

AFRO-BEAT: FROM LAGOS TO THE WORLD

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Introduction

Sonic conquest as a recurrent experience of man the world over, permeate dividing walls of religious, race, language and intercontinental partition. Music is sound. Dominating and irresistible sound whose subjects we are. However, soothing influence on some sonic creativity leaves little to be desired, occasioned by the fact that supposed pleasant sounds is devoid of pathos to news sickling to consumers of its contents. Music as a universal language loses its fragrance of relevance and sonic dominance without the subduing aesthetics of ethos and pathos. Every musical creative work and the human talent behind it represent the grand objective of this paper.

Theological perspective of music history is traceable to God. This notwithstanding, research findings overtime by scholars suggested certain qualities inherent in a piece of music that are most probably responsible for its' universal appeal. As it were, the music industry currently enjoy global accolades owing to the success of various international artists\ musicians of Nigeria origin whose creative art work have placed Nigeria on the map of music independence from the west. Expectedly, almost all genres of music are produced and performed in Nigeria currently.

Some of the genres of music current in vogue in Nigeria includes but not limited to Afro-beat music, traditional ogene music, reggae music, fuji music, hip hop music, traditional folk music, neo traditional music, mashall music, ritual music, sacred music, apala music, sakara music, acuko na agwu, dadakuada music, rock n roll music, chorale music and other numerous traditional brands of music performed by different Nigerian tribes within and beyond the shores of Nigeria.

The music industry in Nigeria today is locally and globally a major contributor to youth employment and empowerment. Its current value not only serve as food for the soul 'but also as lifeline for the pocket'. A study conducted by statista, in Nigeria reveal that the music sub-sectors revenue grew from 26 million US dollars in 2014 to 34 million dollars in 2018. This figure according the research and projection by statista, is expected to grow to 44 million dollars by 2023.

The statistics from the study reveal that the music industry possess the capacity to support millions of teeming youths and generates considerable revenue for the economy. To understand the state of the music industry in Nigeria, it is imperative to highlight several business opportunities inherent in this industry which has made it immensely profitable one without necessarily being a music artist. They include, but not limited to owing a record label. Owing a music streaming platform, commercial event planning, music video directing, entertainment law, being a musical artist, owing a music TV station or radio station ownership, among others. A key stakeholder involved in the music business is the telecommunications service providers who actively utilize the output of the music industry for their product servicing such as ring tunes, callers tune etc. (KPMG international: 2021).

In addition, the immergence of streaming service and streaming platforms like boom play, apple music, and spotify among others has greatly impacted the music listening experience in Nigeria, and the global. With this development, an artiste now earns royalty based on the numbers of streams their song generated on the streaming platform. Although these streaming platforms have made CD piracy a thing of the past, a challenge emerged via digital piracy. Nevertheless, the music industry has fed well in the past two decades. Owing to the success recorded by current crop of Nigerian artistes and musicians like Femi Kuti, Seun Kuti, David Adeleke (davido), Ibrahim Balogun(wizkid), Innocent Idibia (2face), David Ogunmefun (vector), tope Alabi, wasiu ayinde (kwam 1), Damini Agebunoluwa Ogulu (burna boy), Olamide Gbenga adedeji (olamide), Chibuzo Nelson Azubuike (phyno) , Chinedu Okoli (flavor), Peter and Paul (p. square), Nathaniel Bassey, Osinachi Kalu Okoro Egbu (sinach), Azeez Adeshina Fashola (naira marley), among others.

These artistes\musician produce and perform different genres of music of which have been listed above. The artistes have also won different awards and accolades for themselves and for Nigeria at home and abroad. The most recent music award that placed on the spotlight was 'GRAMMY AWARD'. The Grammy award is the highest music award in the world today. This noble award was given to two prominent Nigeria artistes pop music stars- Wizkid and Burna boy.

Suffice it to say that, the two world- class artist had their foundation in Afro-beat music genre. Wizkid grew up visiting the new African shrine in Lagos; owned by Femi Kuti- the eldest son the late legendary musician Fela Anikulapo Kuti; the inventor of Afro-beat music genre. Also, he (wizkid) even did an Afro-beat music collaboration with Femi Kuti titled "jaiye jaiye". Burna Boy on his own part, grew up in an Afro-beat music family; his grandfather, Benson Idonije, once managed Fela

Anikulapo Kuti (the Afro-beat legend) in Lagos, where he was constantly immersed in Afro-beat music vibes. Today, most upcoming artistes have taken to Afro-beat because of the success recorded by their music role models that ply their trade in Afro-beat music. What is Afro-beat music? What is special about this genre of music?

Methodology

The researchers engaged the qualitative approach to gather data i.e. observation, in-depth review of previous researches by scholars that centered on Afro-beat genre as well as online sources; YouTube Afro-beat music video of Nigerian artistes\musicians and short structured interview section with minimal questions, Nigerian info FM station analysis, international media commentaries and interviews about Afrobeat music e.g. BBC, NY times as well as local media like: Channels TV online(interview with Femi Kuti) and vanguard newspaper.

The Lagos Root

Historically, Afro-beat music was developed in Lagos in the late 1960s led by Fela Kuti who with Tony Allen, experimented with different contemporary music of the time. Afro-beat music stemmed from highlife music that began in Ghana in the 1920s. Afro-beat music is a music genre which involves the combination of elements of West African musical styles such as music fuji music with American jazz and latin, soul and funk influences, with a focus on chanted vocals, complex intersecting rhythms and percussion. The term was coined in the 1960s by Nigeria multi-instrumentalist and band leader- Fela Kuti, who is responsible for pioneering and popularizing the style within and outside the shores of Nigeria (Wikipedia: 2021). The specialty that Afro-beat music genre commands is partly based on the fact that Afro-beat is jubilant music that draws on west African source- hybrid language, propulsive rhythms, and mixes them with delivery and tone from across

Africa traditional music, the America's hip hop and Jamaican dancehall among others.

Beyonce's smile delivered extra wattage when she gave a rare interview to ABC robin Robert, she spoke about her soundtrack to the widely awaited Disney film. Calling this production 'a love letter to Africa', Beyonce included her own track and brought in popular artistes from across the continent especially Nigeria. this album that includes Burna Boy, Tecno, Wizkid, and Tiwa Savage have become increasingly famous in the past few years, but they surely play on far bigger stages with this film release. This event also serves as a global introduction to their genre known as Afro-beat (teenvogue: 2021).

The global acceptance of Afro-beat music is beyond expectation. It has become a global phenomenon. Based on the global dominance of afro beat music, the BBC report thus: Nigerian musicians are touring the world and picking up awards at the forefront of the global craze for Afro-beat. ... these new stars including wizkid, davido, tiwa savage (tiwatope savage) and jidenna proving to be some of Nigeria biggest export so musc so that global music giasnt such as universal music group and sony have set up offices in the country. Davido's 'fall' released in 2017, is the most popular Nigerian music video ever. ...the West African phenomenon is not only dominating the sound of the continent. It has flown into club festivals and radio play list across the globe. DJ Rita ray told BBC Afro-beat is also influencing genres from grime to RnB and music makers from Ed Sheeray to rappers like Drake and Stafflon Don, who have all embraced Afro-beat music genre in recent release (British Broadcasting Corperation (BBC): 2021). The profile of Afro-beat musical genre is currently world class. Let's now consider the inherent prowess of Afro-beat music: five pillars of Afro-beat music;

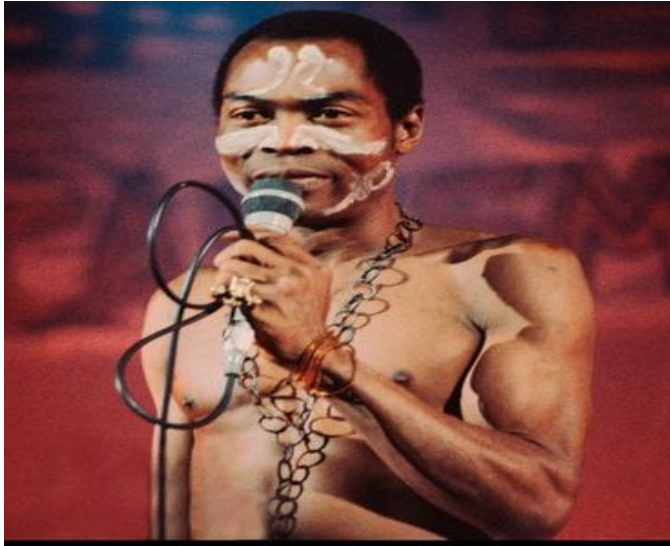


Plate 1: Fela Anikulapo Kuti

Percussive Rhythmic Fusion

The rhythm of Afro-beat music is rooted in African music traditional culture of West African communities. The rhythm is hybrid with heavy percussion which mostly dominate the fast paced rhythmic interplay among accompanying accompaniments. Hence, Afro-beat dance is a diverse and fascinating stlye originating predominantly from Sub-saharan Africa. It is an evolution from traditional African dance styles following the creation of Afro-beat music. ... infact, the dance was developed as a response to the genre's incredibly energetic and upbeat rhythm (sheydancestudio.com:2019)

Unique Vocal Techniques

Afro-beat music boast of unique vocal qualities which many music band lack in practice. Oikelome (2017) confirms the fact that "Singing played a prominent role in Afro-beat band. As an integral part of the band, the singers provided the vocal accompaniment for the music. Their voices were characterized by distinct articulation, rhythmic precision, sense of tonality, lucid expression, and intonation



Plate 2: Femi Kuti (Fela's first Son)

Language

Arguably, the language of Afro-beat music is Nigerian Pidgin (Pidgin English). This language dates back to early contact with the colonial era, when the locals started learning the colonial masters' language of communication for trade and conversational purposes. In a bid to speak the white man's language, they faltered here and there. Nevertheless, this English version permeated. The Nigerian Pidgin language is the most widely spoken language in Nigeria (though not officially recognized) and other West African countries. Even those locals that cannot converse in queens English understand and easily communicate in Nigerian Pidgin. This is in addition to the learned for the educated as well as the illiterates in the society. Hence, Nigerian Pidgin enjoys general appeal especially when infused into music. Afro beat music patronized Nigerian Pidgin language than every other genre of music. Nigerian Pidgin is unique to the rest of the world apart from West Africa. Therefore, when it is heard, arouses a lot of interest. Keady Iboko (2021) said:

"Nigerian music is known as Afro-beat world and it would not be where it is today without the infusion of Nigerian Pidgin. The blend of it in lyrics, melody and production has made it endearing to the people and has aided its penetration all around the continent and Europe as Africans travel the world. ...the influence of Nigerian Pidgin in music can be traced to far back historical moment. It was used as a tool for culture cross-pollination whenever certain events like festivals took place. The likes of Fela who pioneered Afro-beat and told their stories in Nigerian Pidgin...in early stages of Afro-beat fusion into hip-hop, RnB and other genres, singing in pidgin combined with local dialect was the rave."

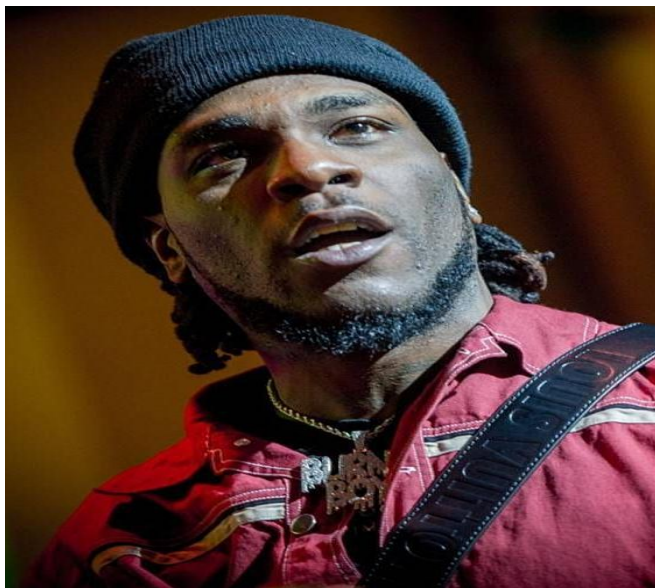


Plate 3: Burna Boy

The Horns

Afro-beat is incomplete without the horns- trumpet, saxophones, and trombone respectively. The aforementioned brass instruments play prominent roles in distinguishing the natural of 'Abami Eda's creation from others. Fela kuti could play a short Afro-beat music sonata with the saxophone as the lead instrument while other instruments

accompany the performance. This he did regularly, sometimes as instrumental music or before the inclusion of lyrical content. The communication between the horns adds aesthetic value to its flavor. The horn was a prominent member of Afro-beat band led by Fela. This is confirmed by Oikelome (2017) who said "the instrumentalists consist of at least twelve horns lines: two baritone saxophones, three alto saxophones, two tenor saxophones, and four trumpets. Fela played the tenor saxophone and the piano while another organist supported in the background."

Advocacy

The Afro-beat music is like a human voice on its own because this genre of music from inception have continued to be at the forefront of advocating for better living standard for masses. Hence, it found itself pitching against the authorities on regular bases. Oikelome (2017) quoting Benson Adonije (former Fela band manager) stated thus "Fela's music was censored by the government press because of the lyrics they termed sensational and unacceptable...he embraced Pan-Africanism, using Afro-beat music as a weapon of struggle and political emancipation" The poor masses naturally appreciate this genre of music owing to the fact that it mostly focus on the issues affecting the ordinary man in the street of Nigeria. a society where the poor remain poor while the get richer, where social amenities are a mirage, where corruption hold sway in high and low places, where the law do not apply to all citizen- the poor live under the law while the rich live above the law.



Plate 4: Wizkid

Excerpt from one of Femi Kuti's song:

"I sorry, sorry oo

I sorry for Ni-ge-ria

I sorry, sorry oo

I sorry for Africa-a

....where right is wrong and wrong is right

History has shown that there has been a social mobilization against societal anomalies by Afro-beat artistes. Sonic decedent is what Afro-beat music represents in the face of compromise by artiste\ musician whose only interest is economic gratification via music business. People still listen to Afro-beat and enjoy it partly due to the fact that issues raised in the music are pertinent to the masses and are still unaddressed till date by successive leaders at different levels in Nigeria. This natural inclination towards protest endears it to the masses. Thus, making it highly appreciable.

Summary and Conclusion

The lofty position enjoyed by Afro-beat music genre at the global stage cannot be over-emphasized. Afro-beat is now a global

phenomenon, and pride itself as one of the greatest exports of Nigeria (from Lagos) to the world. Although a lot of offspring brands are explored by different artistes all over the world; due to its mass acceptability and global success. Nevertheless, Afro-beat has remained a sound voice to reckon with. The international recognition accorded Afro-beat is an unambiguous manifestation of the inherent qualities of its constituent make-up such as percussive rhythmic fusion, reality-based lyrics, language (pidgin), and advocacy. As it were, it is suggestively recommended that these elements of Afro-beat musical genres be emulated and possibly inculcated into the other genres of music so as to enjoy same mass appeal and global acceptability.

Secondly, music composers, educators, performers, singers, instrumentalists, researchers should consider these five pillars when conceiving their music in affinity to their chosen genre.

Thirdly, the power of Nigerian Pidgin and vocal advocacy ignite pathos in the masses (locals at home) and stir sympathy from both local and western audience or private listeners who also are victims of imperfect system. Ethos on the other hand deals with the commanding personality behind the sonic phenomenon.

Fourthly, music educators should encourage their trainees to take to Afro-beat music genre as the world currently submit to its irresistible uniqueness. In pursuance of these, it is hope that many admission seekers in higher institutions will opt for music as a field of study based knowing fully well that the chances of mounting the world stage after music study at the higher institution is assured than ever before.

A situation where most music departments in the country tilt more towards western musical genres and ideas poses itself a limitation to the music trainee. Thus, making music as a choice field of study by

admission seekers who are experiencing and appreciating Afro-beat music among others, less attractive. This needs to be checked.

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