

THE PRESERVATION OF SEVEN SELECTED MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF *BARI BII* MUSIC GROUP IN OGONI COMMUNITIES, RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper focused on the seven choices of musical instruments selected by *Bari Bii* music group of Ogoni communities. Musical instruments are the engine room of any music group. The *Bari Bii* music group makes use of seven musical instruments namely two small size slit wooden drums (*Akira*), one big slit wooden drum (*Kio*), one single membrane drum (*Kere*), one big size metal gong (*Gira*) and one small size metal gong (*Gira*). These instruments play rhythmic, melo-rhythmic, timely important roles during performances, the instruments are classified under idiophone and membranophone families. The seven musical instruments are as old as the group and attention has not been paid on the selection of these instruments in Ogoni communities while their performances are enjoyed by the people. Most music groups preserve their musical instruments among themselves but the seven musical instruments of the *Bari Bii* music group are preserved in their spiritual father's shrine (*Amachree*) for protection by the gods of the land. Information sources were based on observation, participation and print media such as books, journals and conference papers. Findings reveal that all the members of the group during rehearsals and their six months training learn how to play the seven musical instruments that is why they do not feel the absence of any member in their performances. Conclusion and recommendations were made for the improvement and preservation of *Bari Bii* seven musical instruments in Ogoni community.

Key words: Preservation, selected, instruments, communities, spiritual father, shrine

Introduction

Musical instruments in any cultural music group in Ogoni communities play important roles, without musical instruments in any performance to accompany the performers the performance will not be complete and without any bearing. Therefore, musical instruments are the main stream of any performance in the communities, it is used to create and enrich every musical activity in Ogoni communities. In a situation where there are no constructed musical instruments from local materials within the immediate environment, people improvise to form musical instruments like hand clapping, stamping of feet and the use of voice to form part or on the spot musical instruments. Music making is a part of every ethnic society and music making is experienced from birth to

death. In Ogoni community, as soon as a child is born, the new born baby is welcomed with music, women gather to sing and dance with or without traditional musical instruments; they improvise with their mouths, hands, legs even spatter to express their joy for the new born baby.

Agu (2000) observes that:

Nigerians are great lovers of music, who create and perform music to enrich every activity, ranging from birth to death. All musical creations serve specific purposes and all performances are carefully chosen to suit specified functions and activities appropriately (p. 79).

Virtually all activities in Ogoni communities are accompanied with music and musical instruments ranging from birth, marriage, festivals, coronations, funerals, religious worship and cultural activities. Music performances in Ogoni communities start from infancy to adulthood, in the communities, children are involved in music making; through the construction of miniature instruments with materials found around them. During festive periods, they gather themselves and move from one community to another to make music with their musical instruments for cash reward. Agu (2017) supports that "children are initiated into active involvement in musical activities right from infancy within the ambit of the socio-cultural boundaries of each ethnic society." (p. 20) In Ogoni communities, children come together to make music and this music makes them happy, sharpen and develop their sense of creativity and they see their instruments as a means of fun and relaxation and they also use their musical instruments as a medium of expression and communication. When these children make their own music sometimes, the adults hijack this music and form adult music cultural group for the entertainment of the community, the *Bari Bii* music group members started from childhood to play musical instruments in the community and this has contributed to their dexterity on the seven musical instruments at their adulthood.

Odunuga (2009) asserts that "Music is functional to all human beings, animals too produce and enjoy music. Birds and snakes make music in one way or the other; music is seen as an integral part of human life" (p. 8). Music is synonymous with human beings, as soon as music is heard, it affects the psyche and emotions of any human and these are responded through nodding of the head, stamping of the feet, singing and dancing. The *Bari Bii* traditional musical instruments play unique roles both in the *Bari Bii* musical groups social performance and in other aspects that assist in the cultural performances of Ogoni communities. The instruments are used to draw attention and to perform other necessary functions that may not be connected to musical events, like public announcements, warning signals, communications, metaphoric instruments, scary instruments and also sensational instruments.

Okafor (2005) confirms that:

Musical instruments are the tools of a musician. African musical instruments are used primarily for making music but they also perform some special (extra musical) functions in the society. They are in daily use for rituals, spirit manifest dance, maiden's dance, war dance, acrobatic

displays, vocational dance, cult dance, recreational and ceremonial dance, for social entertainment and vocal accompaniment (p. 178).

The *Bari Bii* musical instruments are the essential tools of their performances, they are the internal part of the musical traditions of the community, playing their musical roles and other important specific roles that showcase the cultural heritage of the Ogoni people.

The Preservation of *Bari Bii* Seven Musical Instruments

The survival of any group lies in the preservation of their musical instrument.

The *Bari Bii* music group is one of the best cultural music group in Ogoni, this group through their music has brought peace, unity, love and progress in communities. *Bari Bii* in Ogoni means God's play. The group is as old as their forefathers and it is still in existence till date. The *Bari Bii* honours invitation both within and outside the community, their music has taken them to places both within and outside the state, also, religion is not a barrier. They have composed many songs performed with the musical instruments which are recorded in audio CD and has volume one and volume two, also their music are documented in Rivers State Television (RSTV). The beauty of their music lies in their instrumentation, all the members of the group sing, dance and play the seven musical instruments of the group they don't feel the absence of any member.

The *Bari Bii* music group makes use of seven traditional musical instruments and the materials used in the construction of these instruments are found in Ogoni communities. Onwuekwe (2011) affirms that:

In any vegetation are found trees and other plants. These plants are endowments from nature. People from various climate/vegetation zones make use of these gifts of nature to produce their musical instruments (p. 140).

The *Bari Bii* traditional musical instruments are made from woods, metals, clays, animal skins and these materials are found within Ogoni locality and also constructed within the locality. The people that construct these instruments are members of the community and the seven musical instruments are preserved in the community. The seven musical instruments are preserved in their spiritual father's shrine for protection by the gods of the land. Their musical instruments are not more or less than seven in number. The seven musical instruments are:

No.	Folk Instruments	English Translations
2	<i>Akiri</i>	Slit wooden drum
1	<i>Kere</i>	Membrane drum
1	<i>Gira</i> (big size)	Big metal gong
1	<i>Gira</i> (small size)	Small metal gong
1	<i>Kana</i>	Musical pot
1	<i>Koo</i>	Big slit wooden drum

The two *Akira* (two small slit wooden drums) are the lead instruments. During performance the *akira* plays first followed by the *kana* (musical pot) then the *koo* (big slit wooden drum) joins and then the big and small *gira* (big and small metal gong) joins

last. The big and small metal gong during performance plays communication roles. One of the instruments, the *kere* (drum) has special features. Agu (2005) posits that "Geometrical designs, carved animal and (at times) human figures are found on some instruments. This practice explains further the desire of the people to relate their musical instruments to things around them." (p. 90) The *kere*(drum) is decorated with mirror round the body for beautification and dark in colour because it is always kept close to fire by their spiritual father in his shrine to avoid ants or rodents tampering with the membrane of the drum and also for longevity, the drum instrument is as old as the group, only the membrane that has been changed.



Picture 1: The Seven Musical Instruments of the *Bari Bii* Music Group



Picture 2: The *Bari Bii* Instrumentalists performing with the seven musical instruments



Picture 3: Their spiritual father's shrine(*Amakiri*) where the seven musical instruments are preserved before and after performances

Classification of *Bari Bii* Traditional Musical Instruments

In 1933 Eric von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs came up with four classifications of African musical instruments, their method of classification was based on the cause of sound generated by the instruments. The four main categories are:

- (a) Idiophones
- (b) Membranophones
- (c) Aerophones
- (d) Chordophones

Out of the four categories, the *Bari Bii* music group musical instruments are classified under two main categories which are: (a) idiophones and (b) membranophones.

Idiophones

Agordoh (1985) informs that idiophones are instruments whose bodies vibrate to produce sound when beaten, shaken or struck, Idiophones are most common instruments in Nigeria since they could be found among all tribes. Among the idiophones musical instruments found in *Bari Bii* music group are two slit wooden drums (*akira*), one big and one small metal gong (*gira*), one percussion pot (*kana*) and one big slit wooden drum (*koo*). The two slit wooden drums (*akira*) are the most valuable instruments of the group, they are popular and widespread idiophone instruments found in Ogoni. In various parts of Ogoni tribe, it has different names, the name this instrument answers in one tribe or ethnic society depends on its size and shape. For example, the small size among the Ogoni is called *akira* while the medium and biggest sizes are called *koo*, the slit wooden drum is under struck idiophone family.

The metal gongs (*gira*) both the big and small sizes are referred to as clapperless bells. The clapperless bells are of various sizes; long, small and double. It has many names depending on the tribe where it is found, used, and also on its sizes, shapes and roles. The biggest and smallest size of the instruments in *Bari Bii* music is called *gira* and it is one of the most important musical instruments of the group, this instrument is also under struck idiophone family.



Picture 4: *Gira*(Metal gong - small size)



Picture 5: The two *Akira* (Two slit wooden drums) lead instruments



Picture 6: *Koo* (Slit wooden drum - big size)



Picture 7: *Gira* (Metal gong - big size)

The musical pot (*kana*) is an idiophone instrument performed in *Bari Bii* dance music group, it is an instrument made with clay usually designed in two different ways. The small size of the instrument is oval in shape with extended neck which terminates in an opening through which it is played. A second opening or hole is located on one side of this pot near the neck. A handle is fixed at the opposite side of this second hole. The player is usually seated with the instrument on his or her laps as he beats the two openings with his two palms in alternating rhythm. The second design is normally used by the *Bari Bii* music group which has one hole which is on top of the neck. This design is usually big in size and it is not carried by the players on their bodies, it is kept on the ground and it is played with a special pad and not with bare hands. The percussion drum (*kana*) is under beat idiophone.



Picture 8: *Kana* (Percussion pot)

Membranophone

Kofoworola, and Lateef, (1987) asserts that "drum is the generic name for instruments consisting of skin stretched over a frame or vessel and struck with the hands or a stick (or sticks). Drums therefore are practically identical with the category 'membranophones'." (p.216) Drums are classified under membranophone family. They appear in wide variety of shapes and sizes; some have membranes on both ends while others have on only one side, with the other end open. The membranophone instruments are instruments in which sound is produced with animal skin fixed on the wooden or metal frames. They are played with bare hands, leather thongs or twigs, wooden or metal beaters. Vidal (2012) affirms that "drumming and singing constitute the main forms of musical expression." (p. 43) The *Bari Bii* music group in their performance use one single membrane drum called *kere*, the drum is small in size and the animal skin fastened on it and this drum has a special feature of mirror decorated around it. It is dark in colour due to its preservation close to the fire for preservation. The player displays dexterity on the instrument, he drummer sings, plays and dance at the same time.



Picture 9: *Kere* (Single membrane drum with mirrors decorated round the body of the instrument)

Importance of *Bari Bii* Musical Instruments

The seven musical instruments of the *Bari Bii* music group are the result of their good performances in the communities, both within and outside the communities. Onwukwe

(2011) posit that musical instruments play the following roles: rhythmic, melo-rhythmic and timing (p. 135). The *Bari Bii* music group attached importance to their musical instruments and that is the reason why they don't use more or less than seven musical instruments because of the cultural roles these instruments play. The instruments play rhythmic, melo-rhythmic and timing roles. The importance of the musical instruments to the group are:

(a) Rhythmic importance

The metal gongs (*gira*) and slit wooden drums (*akira*) effectively and beautifully play rhythmic roles in the *Bari Bii* music group performance, the instruments give very strong percussive effects on the music. During their performance, the small slit wooden drum plays first and other instruments join and serve as an accompaniment to the instrument. The metal gong performs and alerts the dancers when to start the performance and when to end the performance.

(b) Melo-Rhythmic importance

These are the musical instruments that play both melodic and rhythmic roles in a traditional ensemble. In the *Bari Bii* music group, the slit wooden drum (*akira*), the single membrane drum (*kere*) and the metal gong (*gira*) play both melodic and rhythmic roles in the group, as these instruments are played in a performance, it spurs the members of the group and the audience into action.

(c) Timing importance

The musical pot (*kana*) and the small metal gong (*gira*) keep time during the performance of the dance, they give ostinato effects to the music. The instruments play the musical patterns that are repeated persistently throughout the performance by the *Bari Bii* music group and other instruments rely on their timing roles.

- d. To entertain the entire Ogoni communities, Rivers State and Nigeria at large
- e. Advertise the *Bari Bii* music group
- f. Preserve the traditional cultures of the Ogoni communities
- g. Educate the communities on the importance and maintenance of their cultural heritage
- h. Perform as representative of their culture on special public occasions
- i. Energize the music group and the people of the community at large.

Findings

Traditional musical instruments are very important in any traditional music group, the *Bari Bii* traditional musical instruments are seven in number, they are two small wooden drums (*akira*), one big size metal gong (*gira*), one small size metal gong (*gira*), one percussion pot (*kana*) and one big slit wooden drum (*koo*). The seven musical instruments are preserved in their spiritual father's shrine (*Amachree*) before and after performances.

The members of this group are trained for six months to learn how to play all the musical instruments and that is why the absence of any instrumentalist are not felt during their performances. Among the seven musical instruments, the small slit wooden drum (*akira*) are the most important instruments. It plays both rhythmic and melo-rhythmic roles in their performances, other instruments play timing and melodic roles.

The materials used in the construction of the instruments are found within Ogoni localities and members of the communities' construct and sale these instruments for a living. The musical instruments are classified under idiophone and membranophone families and these musical instruments are passed on from one generation to another to preserve their cultural heritage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Bari Bii* group musical instruments are as old as the group, the musical instruments used by their forefathers are still in use and preserved by the community to maintain, entertain, advertise, preserve, educate and perform their traditional roles. The *Bari Bii* music group are well known for their music performances through dance and playing of musical instruments. The importance of musical instruments in their performances cannot be overemphasized and the music performed with these musical instruments has taken them to places both within and outside Rivers state. The *Bari Bii* musical instruments form part of the musical traditions of the people, playing their musical roles and other identifiable specific roles that showcase the cultural traditions of the community, they enhance the musical and the socio-cultural activities that go on in the community. Their traditional musical instruments play symbolic roles both in the musical arts tradition of the Ogoni people and there are no age/sex limitations on the use of *Bari Bii* musical instruments, it is therefore concluded that the seven musical instruments are the heartbeat of the *Bari Bii* music group of Ogoni communities. Preserved for with their spiritual father for the future generations.

Recommendations

1. The federal, state and local governments should encourage the preservation of *Bari Bii* music group so that the musical instruments will be preserved for posterity.
2. The *Bari Bii* spiritual father, *Amachree* where the instruments are preserved should be turned to a tourist centre where cultural heritage will be preserved.
3. The materials used in the construction of the musical instruments should be planted in the community to make the instruments accessible to the people.
4. The xylophone which is a melodic instrument should be added to the instruments to increase the number of the *Bari Bii* melodic instruments.
5. The *Bari Bii* musical instruments should represent the identity of the music group.

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