted a large audience. The music required two or three talking drums (*omele*), a rattle (*sekere*), thumb piano (*agidigbo*) and a metal gong (*agogo*). Haruna Ishola was the most famous apala performer, and he later played an integral role in bringing apala to the larger audiences as part of Fuji music.

Names and Biography of Apala Practitioners

A music instructor is expected to list the names of all the artistes or practitioners of the traditional music type and clearly discuss their birth, social status, religion, educational background, economic status, families, general upbringing, livelihood and list of their works. This reveals how their personalities have impacted their concepts and further reiterates the socio-cultural influence on the development of traditional music in Africa. An example of a renowned practitioner is Haruna Ishola who was born 1919 in Ijebu-Igbo in Ogun state, Nigeria. He was dark in complexion, had a tooth gap and was of an average height. His parents were Prince Adeleye Bello Awoyelu and Rebecca Obifowoke Bello. His father was a traditional healer and his mother, a petty trader.

Haruna Ishola did not receive any formal training in music but learned by imitating his predecessors. The initiative to form a group developed when he was still working as an apprentice under his cousin. Ishola started his Apala group in 1947 with a five man band that later increased to ten. In 1948, he waxed his first record in honour of Orimolusi Adeboye – the late Oba of Ijebu-Igbo. Ishola waxed a total of about three hundred records, some of which include; ‘Oro Ejire’, ‘Ina ran’, ‘Apala disco’. In recognition of his role as a worthy ambassador of Apala music, and recognition of his contributions to music in Nigeria, he was awarded a national honour of “member of the order of Niger” (MON) by the then President Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1981. He died on the 9th of November 1983 at the age of 64 years.

Characteristic Elements of Apala Music

The musical contents of Apala should be expressed and analysed on the basis of its aesthetic distinctions with reference to socio-cultural values. However, it must be x-rayed through the universal criteria that are tools for analysing the contents in compositions such as forms, instrumentation, melody, rhythm, texture, and harmony as the basic elements.

An example is the Haruna Ishola’s *‘Ina-ran’*;

Melody: This is made up of succession of notes with varying intervals, which are segmented into phrases. The melody is sung in Yoruba language, which therefore validates its sociological and evolutionary traits.

Lyrics

Ina ran kawoomotiojiowoboeru (2ce)
Esodi nu ke, e fi owokansi be be re idi
Olomi da kun da kun be bi sun mo mi
Da kun da kanbebi mi.

The lyrics are poetic and philosophical and so they cannot be interpreted directly but can be given denotative meanings that express the appropriateness of personal or human existence. The metaphoric content of the lyrics is based on description of romantic gesture on a dance

floor, as viewed by the composer or vocalist. The intervallic relationships in the successive notes are in conjunct movement that is partly mellismatic when rendering the melody. The melody has close affinity with that of the Islamic motives in rendition that is partly modal.

Forms: The structural content of Apala is well enunciated by considering its phrases and sections or various parts. As mostly observed in other African music genres, ‘Call and Response’ is mainly employed in Haruna Ishola’s *Ina Ran*. Ishola sings the call while the back-up singers sing the response. Occasionally, he joins the back-up singers to sing as a form of embellishment. At a particular section of the song Haruna sings narratively, giving a story (partly recitative) of an occurrence in a philosophical manner and then ends the story with call and response.

Harmony and Texture: The song, although characterized by falsettos, is made up of male-voice texture that is rich in lower register, which somehow reflects the religious ethics as regards gender segregation in the mosque and evidence of patriarchal system in African society. It is mainly homophonic. The back-up singers sing in unison with an intermittent response to the call from Haruna Ishola.

Instrumentation

Here, the theory of organology and the art of combining musical instruments as observed in Ishola’s *Ina Ran* is introduced to the student. This is achieved by:

Identification of the musical instrument as observed in Haruna Ishola’s music is expedient. This also includes the nomenclature of the instruments and the parts that make up each of them. It is observed that he uses the same set of musical instruments each time he performs with his group or band.

Students must be enlightened about the instruments that make up his ensemble as thus:

There are four kinds of drums and they vary in sizes. The biggest of the drums is called *iya-ilu*, followed by the *Omele-ako*, *Omele-abo*, and the *Gbedu* itself. The teacher should make sure that the students see these drums and they know them in terms of their differences in sizes. Other instruments that may be included in the ensemble include the “Sekere” and the “Agogo”. The teacher should instruct the students on the classification of each instrument in the ensemble in accordance with the four basic classifications of traditional musical instruments: idiophone, membranophone, chordophone and aerophone. **Idiophones** are Sekere, Agogo and Agidigbo.

Membranophones are Omele-ako, Iya-ilu, Omele-abo and Gbedu.

The justification for the classification of each instrument must be emphasized as it is based on the playing technique and medium of transmission. Each instrument must be discussed under its respective category for clarity sake with accentuation on the membranophone instruments that form the nucleus of the ensemble. In this regard, aerophone and chordophone will not be mentioned, as there are no instruments in the ensemble that can be categorized as such.

Playing Techniques of Haruna’s Apala Instrumental Ensemble.

Playing the instruments in Haruna's ensemble requires a gradual approach to training student on how to play by taking a close look at:

1. Different Pitches Produced by the Instruments.
2. Different Positions of the Player/Instrumentalist
3. Holding of Sticks
4. Right-hand and Left-hand Techniques
5. Sight-Reading.
6. Varying Rhythmic Patterns at Different Tempo and Time Signatures
7. Embellishments

The above techniques can be realized by taking into consideration the following progressive steps during practical rehearsals:

- * Get the class to clap and master the rhythmic patterns.
- * Divide the class into five groups and assign a pattern to each group. Let them clap and memorize the rhythm.
- * Bring them together and let them clap together harmoniously.
- * Ensure that they keep to steady beat or metronome.
- * Repetition of the pattern several times until they master the rhythm and keep to the beat.
- * Get them to select appropriate instruments that can play their parts. Let them perform it and rehearse for about five minutes.
- * Let them take turns to conduct the ensemble.
- * Record the music into a tape for the class library.

Pre-Performance / Pre-Concert

Putting all the procedure into consideration, the teacher will be ready to engage the students in the reality of performance which ultimately prepares them for future - main performance / concert. This is done in a way whereby the students are put under intense condition of real performance or concert by preparing and perfecting all the pieces for the main concert.

Concert / Performance

The instructor must organize musical concert which must be staged periodically. Thereafter, the students put into practice what they have been taught and have mastered in the presence of the audience. This performance may however be for school activities (within or outside) like the end of school year party, excision time, presentation and a lot more.

The guideline given will not only overcome the problem of irregularity in our school curriculum and inadequacy in our approach to teaching African instrumental ensemble but will help in preserving and sustaining African culture. Furthermore, the organizational skill adopted in structuring this procedure directly or indirectly helps in disseminating the concepts in African music culture without ambiguity. This manual will also serve as lesson plan for schools.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Teachers should avoid randomness but embrace systematised approach in their manner of evaluation that is, students' assessment should be based on the level of what have been taught

and not at random. The evaluation should be on each student and the instrument he or she has been trained with. However he or she must be assessed based on his or her group blending, overall musicianship and sense of embellishments. This can be achieved by giving the students assignments regularly.

Conclusion

Education should be seen as a vehicle or tool to disseminate our enriched culture and so the apparently stated guidelines or scheme will serve as effortless steps in delivering or imparting traditional African music. Consequently, it will gradually show case African cultural, philosophical and aesthetic values. Moreover, the encouragement to aspiring for the knowledge of African traditions is somehow facilitated worldwide through the orderly presentation of the scheme provided for Apala music.

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