

SOCIO-CULTURAL FUNCTIONS OF IBIBIO TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

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Abstract

This work focused on four selected traditional musical instruments: The Xylophone (*ikon eto*), Drums (*ibid*), Lute (*Ndidu*) and Horn (*Oduk*) from the different classes of African musical instruments under Curt Sachs' and Hornbostel's criteria. It is worthy of note that *Ibibios* are endowed with varieties of musical instruments, constructed, tuned and performed by them. But despite the numerous functions entrenched in *Ibibio* traditional musical instruments, most of them have been abandoned, in preference to western musical instruments. It is also obvious that *Ibibio* has lost so much values attached to its traditional musical instruments. On this note, this paper would bring to light the socio-cultural functions of these instruments in order to restore the lost values and also change the perception toward its full utilization. The paper would also discuss these instruments in relation to the following areas; physical features/construction, techniques of performance, maintenance, musical functions and extra musical functions, performance norms and cultural implications. The method of data collection for this study involved interviews and field observation. Books, journal articles and other relevant materials were consulted and utilized for this study. This research has shown that *Ibibio* are gifted with variations of musical instruments of which their use is not limited to purely musical functions. Also, the study has encouraged all and sundry to take full advantage of the rich content of African/*Ibibio* indigenous music, by giving equal attentions to the learning of both traditional and western musical instruments in the various institutions of higher learning. This is in order to achieve a balanced musical art that will be profitable to both Africans and the western world.

Keyword: Socio-cultural, Function, Traditional, Musical Instrument.

Introduction

African musical Instruments refer to those instruments that are originated in Africa South, of the Sahara. Africans are endowed with many foliage zones such as Savannah, Forest, desert and river. They make use of various materials gotten from these zones in production of their diverse musical instruments. In the same vein, *Ibibios* are gifted with varieties of musical instruments, constructed, tuned and performed by them. And these musical instruments are made from different resources such as wood, clay, hides and skins, gut, gourds, bamboo, bush ropes, stone, iron and animal horns. Similarly, they are

many factors responsible for the multifarious musical instruments in *Ibibio* in particular and Africa in general.

According to Akpabot (1998),

Environment and Occupation are factors responsible for the diversity of these instrument. Environmentally, these are the savannah, desert, forest and riverine areas, where the occupation of the people match their environment climate. Desert people are usually nomads and cattle rearers; savannah dwellers are herdsmen, forest people, hunters and farmers, while those in riverine areas are fishermen. The occupation of a society reflects on materials used for making instrument and the type of musical instrument and music produced. For example, herdsmen use horns of animals to make horns while forest dwellers, surrounded by wood, produce flutes and xylophones. String instruments are most prominent in savannah areas and people in riverine areas, like forest dwellers, produce xylophone (p.17).

In *Ibibio* society, no activity goes without the presence traditional musical instrument, be it music or dance. Traditional musical instruments play a key role in providing the rhythmic motivation for the singers and dancers as well as for the spectators and participating audience. Some *Ibibio* traditional musical instruments have been found useful for communication purposes i.e. they can be used to send messages to people far away from the place the instrument is being played or people present at the place and time of a performance, instructing them on what to do.

Consequently, despite these important roles played by *Ibibio* musical instruments, a good number of them have been abandoned for their western counterparts. Based on the above position, Akpakpan (2002) said that: "This development is unhealthy and should be frowned at, and if nothing serious is done to revert this ugly trend, it is envisaged that in less that no time our rich cultural heritage will be eroded. To forestall this extinction, both the government and concerned individuals should work painstakingly to educate the masses on the implications of this repulsive trend" (p.1)

Indeed, the above explains why it is apt to carry out this research. It is also obvious that *Ibibio* has lost so much values attached to its traditional musical instruments. Consequently, much credence is placed on the study of western musical instruments in various higher institutions to the total relegation of the study of traditional musical instruments. Seldom, do we see students taking traditional musical instruments as their major or minor instruments. It is from this perceptive motif that Onyeji (2015) said that,

The study of Africa's musical heritage that offers deeper analytical/theoretical insight into the musical and sociological interests of the various musical traditions is imperative to the African art music composer that does not aspire to merely copy the Western approach to composition (p. 33).

The above submission calls attention to the need to maximize the rich content of African indigenous music, integrating it with western musical genres. This will achieve a balanced musical art profitable to both Africans and the Western world. Furthermore, delusion ascribed to traditional musical instruments in some of the religious spheres during missionary era which saw these instruments as being satanic equipment, hence, their unfitness for God's worship should be properly cleared and done away with.

In response to this, Nnamani (2002) aptly remarked that "In fact, during harvest and thanksgiving services, hearing our traditional musical instruments in the church creates an irresistible atmosphere for dancing (p.82). Furthermore, Echezona corroborates Nnamani's position in Nnamani (2002) thus: The various rhythmic patterns of the musical instruments used direct the movements of the dancers (during such worship occasions) and excite them to frenzy. This state of ecstasy leads to prophesy while the dance and its mime actions keep the worshippers in physio-therapeutic (sic) top form by the exercise of the limbs and the respiratory organs. (p.83) The importance of indigenous musical instrument in the religious and social life cannot be overemphasized. It is evident that we can now perceive singing in the church with varieties of traditional musical instrument accompaniment such as *nsak* (rattle), *ntakrok* (woodblock), *ikon eto* (xylophone) and *abang* (pot drum).

Statement of The Problem

It is worthy of note that despite the numerous functions engrained in Ibibio traditional musical instruments, most traditional musical instruments have been relegated, in preference to western musical instruments. In view of this, the paper would spell out the socio-cultural functions of these instruments in order to restore the lost values and also change the perception of the *ibibios* toward its full utilization.

Aims and Objectives

1. To examine the socio-cultural functions of Ibibio musical instruments.
2. To take into cognizance the physical features/construction, techniques of performance, maintenance, musical functions and extra musical functions, performance norms and cultural implications of Ibibio musical instruments.

Significance of The Study

1. The study will provide a framework for further research on socio cultural functions of Ibibio musical instruments in order to enhance its wider usages.
2. It is hoped that this research will be of great significance in African scholarship. It may also be relevant to Scholars that are interested in history, organology, musical technology and archiving.

Methodology

The method of data collection involved interviews and field observation. Books, journal articles and other relevant materials were consulted and utilized for this study.

Classification of African Musical Instrument

African musical instruments are categorized into four kinds, according to the mode of sound production. In line with this Oikelome (2001) states that "The Standard classification of musical instrument was derived by Curt Sachs and E.M. Von Hornbostel in 1914. This was based on the catalogue of a large instrumental collection compiled by the Belgian, Victor Mahillon (1893) (p.59).

These four classifications are: Idiophones, membranophones, chordophones, and aerophones

Idiophones

Are those musical instruments that depend on the vibration of the entire body for sound production. Examples include xylophone, gongs, thumb piano, bell, woodblocks and rattles. They are the most prevalent musical instruments in Africa. In Ibibio society, there is no hard- and- fast rule on who to play the xylophone, nowadays, it can also be played by children who are skillful in the act of playing. Idiophones are subdivided into three types: (i) The struck idiophone (ii) The shaken idiophone (iii) The plucked idiophone.

According to Okafor (2005)

(a) One of the most widespread of them is the log xylophone

Igbo: *mgbeleke/mgbe,ngedegwu; igenyi* (Ohafia); *ubo maa* (Ngwo, Nkanu, Mgba-Ishielu); *akwari* (Afikpo); *ikwilikwo* (Nenwe) *agogo* (Isele-Uku); *ikwe-mgbo* (Idemmili); *mbarimba* (Ngwa); *ngelenge* (Owerri); *oge* (Maku); *ikiri* (Mgbowo); *ekere-mgba* (Ekwulobia). Ibibio/Efik: *ikon eto* (p.161).

Xylophone

Physical Features/Construction

Xylophone as a struck idiophone which depend on the vibration of the entire body for the production of sounds appear on many forms:

1. The log xylophone formed by employing tuned slabs of wood across two banana stems.
2. Xylophone which keys are placed over a wooden frame, with suspended resonators.

According to Nzewi (2007) "The xylophone is an arrangement of graded slabs of wood each of which is a graded melodic note or key. The range of keys is used for playing melodies as well as harmonies in two or more parts... The keys are made from various types of resonant wood available in a culture's ecology. The natural sound produced by a xylophone key is soft, depending on the type of wood preferred by a music culture area (p.88)"

He also went further to state how the instrument is tuned thus:

"xylophones are permanently tuned according to the scale/s of a music culture area during construction. Dry and seasoned wooden slabs are used in order to ensure a fixed pitch. The pitch of a wet slab of wood rises as it loses water" (p.89).

Techniques of Performance

Xylophone is a musical instrument that made up of wooden bars struck by mallets, each bar is tuned to a pitch of a musical scale, the xylophone can produce pentatonic, hexatonic and heptatonic melodies, depending on how it is tuned.

The sound production depends profoundly on the skill of the player. The player positions his or herself at the centre of the instrument to play the xylophone. He or she must also

stand erect, while holding the mallets between the thumb and first joint of the first finger with one mallet per hand. The wrists help in the smooth movement of the mallet in upward and downward trend. The Xylophonist plays the lower register by taking one step to the left and the upper register by making one step to the right. Flats and sharps are struck along the boundaries of the bars but not on the part of the bar that rests directly on the frame.

Musical Function of the Xylophone

It is generally used for music accompaniment. Xylophone is a melodic and harmonic musical instrument. *Itembe, Ekombi, abang* and *Mbopo* dances are accompanied by Xylophone in Ibibio Society.

Socio-Cultural Function of Xylophone (Idiophone)

Xylophone as a speech surrogate instrument is capable of imitating phrases and proverbs of the *Ibibios*. It also help in conveying specific information that are decoded by the indigenes like the specific activities or the prevalent cultural activities in session .

According to Nketia (1975)

Their use is not confined to purely musical functions. Some are used where appropriate as signals for attracting attention, assembling people, or creating an atmosphere (especially during religious rites and ceremonies). They may also be used for transmitting verbal messages or for reinforcing verbal communication, for marking the movement of special personalities such as priests and persons undergoing sacred initiation (p.69).

Maintenance of The Xylophone

Xylophone should not be left in extreme temperature as this could distort the timbre (sound quality). Also, never keep any object on top of the xylophone.



Xylophone

Membranophone

Membranophones are musical instruments that depend on the vibration of the stretched membrane or animal skin as a source of sound production.

Membranophone consists of the single and double headed drums.

They are made from various materials including logs of wood, gourd or calabash, strips of wood bound together by iron hoops, with a skin membrane etc.

They are classified according to their playing techniques (e.g. struck, plucked, friction)

Drums appear in a wide variety of shapes & sizes. These include: single-headed, open at one end and closed at the other end, others are double-headed drums with resounding skins at the both ends.

Construction/ Acoustical Properties:

In designing or Constructing drums, the pitch and quality of tones are usually put into consideration and this calls for the choice of different shapes and sizes of drums as well as the choice of drumheads and method of holding the drum head. Sometimes other devices such as seeds or rattling metals could be attached to get some certain qualities of sound. According to Nzewi, M. & Nzewi, O. (2007)

African Musical Instrument, including most drums, are carefully tuned during construction, and fine-tuned before a performance. In the case of drum types, tuning pegs are fixed in a variety of techniques. Tensioning strings could also serve as a tuning device, depending on how the skins is laced to the frame of the drum. Using a turning mallet, for trapping the area of the skin where it is in constant with the wooden frame, raises the tone level during fine-turning, especially for mortar-shell drums (p.2).

Heating the drum in the sun or by the side of a fire is another technique for raising the tone level of drums with or without tuning pegs. Rubbing water or Spittle on the skins of a high-tuned drum lowers the tone to the desired level.

Maintenance of Drums

Drums needs to be properly stored after use. Atmospheric conditions also affect the pitch and voice quality of the drums that have not been in constant use. Therefore, an open-ended membrane should be kept lying on its side for proper air circulation within the body so as to retain its sound quality and material strength. Drums should also be stored on a raft built above the fireplace to ensure its sonic health. Avoid placing objects on the membrane as this could lead to its damage.

Musical Function of the Drums

Drums are used as a surrogate speech instrument. It can transmit instruction or message to a set of people within the context of a performance. The African drum is a highly skilled melodic instrument. In *Ibibio* Society, dances accompanied by drums are *Abang*, *Ebre*, *Mbopo*, and *Ndok Ufok ebe* .

Socio-Cultural Values or Function of the Drum

Large Slit wooden drums in *Ibibio* society emblemize community authority. When sounded, everyone is obligated to conform to its summons and instructions. They are also used in maintaining of law and order in *Ibibio* society. In support of the above, Antai (2005) said that "A drum beaten in a special manner on the Chief's order banned domestic animals from straying and authorized the instant killing of such strayed animals. Such animals were described as being slaughtered by 'Ekpe' (lion or leopard) (p.98).

Specific drums are endowed with religious or healing symbolism in *Ibibio* cultures. Confirming this, Nzewi (2007) said that : "The African drum produces healing sonic

energy and also imbues and enriches benign spirituality. Hence it is used in various ways and situations in rituals as a healing musical instrument, for both mass and personal psychical health management" (p.3). It is noteworthy that some drums signal the presence of important personalities like priests or kings. Also, Specific drums are funerary instruments that give obituary announcement in *Ibibio* society.

Techniques of Performance

A drum, depending on the species and size, could be played standing, sitting on the ground or on top of the drum, with the drum positioned between the legs/thighs or between the armpit and body. The following drums are commonly used: Skin drum, wooden slit drum, pot drum, Calabash drum, and Water drum

Wooden Slit Drum *Ekwe* (Igbo), *Obodom* (Efik/Ibibio) Pot drums *Udu* (Igbo) *Abang* (Efik/Ibibio)



SLIT WOODEN DRUM



SKIN DRUM

Chordophones

Chordophones are musical instrument that produce sounds with the aid of vibration of the stretched strings. They include the following: Lutes, bow, lyres, harps and zither. According to Akpabot (1975) "Stringed instruments among the Ibibios have become extinct, if ever they were present....Stringed musical instruments among the Yorubas and Ibos are also rare; and there is the possibility that stringed instruments, which are common among the Hausas of Northern Nigeria, got into the country through the advent of Islam". (p.17). Based on the above, it is evident that stringed instruments were not originated from the Ibibio, they were probably brought in through the process of acculturation and urbanization. That is why the rareness of it, is still prevalent among the Ibibio land.

Socio- Cultural Values of Lute.

In the ancient *Ibibio*, Lute and harp had played prominent roles in the spiritual warfare. To this effect, Akpabot (1986) asserts that "It is played as an instrument for 'going into fits'. This means that a listener, usually a woman, requests a tune on the instrument and dances so wildly to the music that she collapses on to the ground in a faint and is carried away to be revived"(p.13). In *Ibibio* society, evil spirits are driven and

consciousness regained via the playing of lute and harp. As this is synonymous with the Biblical harp.

Lutes

Construction

According to Nzewi, M & Nzewi, O (2007),

The lute is plucked string instrument that has two or more strings strung parallel to a fretted or unfretted straight neck. The distance between any two frets is a note, while the value of the interval between adjacent notes is determined by a culture's Scale System as well as the tone order on the instrument. The body of a lute is in two sections. The neck carries the fret to which the free ends of the strings are attached. The other section is the sound chamber that could have the shape of an egg split lengthwise or could be hemispherical. Sound holes are cut on the deck of the sound chamber. The neck is usually spiked into the tapered end of the sound box. Strings are of horsehair, gut, vegetable rope or palm fiber. The fixed ends of the strings terminate on a bridge mounted on the flat deck of the sound chamber. (p.109).

Technique of Performance

To produce Sound, the strings of lutes are plucked with fingers or a plectrum. Tuning is achieved by adjusting the tension of the string using pegs, tuning pads or by re-tightening the strings.

Ibibio/ Efik: *Ndido-Uruk*,



LUTE

Maintenance of Lute

1. It is vital to note that the instrument should not be left in direct sunlight, where the heat can really penetrate, because of the flexibility nature of the animal glues used.
2. A reasonable humidity level storage should be encouraged.
3. A small amount of free string behind the knot at the bridge is advisable.

Aerophones

Characteristics vibration of the air column. Examples of aerophones are horn, flute and indigenous trumpet. The commonly used aerophones among the Ibibios is the horn (*oduk*). It is usually made from the horn of a deer or an elephant tusk, with a conical shape. They rarely have finger holes unlike indigenous trumpets. According to Nzewi, M.& Nzewi, O. (2007) "a horn or trumpet is an instrument on which sound is produced when the vibration of the lips in the mouthpiece or embouchure excites the sympathetic vibration of the air column inside the tube" (p.102). It is always side-blown with one opening. A skillful player can produce three to four tunes by overblowing. Horn is a solo instrument and can also be used as a symbol of power.



Socio-Cultural functions of Horns

Horn is used by noblemen as a symbol for conflict resolution or to negotiate for war and peace. In line with the above, Antia writes that:

Horn was used to call for or effect cease fire where and when a war raged between two or more communities. In this case Chiefs from neutral villages within the clan or group sent an emissary to blow the "Nnuk Enin" and gave "ayei" specially tied warning each group against further bickerings. This was an injunction placed on the war and any violation of the injunction by any faction or group attracted heavy fines paid by the defaulter (p.97).

Musical Functions of African Musical Instrument

- (1) They serve as melodic instruments examples are flutes, horns, xylophone, musical bow, zither and algaita.
- (2) Some instruments keep time and play ostinato during performance, e.g. the percussion pot.
- (3) Rhythmic Instruments play accompaniment, e.g. wooden clappers, flutes and beaded gourds.
- (4) Melo-rhythmic instruments: They are instruments that are melody-borne and play rhythms, e.g. xylophone, slit wooden drum, horns, flutes and talking drums. They serve melodic and improvisatory roles. They also play rhythm of dances, gives cues, and signal dancers at where to stop.

Extra Musical Functions of African Musical Instrument

Writing on the extra musical functions of the African musical instruments, Onwuekwe, (2011) said "Apart from music making, Nigerian musical instruments perform other

functions, these include:(i) Solo instruments, (ii) Communication, (iii) Therapy, (iv) Sorrowing and Mourning, (v) Symbolism, (vi) and Court instruments" (p.141).

General Maintenance

A clean and well-maintained instrument sounds better and the timbre will not be distorted. Proper maintenance leads to durability of the instrument. African musical Instruments should also be kept in museums for historical records and posterity.

Performance Norms and Cultural Implications of Traditional Musical Instruments in Ibibio Land

Musical Instruments in Ibibio society serves a variety of roles. Some instruments may be narrowed to religious or cultic rituals or to social occasions. Among some peoples there may also be restrictions as to the age, sex, or social status of the player. Besides recreational use, or as accompaniment for dancing, instruments may serve many other roles.

According to Nzewi (2007), A musical instrument could also be a symbolic object. It could be regarded as a symbol of certain communal, religious or societal authority. As such, its physical presence or significant sound or both in a given location or occasion becomes a manifestation of the extra- musical authority ascribed to it. For instance, in the indigenous legal system of an African society, a particular clapper less iron bell could be symbolic, ascribed neutral juridical authority to be administered by a juridical organ or agency in a society. A significant sound pattern played on the bell over a piece of land that is in dispute invokes meta physical intervention in the issue of ownership until arbitration is completed by the known juridical body/agency. The disputants become forbidden, thereby, to exercise any ownership rights or action on the piece of land until the agency has finished arbitration on the matter of ownership. A breach of the metaphysical injunction of the significant bell- sound is liable to severe customary penalty. (p.77)

In Ibibio society, the same is also applicable. Apart from bell, slit wooden drum or a membrane drum could also be used to enforce practical order or as a sign of consensual seal to a decision that has been reached through appropriate deliberation.

In order to explore the importance, performance norms and cultural implications of traditional musical instruments in Ibibio society. We conducted two interviews with two men within different villages in Itu Local Government Area. These people were between the ages of 70 and 80. This section will give a brief outline and background of these informants' responses.

Obong Okon Akpan Udoh is a 78-year-old man from Ikot Ebom Itam in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. In the interview session with him on the performance norms, cultural implication and importance of some traditional instrument in Ibibio society. He said that Ibibio has a wide variety of musical instruments which has served in a number of different roles, some of them not primarily musical. According to

him, he said "in strict Ibibio culture there were usually rules regulating or designating an instrument to men and women. Being a male instrument, it may not be touched or played by a female. Similarly, an instrument designated for female can only be used by women. But, this with time has changed. There are no set rules anymore due to a high level of civilization, acculturation and religion.

Ete Timothy Silas is a man now in his mid-seventies who grew up with his grandfather who was a master craftsman who works with wood in producing musical instrument. He said some drums were believed to carry a supernatural spirit, on that ground, they were to be handled by a certain class of people. But in a time of vast social change like this, drums have now been incorporated for praise and worship in many churches like catholic. Drums are now used to accompany singing, dancing, healing, mourning etc. There are no such restrictions, it could be played by anyone at any gathering.

Findings

Having taking a holistic look at the Ibibio traditional musical instruments with specific attentions to their functions. This research has shown that Ibibio are gifted with varieties of musical instruments of which their use is not narrowed to purely musical functions. Also, traditional musical instruments play a key role in providing the rhythmic motivation for the singers and dancers as well as for the spectators and participating audience. Some Ibibio traditional musical instruments have been found useful for communication, symbolism and therapy purposes.

Furthermore, the study has encouraged all and sundry to take full advantage of the rich content of African/Ibibio indigenous music, by giving equal attentions to the learning of both traditional and western musical instruments in the various institutions of higher learning. This is in order to achieve a balanced musical art that will be gainful to both Africans and the western world.

Recommendations

1. Concerted efforts should be made by individuals and various agencies towards documentation, preservation, promotion and utilization of Ibibio indigenous musical instruments for posterity.
2. Strategies should be formulated by governments, institutions and curriculum planners to encourage more focus on the learning of traditional instruments.
3. Misconception ascribed to traditional musical instruments in the Liturgy of the churches during missionary era which saw these instruments as being satanic equipment, hence, their unworthiness for God's worship should be properly cleared or eroded.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be deduced that the values embedded in the use of *Ibibio* traditional musical instruments transcend mere music making as they serve as veritable tools for sustaining, internalizing and immortalizing the *Ibibio* culture. Therefore, Africans/*Ibibios* are encouraged to explore the rich contents of indigenous

music by learning both traditional and western musical instruments to achieve a well-balanced art knowledge to be able to stand out from the musical worlds. Notably, the study has also revealed that restrictions and taboos formerly associated with age and sex in playing some special instruments in Ibibio society are no more, due to some factors like acculturation and urbanization. Consequently, the restrictions have no positive or negative implications on the gender. Furthermore, the paper also encourages the use of various traditional musical instruments in the ecclesiastical settings.

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