

## COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES OF YORUBA ISLAMISED GOSPEL MUSIC

Dr Adedayo Ezekiel Babatope

Department of Music,  
Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State  
Email: adedayoe@babcock.edu.ng.com

### Abstract

Yoruba Islamised Gospel Music (YIGM) is a genre that is situated within three main world cultures of Western Europe, Arab and Africa. The multicultural uniqueness and the inherent adventured/ creativity that characterise twenty first century have to an appreciable degree influenced the compositional and performance practice of Yoruba Islamised Gospel Music (YIGM). With a particular attention to *Wákà Àpàlà* and *Fúji* gospel, this study was designed to examine couples of compositional techniques/devices encapsulated by this brand of gospel music, with a bid to ascertain the degree of cultural nuances/ postmodernism traits it embodies, as well as the implications of such features in Nigerian gospel music (NGM) scene. Within ethno -musicological approach, this study explored cultural pluralism and social evolution as its theoretical frame works. Relevant data were sourced from text books/journals alongside informant/in depth interviews and documentations of the musicians' performances on audio tapes. Inferences from the study unfolded diverse compositional techniques contrived by the artists which spanned repetition, variation, hocket, appoggiatura, mellismatic note setting, recitative (heightened speech), harmony, slogan, overlapping and interjection. It was also evident that the compositional techniques harnessed by the artists of YIGM resonate African, Judo-Christian and Arabian- Islamic cultural landscapes. Furthermore, it was deduced from the study that the inherent multicultural nature of YIGM is gratifying in term of its general and musical roles. This paper concluded that Yoruba Islamised gospel music is potential for cultural synergy and dynamism, a stance attested by its compositional techniques and acceptability within the mainstream of Nigerian gospel music.

Keywords: Yoruba Islamised gospel music, Multiculturalism, Mellismatic

### Introduction

In the pre-colonial, Islamic and Christian eras, the Yoruba music was distinct in instrumentation, vocal types, performance contexts, to mention a few. This stance was evident in a vast number of vocal forms that were engaged for religious and secular ceremonies. For instance, *Ìjálá*, a vocal music, is presented by the hunters, *Ìyèrè* Ifá by Ifá priests, while *eṣkún iyàwó* is usually performed to accompany a bride during her wedding ceremony. The premium placed on text informed the massive textual expressions, spanning figurative, proverbial and philosophical declarations among others (Adedayo, 2021). The advent of colonization, Christian Missionary Movement, both from Western Europe and Arabian Islamic tradition profoundly reshaped Yoruba music. The European influence culminated in the emergence of diverse Christian musical forms, namely Church music including hymnody and gospel brand. Meanwhile, the Islamic

movement evoked two musical practices designated 'Islamic' and 'Islamised' music. While Islamic as elucidated by Omibiyi (1979) and Daramola (2007) depicts musical practice entrenched in Islamic tradition, the latter delineates Yoruba musical practice that has been influenced by Islamic culture. Construed as a reaction from the liberal to indignation launched against the profane appropriation of music by the Islamic religious leaders, Islamised music which emerged as a semi-religious miniature, metamorphosed to socio-religious and socio-cultural status of popular form.

Omibiyi (1979)'s allusion to Yoruba popular music of Islamic origin is insightful. The scholar designates this subgenre with its variants; *Wákà Àpàlà* and Fuji that are aptly composed and performed essentially by Musicians of Islamic religious background as 'Yoruba Islamised popular music'. As a corollary to quest for creativity and adventure, corroborated by allegiance to primordial religion, a vast number of artistes have emerged in recent times, who integrate Yoruba Islamised popular styles with the conventional gospel music. The synergy between Yoruba gospel music and the popular music of Islamic derivatives is consummated in a musical synthesis deciphered by this researcher as Yoruba Islamised Gospel Music (YIGM). The aftermaths of this amalgamation, underpinned by post-modernism are apparent in textual content, compositional/performance contexts, instrumentation, aesthetic, and compositional techniques. This study interrogated compositional techniques ascribed to YIGM, with a bid to ascertain its inherent cultural nuances, reminiscences of post modernism and the efficacy portrayed by such a musical trend within the mainstream of Nigerian Gospel music. In ensuring brevity, simplicity and also abate monotony of usage, the acronym "YIGM" has been abstracted for Yorùbá Islamised Gospel Music in this study.

### Compositional Techniques

The present styles are significantly defined by a myriad of compositional devices. Enlisted are, repetition, variation, hocket, appoggiatura, mellismatic note setting, recitative (heightened speech), harmony, slogan, overlapping and interjection,

### Repetition

The concept of repetition and its modifications is extensively engaged within the framework of musical form. In a bid to combat the challenge of monotony that often emanates from the usage of this device, a scheme is appropriated by the artistes in which case, melodically synonymous stanzas and verses are stocked with varied textual messages. The second stanzas and chorus of *modupe ore mi* (I am appreciative of God's benevolence) deducted from *Wákà gospel* append to this design. On the other hand, occasions have been sighted in which textually analogous phrases appropriate contrasting melodic lines. This scenario is depicted by song from *Fúji gospel*.

**Excerpt on Technique of Repetition, *Wákà gospel* (Melodically analogous) the same melodic line laden with the contrasting texts.**

Iba fun Baba loka seba re o verse one  
Moni Jésù loba ota ma pofo verse two

**Musical example:**

fun Ba-ba lo-ke, a se-ba re o\_\_\_ I-ba fun Ba-ba lo-ke, a se-ba re o\_\_\_ O-pe o-lo

The musical example consists of two staves. The top staff is a treble clef in 4/4 time, showing a melodic line with lyrics: "fun Ba-ba lo-ke, a se-ba re o\_\_\_ I-ba fun Ba-ba lo-ke, a se-ba re o\_\_\_ O-pe o-lo". The bottom staff is a bass clef in 4/4 time, which is empty.

**Excerpt on technique of repetition from *Fújì gospel* (Textually analogous), abstracting phrases with textual repetition and melodic variation' musical example:**

lle lu - yah o, e -k'a - lle-lu-yah o, e -k'a - le-llu - yah o, e -k'a

e-yin Ba ba\_\_\_\_\_ o e-yin Ba ba e-yin Ba ba\_\_\_\_\_

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The musical example consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef in 4/4 time, showing a melodic line with lyrics: "lle lu - yah o, e -k'a - lle-lu-yah o, e -k'a - le-llu - yah o, e -k'a". The middle staff is a bass clef in 4/4 time, which is empty. The bottom staff is a treble clef in 4/4 time, showing a rhythmic line with lyrics: "e-yin Ba ba\_\_\_\_\_ o e-yin Ba ba e-yin Ba ba\_\_\_\_\_". A small number "4" is written below the first measure of the bottom staff.

**Variation**

The technique of variation is intensified by a host of compositions appropriated. Contrasting melodic phrases, verses and sentences have been observed to advance the course of aesthetic in African music. Besides stemming the tide of monotony, variation arouses innate interest and propensity in the subconscious faculty of the audience. The solo and the chorus of *Àpàlà gospel* present absolute textual and melodic variations as follows

Excerpt on variation form in *Àpàlà gospel* musical example

min, O-gun a-ye o ni ri wa mu lai-lai, Lo-la a-si-wa ju\_\_ to ti da-ra fun\_ E-mi ne\_\_

3  
S. ma so-ri-i-re O-gun a-ye o ni bo-ri mi ma - a sa-se-ye la-ye ti mo wa

wa Ma a so-un re-re ni-le a-ye mi o-ju o-wo kii pon Da-da o-

Ma a so-un re-re ni-le a-ye mi o-ju o-wo kii pon Da-da o-

Ma a so-un re-re ni-le a-ye mi o-ju o-wo kii pon Da-da o-

4  
S. ju o-wo o ni pon mi i-re gbo-gbo ko wo-le to mi wa\_\_

In a bid to consolidate variation, the device of textual phrasal contradiction showcased in the ending words or notes (suffix) has been sighted in this research. Such a feature characterises *Fújì gospel* in the excerpt below

Soprano  
O-ju ti te-su e - ni e-ko Sa ta ni,

Soprano  
O-ju ti te - su e - ni e-gbe e

S.  
o-ju ti ti e, e - ni e-ko O-tu ti tesu e - ni e-ko

S.  
O-ju ti te - su e - ni e-gbe e

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### Hocket Technique

A rhythmic linear technique exercising alternation notes, voices, pitches, or chords, hocket is maximally adopted in the creation of music including styles presently engaged. In the semblance of medieval practice, a verse number of songs interrogated is structured, in which case, a single melodic line is shared usually between two (sets of) voices. A voice or set of voices sings while the second voice or set of voices observes a respite. A technique of this attribute is embodied by the responsorial format of *Wákà gospel* (*Olúwa pàs[e] ìyàwò*).

### Excerpt of hocket technique from *Wákà gospel*

S.  
ka - ke-te won ka je mi-mo

S.  
ro, O lo-run o je a-la - i-le-e-ri ni-nu ni-to-ri

### Appoggiatura

A musical ornamentation harnessing a note or notes of embellishment preceding and delaying the next note (principal), appoggiatura in a sense arouses excitement in an audience whose affinity and aesthetic reside in vocal displays. Though this technique parallels slurring, neumatic, mellismatic melodic setting and other devices as vocal techniques, a line of distinction is established among them in principle and practice. While the integral notes of slur and melodic setting are numerically germane, appoggiatura is effectual, solely from qualitative perspective of tone coloration. Besides the characteristic sound effect evolved from this scheme, the variation device engendered is desirable.

### Appoggiatura: excerpt from *Fújì gospel-Ekaleluya* (Shout Alleluia)

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S. - lle-lu -yaho o - yin dad - dy o o yinO-lo-run o o

S. - lle-lu -yaho o - yin dad - dy o o yinO-lo-run o o

Excerpt on mellismatic note setting, *Àpàlà gospel*

Ye!

ra, Ba-ba lo-ke ko je a pe la-ye

ra, Ba-ba lo-ke ko je a pe la-ye

S. O - ri mi o O - ri mi gbe mi de - po

Recitative (Heightened speech); *Fújì gospel*

Soprano

Soprano Esumobi e wágbùn ti mo\_gbede na E mi lomo o-ni naku na\_ toyakafan da -

Soprano

S. Èsumbi ewgbùnti mgbèdèna Èmilomoo ninakuna\_ tyakafanda -Èsumbi ewgbùnti mgbèdèna

S.

### Harmony

Chord progression evinced in hymn tune, where a melodic line and accompaniment part proceed step wise with one another is at variance with traditional African harmonic concept in music. A list of harmonic textures that codify African music has been advanced by Nketia (1974) namely; monotony, polarity, homophonic parallelism, occasional heterophony, contrapuntal polyphony, ostinato/ overlapping, cadential homophony and homophony polyphony. Adedeji (2004) corroborates this insight.

The harmonic features that delineate the compositions amassed particularly, the textural designs and artistic creativity/intricacy showcasing them, contrast the conceptual principles of monophony at inception. Polyphony in its variants constitutes a prominent texture of the compositions harnessed. At least, two parts are vivid including the melodic line. It should be reiterated that this design, in which independent parts comprising the melody and the accompaniments (alto, tenor, baritone) are contrapuntally aligned, is anomalous to the homophonic sensitivity of vertical harmony.

The textual outfit that mediates between the conventional vertical chord progression of hymnody and the parallelism denoting the music of Yorùbá, situate compositions amassed within the harmonic framework of polyphonic/ homophonic texture. To be succinct, homophonic parallelism has been interchangeably appropriated in this study. Two parts harmonic texture that contradicts the device of vocal unison defines an ample of compositions collated. The design of this nature coopt one other part in homophonic parallel motion to the melody. Such an arrangement is exemplified by the following excerpts;

#### Two Part Harmonic Texture *Wákà gospel Iba fun baba loke (Adoration to the Almighty)*

The musical score consists of two staves. The first staff is the vocal line with lyrics: "I-ba fun ba-ba lo-ke, a s'e-ba re o\_\_\_". The second staff is the accompaniment line with lyrics: "I-ba fun ba-ba lo-ke, a se'ba". Both parts are in 4/4 time and share a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#).

Compositions are sighted in which case, rather than one, two distinct notes that assume or stimulate alto and tenor of the western harmonic concept are added to the melodic line. Polyphony in this nature is portended as follows in *Àpàlà gospel. (Realì Àpàlà)*

Excerpt on Three Part Harmonic Texture, of *Àpàlà* gospel music (Realì *Àpàlà*)

Yet, a seemingly four part harmony is vivid in a *Wákà* composition. In this device, the melodic notes are echoed an octave down by the baritone to improvise the bass notes. An example bellow justifies this feature;

Excerpt on Four Part Harmonic Texture in *Wákà* gospel - *Wákà Jesu* (Jesus' *Wákà*)

**Slogans/Vogues (Ijasa)**

Songs collated, are characterised by skillful appropriation of slogans. *Àpàlà* and *Fúji* gospel are particularly laden with such non intelligible syllables/words. The following statements/phrases from *Àpàlà* gospel by Bois Oṣṣun are elucidative.

Solo: Mo lè s[e báyí] d[ò] la  
tomorrow

Solo: I can maintain this statuquo till

Chorus: Nítorí J[ésu] kí síbè

Chorus: Christ is awesome



Contextually, the personality of Christ is extolled in the above musical passage extracted from song (ix) of Bois Oṣṣlórún's *Àpàlà* gospel style. The artists allude to the awesomeness and overwhelming benevolent nature of Jesus by contriving the phrase "ki síbè",

"ó sṣemí jòṣṣlìjòṣṣlì"

A state of appeasement is acknowledged by the same artistes in another statement, in the same track; "ó sṣemí jòṣṣlìjòṣṣlì". In the context of usage, the adjective "jòṣṣlìjòṣṣlì" connotes the enliven spirit in which the artistes revel. Other slogans displayed by Bois Oṣṣlórún include the following:

"Èṣṣmi mímóṣṣ ni pàdí wa". A word also drawn from *Àpàlà gospel*

"padi" delineates intimacy between or among personalities.

Solo: Oṣṣjóṣṣ oṣṣjóṣṣ ní lá n loṣṣjóṣṣ yeṣṣn

Oṣṣjóṣṣ tí Jṣṣsù "reṣṣmisi"

The word 'remisi' suggests an approval/accreditation of a proposal in that context of abstraction. It bespeaks an endorsement by God of the style of music which the artistes appropriate. Nevertheless, it is non intelligible.

Solo: Ìyàwó, àwoṣṣn tó n jàn éṣṣ móṣṣlèṣṣ ní gboro Solo: Woman, men that defile you

Woṣṣn á di kálámú fún eṣṣ

will soon despise you

The word "kálámú", a coinage of a Yorùbá vogue, "kálá", contrived in *Àpàlà gospel* by Pastor Olawale Taiwo, implies a purposeful and predetermined rejection or "showdown" hauled at an individual. The conglomeration of such words evokes a scenario that contrasts with Yorùbá musical aesthetic, which resides essentially in textual meaningfulness within the ambit of explicit and implicit cultural association, guarded by the society and individuals. These words spurs the course of compositional techniques/creativity in the domain of music, thereby, enable listening pleasure in the prospective audience.

### Overlapping

Overlapping is a structural arrangement in which two or more vocal or instrumental parts in a musical composition or performance overlap each other or one another. An identifiable Western and African musical cultural trait, overlapping establishes somewhat, sociability in composition and performance organisation between the solo and chorus. However, rather than alternation, both the solo and chorus simultaneously engage distinctive textual or melodic lines. This technical design is portended by *Àpàlà gospel*

### Excerpt of overlapping from *Àpàlà gospel* music

gi - gā, O - ba a - won O - ba, O - lu - wa a - won O - lu - wa

Mo - du - pe - Je - su

Mo - du - pe - Je - su

### Interjection

Another innate trait germane to the composition and performance of the Yorùbá Islamised popular music that has been infiltrated in to YIGM, is the phenomenon construed as interjection. This technique, often contained in a number of speech or song texts disseminated from a source (voice) sometimes other than the solo and the chorus, is prominently resonated in quite a number of pieces. Interjection on one hand, and in part, attests creativity within the ambit of composition. On the other hand, it delineates a trend towards secularism in the world of gospel music. This reality justifies the non liturgical adaptability and contextualization of gospel music. Diverse mechanisms have been explored for the delivery of interjection by the artistes in this study. In a device, the design is positioned in between the solo and the chorus. An excerpt extracted from Àpàlà gospel music replicates such placement.

### Excerpt of interjection (between solo and chorus), Àpàlà gospel Music

Gbo-gbo i - so-wo e - le-gbe le-yin mi

re lo ma te-le wa o i - re, i - re

E sa-min e I - re, i -

re lo ma te-le wa o i - re, i - re

I - re, i -

### Excerpt of interjection: textual (between solo and chorus), Àpàlà gospel (Text)

Solo: Tòṣtún tòsì màà fi kóre wálé

Solo: From left and right I will amass fortune

Chorus Ha, ire ire ni yó ma tẹ̀lé wa ire ire Chorus Ho fortune, fortune shall pursue me

Solo: Gbogbo isòwò eṣeṣe gbé mi Solo: My entire band members

**Interjection:** E sàmi o (speech texts) **Interjection** E sàmi o (speech text)

Chorus: Ire ire ni yó ma tẹ̀lé wa Chorus Fortune, fortune shall pursue us, ire ire fortune, fortune.

In another format, interjection is aroused by the solo presenting a bridge between two chorus lines. The specimen below deducted from *Wákà gospel* exemplifies such applications.

**Excerpt of interjection: textual (between two choruses by a solo bridge), *Wákà gospel* (textual)**

Chorus Olúwa yó sẹ̀ tẹ̀mi fún mi o Chorus The Lord will advance my course

Olúwa yó sẹ̀ tẹ̀mi fún mi The Lord will advance my course

**Interjection (Solo):** Ta ló bá o sẹ̀? Interjection Who advanced your course

Chorus Olúwa ló sẹ̀ tẹ̀mi fún mi o Chorus The Lord advanced my course

Olúwa ló sẹ̀ tẹ̀mi fún mi The Lord advanced my course

Mo gbOlúwa gbóṣe Olúwa I believe in God and Lord advanced

fi bámi sẹ̀ my course

Oṣoṣo Oṣoṣo run ló sòrò mi dayò The Son of God advanced my God

Olúwa ló sẹ̀ tẹ̀mi fún mi The Lord advanced my course

6

S. yo O-lu-wa yo se ti-re fun o

S. O-lu-wa yo se te-mi fun mi O-lu-wa yo se ti-re

11

S. Ta lo ba o se?

S. fun mi O-lu-wa lo se te-mi fun mi O-lu-wa yo se

## **The Efficacy of Compositional Techniques of Islamised Gospel Music**

From perspective of compositional technique, multiculturalism and postmodernism that characterise Yoruba Islamised gospel music are consequential in certain respects.

### **General Efficacy**

#### **Popularisation of YIGM**

The exit of this brand of music from the confinement of the church liturgical service of divine worship, a development that affords extensive adaptation of devices namely, slogans/vogues, overlapping, interjection, nonsensical syllables among others, to a high degree implies secular treatments of gospel music. The urge for musical compositions and performances that could evoke emotional sensitivity in the twenty first century is gratifying at the instance of youth audience, whose quest essentially resides in fantasy, adventure and sometimes illusion. It is needful to reiterate that popular music of Islamic variants emerged as a reaction to resentment launched towards liturgical appropriation of music by the religious leaders in the nineteenth century.

#### **Expounded Audience scope**

Compositional techniques which define Yoruba Islamised gospel music are culturally multidimensional in scope. Repetition, variation and hocket devices that are severally ingrained within the musical /structural format of responsorial and antiphonal are indigenous to Africa. On the other hand, Arabian vocal styles are delineated by recitative modes, mellismatic note setting and appoggiatura/slurring. Averse to the monophonic harmonic texture that characterise the popular Islamised music, YIGM contrives polyphonic/homophonic texture that delineate Western/ European harmony, ranging from two to four parts. In addition, twenty first century devices that are contained in slogans and nonsensical syllables, interjection and overlapping are apparently showcased in the styles of this study. Such multifarious techniques engendered by *Àpàlà*, *Wákà* and *Fújì* music have been effectual in engendering diverse audience in their distinctive tastes.

#### **Expounded Performance Contexts**

The popularization and wider audience scope aroused by YIGM styles are aptly implicating in the pastiche of the observable compositional and performance contexts. Contrary to the foundational concept of gospel music within the ambience of church liturgy, its contemporary exhibition portended by YIGM compositional techniques has transcended religious adaptation to incorporate socio- religious, socio-cultural and even, entertainment contexts. The boundary line between the liturgical and non liturgical usage of YIGM is to a large extent, a factor of permissiveness, extensively manifested in a much heavier instrumentation, body articulation by the musicians and the audience (Adedayo, 2021). However, the outdoor adaptation of *Àpàlà*, *Wákà* and *Fújì* gospel music is not solely evident in instrumentation and body articulation; it is also embodied by an array of compositional techniques spanning interjection, overlapping, slogan and nonsensical syllables

#### **Socio-cultural Integration**

In a heterogeneous society of Nigeria, nuanced with contrasting religious and cultural ideologies, a unifying factor is imperative. In the domain of music, Yoruba Islamised gospel music underpinned by its compositional devices is succinct to afford the needed community of oneness, stemming from its inherent cultural diversity. This stance is

attested by the Arabian vocal styles of slurring, appoggiatura and mellismatic note setting, western harmonic textures as well as African techniques of repetition and variation.

### **Musical/Aesthetic Efficacy**

#### **Artistic Proficiency**

Of all musical elements, compositional technique is the most exerting influence to convey artistic dexterity on board. Citing devices interrogated in this study as templates, the intricate adoption of the contracted techniques by the respective musicians is a full proof of artistic virtuosity. The alternation of repetitive mode with variation, responsorial with strophic responsorial, buttressed by hocket technique is gratifying. The massive adoption of overlapping, interjection, mellismatic note setting alongside slurring and appoggiatura, all attest this discourse.

#### **Structural and Functional Roles**

Broadly, mention should be made of two cogent obligations at the instance of repetition and interjection harnessed; structural and nonstructural. The discourse so far has presented both devices (repetition and variation) as integral parts of internal structure of musical composition. Besides the structural usage, however, these techniques are quite appealing in the functional role of intensification and message memorisation/ retention. They are apt to engrave the image of the subject matter of the musical passage in the memory of the audience. Justification for the repetitive nature of Nigerian Gospel music, particularly the Yorùbá derivative is evident in Adedeji's (2004) depiction; "philosophy of intensification". The scholar advances that the use of much repetition in Nigerian gospel music is essentially premised on a Yorùbá adage which says "isíu ate ñumó òràn kì í jóná" (communication to an impaired ear is made repeatedly).

#### **Unity and Variety**

In micro and macro spheres of life, the ambivalent concept of unity and variety is imperative for ensuring balance and stability. Within the ambit of music, the foregoing has been addressed by Hickok (1993: 26) who postulates that unity gratifies the listener's quest for 'coherence' and 'familiarity'. Contrastingly, the scholar portrays variety as appealing to the human enjoyment of the 'new', 'different' and 'unexpected'. Such a scenario that engenders dynamism, severally enlivens audience prospective utility and affinity towards music. Respectively, repetition and variation as templates of unity and variety in this study do not only invigorate artistic dexterity, but have also been contrived to obviate monotony and boredom in the music making and music usage.

#### **Vocal Aesthetic**

The inherent vocal style harnessed by the YIGM artists is largely vested in Arabian vocal techniques of voice ornamentation, spanning shaky, slur, vibrato, appoggiatura, mellismatic, to mention few. Conglomeration of these devices profoundly fortifies vocal aesthetic imbued in Yoruba Islamised gospel music, which eventually animates listening pleasure in the prospective audience, a response to the desirable textual and sound effect. Asserted by a Cleric (Alfa Quadry), vocal technique is supremely esteemed by Arabian-Islamic religion/culture, which entails formal training.

### **Conclusion**

YIGM is a multicultural subgenre of Yoruba gospel music, a reality encapsulated by its multifarious compositional techniques, namely: repetition, variation, hocket, appoggiatura, mellismatic note setting, recitative (heightened speech), western harmonic texture, slogan, overlapping and interjection. The inherent cultural nuances of Yoruba Islamised gospel music is consequential at the instances of its popularization, expounded audience scope and audience performance contexts as well as its efficacy in socio cultural integration. As part of conclusion, the compositional devices embodied by YIGM exert a vast number of musical effects which are evident in artistic proficiency, terse structural and functional roles, unity and variety, coupled with vocal aesthetic, a stance that is credible for expounding aesthetic scope and acceptability of gospel music in a contemporary and changing society of Nigeria.

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**Name of the author-** Dr Adedayo Ezekiel Babatope

**Institution-**Department of Music Babcock University Ilishan-Remo Ogun State, Nigeria

**Phone No-** 08066436445

**Email -** [adedayoezekiel37@gmail.com](mailto:adedayoezekiel37@gmail.com)

[adedayoe@babcock.edu.ng](mailto:adedayoe@babcock.edu.ng)