

EKWEMMA INSTRUMENTAL ENSEMBLE IN EHA-ALUMONA CULTURE OF ENUGU STATE: AN EXPOSITORY STUDY

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Abstract

African xylophones have been studied and constructed using the 12-tone western scale. There seems to be a dearth of information on specific types of xylophone in Igbo land. Eha-alumona is a town in Nsukka in the North East part of Igbo Land and her traditional religion is strictly predicated around a special type of xylophone called 'Ekwe mma' (literally translated as 'the wooden gong of the deities'). In the light of the present wave of cultural renaissance in Nsukka cultural metropolis and the danger of extraneous influences and 'contamination', this research attempts an appreciation of this instrument and its accompanying music through an expository study. It attempts to evaluate the implications of this sacred instrument and its sacred meaning for the devotees. Using observation, interviews and descriptive designs, this research elects to expose this music ensemble and by so doing, hopes to furnish more knowledge on the repertoire of knowledge already provided by researches on African xylophones and their symbolisms, and indigenous music of Igbo extraction. It also hopes to highlight how this particular instrument and its link with the religious and social life of a people can inform a contemporary world on the communicative uses of music.

Introduction

In the recent past, there seems to be an 'explosion' in cultural awareness and renaissance of traditional religious music and practices especially among the youths in the whole of Nsukka senatorial zone. This current trend has its own backsides not only in the wearing down of the boundaries helming some of these sacred music but also in the 'cross-pollination' of these original sacred music with more contemporary music in such a way that the original music seems to gradually fade out given the fact that some of the original custodians of these music are gradually dying out. One of these is the Ekwe mma Ensemble in Eha-alumona town of Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. There is a need to recapture the original genius in a fast growing society with attendant modernism and often unsavoury bastardization of original heritages in the name of cultural renaissance. This study comes readily to feel this gap through an expository study and to further dig into the possibility of experimenting with traditional motifs as derivable from this instrument 'Ekwe mma' in today's composition and especially in traditional accompaniment styles.

Brief Look at Xylophones and African Xylophones from Historical Perspective

The **xylophone** (from the Greek meaning 'wooden sound', 'xylem' for 'wood' and 'phone' for 'sound') is a musical instrument in the percussion family which probably originated in Indonesia (cf. New World Encyclopaedia; June 2019). It consists of wooden bars of various lengths that are struck by plastic, wooden, or rubber mallets. Each bar is tuned

to a specific pitch of the musical scale. Xylophone can refer to western style concert xylophones or to one of the many wooden mallet percussion instruments found around the world. Xylophones are tuned to different scale systems depending on their origin, including pentatonic, heptatonic, diatonic, or chromatic. The arrangement of the bars is generally from low (longer bars) to high (shorter bars).

For Wiggins & Joseph (1992), the earliest known model was from the ninth Century in southeast Asia. However, there was a model of a hanging wood instrument dated to ca. 2000 B.C.E. in China. It is likely that the xylophone reached Europe during the Crusades and the earliest historical reference in Europe is in sixteenth Century Germany in organist Arnold Schlick's *Spiegel der Orgelmacher und Organisten*. According to the New World Encyclopaedia, June 2019;

The xylophone, which had been known in Europe since the Middle Ages, was by the nineteenth Century associated largely with the folk music of Eastern Europe, notably Poland and Eastern Germany. By 1830, the xylophone had been popularized to some extent by a Russian virtuoso named Michael Josef Gusikov, who through extensive tours had made the instrument known. His instrument was the five-row "continental style" xylophone made of 28 crude wooden bars, arranged in semi-tones in the form of a trapezoid, and resting on straw supports. It was sometimes called the "strohfiedel" or "straw fiddle." There were no resonators and it was played with spoon shaped sticks. According to musicologist, Curt Sachs, Gusikov performed in garden concerts, variety shows, and as a novelty at symphony concerts. Certainly in the 1830s a xylophone solo was a novelty. Noted musicians, including Felix Mendelssohn, Frederic Chopin, and Franz Liszt spoke very highly of Gusikov's performances. Perhaps due to his great influence, xylophonists continued to be featured in theater shows and concert halls until well into the twentieth century. The xylophone is a precursor to the vibraphone, which was developed in the 1920s.

The modern western-style xylophone has bars made of rosewood or more commonly, kelson, an extremely durable fiberglass that allows a louder sound at the expense of tone quality. Western-style xylophones are characterized by a bright, sharp tone and high register. Modern xylophones include resonating tubes below the bars.

However, though formal literature attributes the historical origin of xylophones to Southeastern Asia, with models later developed in Western and Eastern Asia, we aver that, as we shall see with regard to 'Ekwe mma' Nsukka, some forms of xylophones were already part of some African instrumental ensemble even before any contact with western literature. There was the 'mbila' of 'chopi' people in modern day Southern Mozambique, the 'makonde dimbila' of East Africa, the 'balofon' (gabone folk xylophone), the 'gyil' of Ghana (used in dagara funerals), Burkina Faso, Mali, Ivory Coast and a host of other types of xylophones spread across Africa. (cf. Jones, 1971). In Nigeria, for instance, different forms of African xylophones exist and are given different names.

These include Ngedegwu in Igbo part of Nigeria, the 'ikot-eto' seen among the ibibios, the 'agiloh' in Ogoja, the 'kundum' in Birom, and the 'molomaikafo' in Hausa.

In line with the above thoughts, Echezona (1963) claims that "the Igbos are generally regarded as the originators of the marimba... but having originated it, they lost touch with its further developments elsewhere" (p.81). For Lo-Bamijoko (1987),

Echezona's claims are based on a series of historical evidences which confirm the black presence, and thereby a black influence in Asia beyond what there ever was of Asian civilization in Africa. If this is so, then A. M. Jones' "brilliant" attempt to place the origin of the xylophone in Southeast Asia must be in very bad faith, and represents further demonstration on the part of the Westerner to deprive Africa of anything that is of value. (p. 24)

Xylophones are special in African instrumental ensemble with special reference to the Igbo people of Nigeria. Among the Igbos of Nigeria, they are designated with different names like 'Ngedegwu', 'Ngelenge', 'Ikwe-mbo' and 'Ekwe mma' or 'Ngede Njiko'. They belong to what many African scholars have categorized as idiophones, that is, that category of African musical instruments that produce sound by means of striking (cf. Sachs-Hornbostel system of classification of African Instruments). They constitute a special part of wooden drums. In Igbo cosmology, they constitute a special African instrument not just because of their entertainment value, and their ability to combine a rhythmic function with a melodic function (cf. Lo-Bamijoko, 1987) but more importantly because of their symbolic importance and their ability to send messages and interact with the people's cultural consciousness.

In all, we reiterate that African xylophones are almost as old as the different persuasions of African culture. Most of these African xylophones are formed by a collection of special kinds of wood which are tuned to desired pitches by chiseling the wood, and then arranging systematically and packaging in a box (box xylophone) or bucket (bucket xylophone) or designed with the aid of wooden and leather frames. These xylophones perform different roles according to cultural perspectives.

An Appreciation of Ekwemma Instrumental Ensemble

Given the fact that this is also a musical study, let us examine some known theoretical features that would undergird this musical exposition of Ekwemma music.

Melodic Patterns: First is the recognized theory in African music that the nature of inflections of speech is the ultimate origin of the concept of melody. The Igbo Cultural Community or Igbo society constitutes what linguists call a speech community. Onwuegbuna (2019) identifies four types of melodies prevalent in African music, namely: Tuneful melody (patterned after known tunes), motivic melody (arranged in short melodic phrases), sinuous melody (snake-like in nature, often accommodating microtones and lyrical melody (that is, the type of melody driven by language). Among these, lyrical melody holds a pride of place as far as indigenous African music is concerned for these melodies were in Onwuegbuna's words 'logogenic' in nature, contrived and patterned after human speech.

Hence, 'even when an ostinato melody (vocal or instrumental) is used, the tonal inflections of the language speech are mostly considered.' (p.25).

In 'Ekwemma' music, melodic contours are aligned along speech patterns and it is often possible to decipher what the lead xylophonist is saying with xylophone. Another prominent feature of 'Ekwemma' music which highlights this lyrical nature of African music is what is referred to as 'iwo egara' which involves the employment of dramatic vocal effects, involving a snake-like melodic movement driven by language and accompanied with rich vocal ornamentation to achieve effect. This rendition is often woven around familiar modes especially the Aeolian mode. This is often performed by a vocal soloist while the rest intersperse his renditions with brief lyrical affirmations like 'mhhn' or 'ehhn'. This is often used to evoke an emotional feeling about a particular situation, to trace the ancestry of a prominent person or to express eulogies to a prominent person. Here, words are used to paint images with the aid of idioms, dicta, aphorisms and proverbs.

The more common types of scales encountered in African culture areas and very prominent in the Ekwemma music are the pentatonic scale (of five pitches), hexatonic (six pitches), heptatonic (seven pitches), tetratonic (four pitches). Other African melodic techniques include repetition and variation, fragmentary melodies, cyclic motives, short duration, unilineal relay melodic structure where a complete melodic theme is shared by more than two voices, the unilineal interlocking melodic structure in which two or more parts weave in and out of a melodic track to yield the primary theme, shifting tonality etc. These are all evident in the Ekwemma music.

However, African melodies are not merely vocal. We have also instrumental melodies and vocal-instrumental melodies. Ekwemma is primarily an instrumental ensemble. Nevertheless, the articulation of these instrumental melodies is often designed as voice surrogates.

Harmonic Patterns and Techniques: African music, in terms of harmony, can generally be said to be heterophonic, polyphonic and also contrapuntal. This is very evident in the Ekwemma music. The simultaneous combination of linear melodies, that are language-driven, results in intervals that are parallel. Thus in African harmony, we can have parallel thirds, fourths, fifths or thirds running consecutively for some times. Scholars opine that some of these intervallic distances in terms of harmony are premised on symbolic meanings attached to the numbers of the intervals since some numbers are highly symbolic in African cosmology and numerology. These numbers include 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th and their inversions. In other words, African harmonies are founded on cultural expression. Thus, an articulation of harmony may take these intervallic distances into consideration and these intervals are acceptable to the extent that they symbolize our cultural expression of life (cf. Onwuegbunam, personal communication, September 18, 2019). This serves to re-enforce the functional dimension of African music and the deliberate arraignment of music to capture the realities of life. It also highlights the use of symbolism in African music.

In line with this, Samuel Akpabot (1998) writes;

Legends, myths and symbols are integral parts of the belief system of African societies. Stringed instruments like harps, lutes, drums, thumb pianos and xylophones have their peculiar tuning procedures and orchestral instrumentation determined many times by legends, myths and symbols associated with individual instruments. Ritual music is full of examples of the roles that legends and myths play in song and dance. (p. 12)

In line with this functionality of African music, and citing a number of authors, Onyeji, in 2016, avers that 'writers on indigenous music of Nigeria and indeed Africa have variously and in concert noted its place as a functional art—integral with life and rhythms of life' (p. 9). This means that African music, in this sense, is not an autonomous mental creation but is inextricably linked with the dynamism of practical existence and must reflect it. For R. C. Okafor (2005),

In the African culture, music is an entity rather than a mere mental creation or conception. It reflects and interprets the man in a specific environment and is often the key, which opens the gate to spiritual, mental, emotional, psychological, social and mystical realms. (p. 88)

Indeed, African music harmony is laced with the ideological and cultural foundation of mutuality and collaboration representative of African philosophy of life. A variety of African harmonic techniques include parallelism, imitation, overlapping, unison, polarity, ostinato, pedal point, hocket technique, additional parts etc. There is also the use of vocables which as Adeogun (personal communication, September 11, 2019) discusses in his lectures, has also a vital link with practical existence and is most often enriched with meaningfulness. For Adeogun, vocables reflect any of these four: a. complement b. acceptability especially if the words employed have other meanings c. communal support d. Re-enforcement.

Finally, according to Dan C. Agu, African music can come in any of these five main musical structural or presentational forms: a. Solos b. Call and Response c. Call and Refrain d. Solo and Chorused Refrain and e. Mixed Structural forms (Agu, 1999:15). The Ekwemma musical ensemble mirrors all of these harmonic techniques and patterns as we shall see subsequently.

Rhythmic Patterns: African music is highly polyrhythmic involving a complex combination of different rhythms being played at the same time. Thus, we have cross rhythm, polyrhythm, heterophony and polyphony as different nuances of African rhythm. Here, the instruments mimic the voice, probably because vocal music began before instrumental accompaniments. Instrumental cadences are rhythmically conceived.

According to Blacking (1995), there are three major rhythmic modes found in every metric organization in African music: The Trochaic (Long-short), Spondaic (Long-long) and Iambic (short-short). To analyze the rhythmic properties of a given African composition, we must consider the significant rhythmic features such as the meter, duplet, or triplet occurrences, prevailing note values and syncopations.

In all, as Onwuegbuna (2015) rightly puts it, "African music is characterized by polyphonic (and often contrapuntal) texture, complex rhythms, syncopations, and percussive treatment of both voice and other non-percussion instruments, amongst others" (p. 24). It is created to serve an end, which is life, and it is completely inseparable with life. The Ekwemma musical ensemble provides a great measure of evidence for these stands especially in the systematic combination of the xylophone slabs that make up the ensemble.

In all, in creating or structuring African Indigenous music, Onyeji (2016) identifies at least five philosophical principles that generally undergird the making and practice of music in Africa, namely: a. As a Humanistic Commitment in Africa (meant to integrate all into a common humanity) b. As Education, Enlightenment and Moral Force in Africa (designed for social, moral and cultural education and training) c. As Agent of Social and Political Order d. As Human/Communal source of therapy and Spirituality and finally e. As Entertainment. (cf. pp. 20-26). These philosophic mindset coupled with the desire to draw the melodies, harmony form and texture, rhythmic movements and thematic developments from already existing musical culturally ideological paradigms, generally motivate African indigenous compositions. Leading composers in this light include Joshua Uzoigwe, Ephraim Amu, Chris Onyeji, Akin Euba, Meki Nzewi, Samuel Akpabot, Okechukwu Ndubuisi, Dan Agu etc.

Empirical Reviews:

A number of scholarly researches have been made by many ethno-musicologists into the indigenous music of so many parts of African cultures especially here in Nigeria. These surpass the expected confines of this article. Permit us therefore to just cite some few examples.

In 1989, Wayne Slawson had done a study in Ewe drum music in which he studied the features, musical operations and compositions based on this indigenous music. Again, Onyeji, Christian in 2002 also did a study of Abigbo choral dance music and investigated its application in the composition of abigbo for modern symphony orchestra. Joshua Uzoigwe has also done a study of 'Egwu Amala' and 'Atilogwu' music. Agbo, Benedict in 2016 has also done a research study in the ikorodo of Nsukka evolving accompaniment styles and other cultural expressions in this music that can provide paradigms for African art composition with Nsukka texture.

In all, there have been numerous attempts by scholars to research into the indigenous music of different locations in Africa and Nigeria in particular with a view to evolving paradigms for art composition that preserve the original genius of African music and making compositions based on the paradigms so evolved.

Musical Exposition of Ekwemma Instrumental Ensemble in Eha-Alumona Culture

As already said earlier, 'Ekwemma' is a special type of xylophone strictly prominent in the traditional religious circles of many parts of Nsukka cultural zones, of which Eha-alumona is one. It comprises of groups of special wooden slaps that are placed on bare laps in order to produce very bright and sonorous sounds. These xylophones are specially kept in the sacred shrines and are dedicated to different deities according to the different cultural zones. They are only performed within the particular season delineated for it, which could be a period of six months in about three—five years.

Ritual and Socio-cultural Significance

In Eha-alumona town of Nsukka L. G. A., this xylophone called 'Ekwe mma' is only performed during 'omabe seasons' which take place between January to September bi-annually. Within these seven months, the Masquerade activities including this ritual music, only take place on all the 'Eke' and 'Nkwo' market days except just about three weeks before the end of the season, during the 'ula mma' (literally, 'departing of the deities') when the masquerades and this ritual music can take place daily. These periods are said to be when 'mma no n'al' (that is when the ritual masquerades are on ground), and therefore, the 'ekwe mma' can be heard (but not beheld by non-initiates) within this season. At the expiration of the season delineated for it, the 'ekwe mma' are neatly stacked in a sacred bag and put aside until the next season of the masquerade.

Originally, on 'Onuokachi' festival (the very last day of the bi-annual omabe festival), no one was expected to come out except ritual male initiates. On that day, the deities were expected to come out in public parade throughout the length and breadth of Eha-alumona. Only trained ritual initiates who have the musical art were expected to go into the shrines on that day and beat the 'Ekwemma' music to signal that the deities are on public display and to sound a public warning. The music usually came in two forms: Solo performances of the Ekwemma and then with accompaniments. The 'Ekwemma' instrument had the pride of place in the entire instrumental ensemble because of its highly prized ritual significance and its melo-rhythmic capacities. It is believed to have the capacity to summon the deities and the ancestors. It was also used to express their eulogies and extol their adventures. This is in addition to its function of sending signals and warnings to the rest of the community. It was helmed in a lot of secrecy and though even non-initiates could relish its beautiful melodies and bright tonal qualities from the enclosures of their homes, they could not see it. Only highly placed initiatives who have attained some pedestal in the traditional religion and who have killed in wars, could step on it. To do the contrary would be to risk immediate death.

The exclusive use of these instruments for the deities celebrated in a particular culture is the reason it is called 'Ekwe mma' (meaning, the wooden gong for the deity). This exclusivity in terms of use, together with the sacrosanctity associated with their use,

punctuate also other cultures within Nsukka senatorial zone of today's Enugu State where they are celebrated.

Asides the masquerade ritual ceremonies, this sacred music can also be featured in the burial of prominent traditional rulers who are initiates in the masquerade cult. Such burials would involve the appearance of these cultic masquerades, like the burial of 'attamah mma' (chief priest of a particular deity), 'attamah omabe' (chief priest of the ritual masquerade), 'onyishi' (the eldest in a clan or village) and 'eze' (the traditional ruler of the community). This ritual music is accompanied by dancing meant for the initiates, and as said earlier, only those who have killed in war among them may step on the instrument as a way of ending a particular section of music or risk losing one's life. Women are not even allowed the privilege of beholding the instrumental ensemble let alone the masquerades that they parade. Regulations about who may enjoy the privilege of the performance of 'ekwe mma' may also differ in other sub-cultures within Nsukka zone.

Technology:

The making of the xylophone slabs involves a complex ritual process. The slabs are made from special wood (or 'xylem') called '**ugbamoja oke mmeyi**' (the trees are preserved in special sacred forests with a lot of exclusivity and secrecy) or '**okpeyi**'. This involves a process of wood conversion in which the standing timbre is felled and the rough wood sawn and shaped into slabs and allowed to dry by 'open air' method of wood seasoning. In some cases, a natural form of 'kiln' method of wood seasoning is employed, in which the wood slabs are roasted around an open fire by the locally trained technologist. The converted timbre is now tuned to desired pitches according to established principles and or according to specific melodies in mind on the part of the local musician and technologist. This pitch differentiation is achieved by shaping the slabs into different sizes. The slabs are then smoothed with the aid of scraper and sandpaper. To get the precise pitches, the technologist would use the technique of either chiseling the edges or burrowing into the flat part or board of the slabs. The former achieves a sharpening effect while the latter achieves a flattening effect.

When these processes are carried out, the xylophone slabs are now packed in a bag and dropped into a flowing river dedicated to a deity and allowed to stay there for one year. This process is called '**otue**'. Apart from the ritual purposes of dedicating this instrument to the water deity and allowing it to commune with water spirits, this process also serves to solidify the wood and smoothen it more. After one year, the slabs are brought out from the river and a sacrifice is made with a big ram (in the ancient times, this sacrifice was with a human being) and the instrument is emblemized with a spirit of potency, since the ram is often associated with agility in Nsukka culture. The blood of the ram (ebule) is used to carefully smear and thoroughly rub the panes of the xylophone slabs. This process is called '**mmenyi ji**'. Then a ritual feast is carried out to celebrate the birth of a new 'ekwe mma' in which case, the initiates eat yam with a soup prepared with the ram meat.

Musical Features and their Cultural Significance and symbolisms

First, the sitting arrangement and technique of playing the 'ekwemma' is unique. The slabs that make up the 'ekwemma' ensemble are shared among the players who while sitting on bare ground spread the slabs across their legs with the space in between their legs acting as the resonator. The three (or four) players of 'ekwe mma' or 'Ngedegwu Njiko' must sit on the ground, with each player sitting in between the legs of another directly before the loins and wearing nothing else (or at most, in the light of recent developments, a small covering for their loins). A special kind of sacred leaf called 'owa' or 'igowa' is put in all of their mouths. This leaf is called 'icharaku' in some other parts of Nsukka land and has a higher religious and ritual significance than 'omu' (tender part of palm frond). It is also associated with a lot of powers. The players widen their legs to a moderate position, but wide enough to accommodate the player sitting in front, and the xylophone slabs are placed across the naked laps of the players. The placement on naked body is a sign that the instrumentalists are fully in communion with their instruments, that is they are now one with their slabs. It also helps to project the sound. The space in-between the legs and the naked floor act as resonating chambers to the sound produced by the xylophone slabs.

The sitting arrangement of players of 'Ekwemma' ensemble and the fact that they are three or four signifies a number of things.

First and foremost, it is an instrument of communion symbolizing the communion between the living and the dead, the adherents of the religion and their dead ancestors. It also extols the communion that should exist among the initiates of the religion. No wonder then, it is also called 'Ngede Njiko' (the xylophone of unity). As against, the western counterpart where one person can play a xylophone, this special instrument is played by a group of players, mainly three, and in some rare cases four. Three is a sign of communion and unity, while four represents the four market days. The sitting arrangement of the players is so arranged to depict some form of ancestry, genealogy and collaboration.

In an arrangement of three, the first person is the lead instrumentalist and has four slabs that are referred to as 'eno' (literally, 'four'). He plays the role of the 'Master Instrument' (MI), behind him is another player with two slabs called the 'ebo ihu' (literally, two in front), who plays the role of a response to the master instrument and occasionally serves as the 'Action Motivation' (AM). In an arrangement of four, there would be 'ebo etiti' or 'ebo azu' player (literally, 'middle two' or 'last two' respectively, who is collaborating with 'ebo ihu'. At the back, is the last person also with two heavier slabs, called 'mgbe' or simply 'ebo' (two). He provides both the time line and the bass texture to the entire ensemble. Other percussions instruments would be aligned horizontally behind these trio (or quartet in an arrangement of four) to provide other musical roles.

It is important to note that a special musical relationship exists between these groups of xylophone slabs. For example, in an arrangement of three, a particular pitch-slab must criss-cross the three instrumentalists to underscore the unity which these instruments

represent. This pitch would serve as the base of 'eno', the lead of 'ebo ihu' and the base of 'mgbe' at a lower octave. For instance, if we have 'eno' comprising a tetra-tonic scale of C#, E, F# and G#, then 'ebo ihu' would be a bi-tonic scale of A# and C#, then 'mgbe' would be a bi-tonic scale of C# and E at a lower octave. In these three, therefore, C# is constant to maintain that unity. The 'Mgbe' on a lower octave being a bi-tonic scale is a shorter form of and embedded in the 'eno', whereas the 'ebo ihu' is a derivative from either of the two with an additional third below the constant (C#). This musical arrangement of the slabs, apart from symbolizing unity, is also premised on a cultural belief of Nsukka about genealogy and re-incarnation. It is believed that a man inheres and re-incarnates, not necessarily in his son, but in his grandson. This is why there is a replication of the 'eno' in the 'mgbe' though in a shorter level, while the 'eno' derives from the 'ebo ihu' as a much as a son, derives from his father.

This aligns with Akpabot's view about the family model of music making in African societies. For him, Family concept in African societies is very strong and this is reflected in the way they conceptualize their music. We have examples of musical instruments named after a family or carved in human likeness. Family concept in instrumentation, for example, is linked to the African's view of the relative importance of males and females in society. (1998, p. 12)

In an arrangement of four xylophonists (which is often very rare in Eha-alumona culture), this triadic arrangement must be present, while the additional 'ebo etiti' could be a further extension of the 'eno' (or 'mgbe') with either a note or two in so far attempt is made to maintain the modal feature. It could be, for instance 'F#' and 'A', and this bi-tone would thus be a modal fourth above the 'eno' as much as the 'ebo ihu' is a modal third below the 'eno'. It is important to note that this modal feature specially characterized by intervals of 3rd is characteristic of Ekwemma music.

Other instruments in the Instrumental Ensemble and their roles

These include the 'okpokolo' (wood block) which gives the Phrasing Reference (PR), the 'udu' (musical pot) which in most cases includes the big pot referred to as 'oke' (male) and the smaller pot referred to as 'onyenye' (female). This is in line with Ibekwe's postulation of African traditional system of classification based on sex. This is what she calls the 'male and female classification concept'. (Lecture notes on Mus. 820 'Organology' June-July 2021).

In some other parts of Eha-alumona like 'oke al' village, only the big musical pot suffices. These musical pots act as the pulse maker. There is also the maracas called 'ichaka' which combines with the **okpokolo** to give the phrasing reference. The drums, 'igba', serve to enhance the action motivation in collaboration with xylophone slabs especially the **eno** which are the principal action motivator. The flute, 'oja', occasionally plays leading melodic roles, and at other times, serves as accompaniment. However, the flute is not an indispensable part of the instrumental ensemble as some villages in Eha-alumona do not have the flute as part of their own ensemble. There is also the 'egara' voice. This is a

form of Nsukka local chanting that moves strictly in modes and involves a lot of sliding effects and recitatives often used to express the eulogies of past ancestors and heroic individuals in the community. The **egara voice** often intersperses the performance with solo renditions and in some other cases give vocal expression to what is often played. It can also act as the 'call' voice for the male chorus. There are also other voices that act as chorus for some of the known traditional anthems. These voices provide occasional refrains to pieces played by the instrumental ensemble.

ARRANGEMENT OF SOME EKWEMMA ENSEMBLE PIECES AND THEIR MUSICAL ANALYSIS

Mgbo Rigirigiri Mgbo:

MGBORIRIGI MGBO

(Usually performed when the masquerades enter the shrines)

The musical score is arranged in a system of 14 staves. The instruments and voices included are:

- Oja:** Treble clef, key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), mostly rests.
- Udu:** Percussion line with a double bar line, showing a steady rhythmic pattern of quarter notes.
- Ichaka:** Percussion line with a double bar line, showing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Ekwe:** Percussion line with a double bar line, showing a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes with some rests.
- Igba:** Percussion line with a double bar line, showing a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes with some rests.
- Okpokolo:** Percussion line with a double bar line, showing a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes.
- ENO:** Treble clef, key signature of three sharps, mostly rests.
- EBO IHU:** Treble clef, key signature of three sharps, showing a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes.
- EBO ETITI:** Treble clef, key signature of three sharps, showing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- MGBE:** Treble clef, key signature of three sharps, showing a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes.
- Voice:** Treble clef, key signature of three sharps, mostly rests.
- T. (Tenor):** Treble clef, key signature of three sharps, mostly rests.
- Bar. (Baritone):** Bass clef, key signature of three sharps, mostly rests.
- B. (Bass):** Bass clef, key signature of three sharps, mostly rests.

The score consists of four measures. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The time signature is not explicitly shown but appears to be 4/4 based on the notation.

5

Oja

Udu

Ichaka

Ekwe

Igba

Okpokolo

ENO

EBO IHU

EBO ETITI

MGBE

Voice

T.

Bar.

B.

O vu te

M gbo ri gi ri gi ri M gbo M gbo ri gi ri gi ri

M gbo ri gi ri gi ri M gbo M gbo ri gi ri gi ri

M gbo ri gi ri gi ri M gbo M gbo ri gi ri gi ri

8

Oja

Udu

Ichaka

Ekwe

Igba

Okpokolo

ENO

EBO IHU

EBO ETITI

MGBE

Voice

O vu te O yi ma nw'u gwo ke

T.

M gbo M gbo ri gi ri gi ri M gbo

Bar.

M gbo M gbo ri gi ri gi ri M gbo

B.

M gbo M gbo ri gi ri gi ri M gbo

General Structure:

Conscious attempt is made here to capture the creative and performance idioms of 'Ekwe mma' music of Eha-alumona. The vocal part of this arrangement and the harmony are

derived from the creative study and application of musical elements from the instrumental resources in a way that captures the spirit of this indigenous music.

Other Musical Features

Tonality and Mode: We have an arrangement of four xylophonists in this arrangement. The special musical features of this xylophone arrangement have already been explained above. Surmise it to say that, as it concerns the xylophone arrangement we have here, we have 'ENO' comprising a tetra-tonic scale of C#, E, F# and G#. Then we have 'EBO IHU' which is a bi-tonic scale of C# and A# and a modal 3rd below the 'ENO'. We have an 'EBO ETITI' which is a further extension of the 'eno' comprising a bi-tonic scale of 'F#' and 'A', and therefore a modal fourth above the 'ENO'. Finally, we have the 'MGBE' comprising a bi-tonic scale of E and C# at a lower octave. In the three, therefore (that is, ENO, EBO IHU AND MGBE), C# is constant to maintain unity. The 'Mgbe' on a lower octave, being a bi-tonic scale, is a shorter form of and embedded in the 'eno', whereas the 'ebo ihu' is a derivative from either of the two with an additional third below the constant (C#). The EBO ETITI is a modal fourth above the ENO. **Other Features:**

Mode: Aeolian mode. **Tonality:** Poly-tonality but pre-dominantly C# minor.

Scale: Bi-tonic scales and Tetra-tonic Scales were used in the instruments. Hexatonic scales were used for the voices.

Time Signature: $\frac{4}{4}$ (cut time). **Meter:** Compound Duple time, . **Tempo:** Moderato

Instruments: Xylophone, Udu, Okpokolo, Ichaka, Igba & Ikolo/Ekwe

Other Harmonic Techniques: include: The use of parallelism, Call and Response, Overlapping,

Repetition techniques with variations, Use of Hocket Technique and Unilineal interlocking structure

Akat'evur'ogwe (Instruments and Voice)

AKAT'EVUR'OGWE

The musical score is arranged in a system with ten staves. The top staff is for the Udu, marked with a double bar line and a common time signature, and includes the tempo marking *Allegretto Forzando e Animato*. The second staff is for the Ichaka, featuring a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed eighth notes. The third staff is for the Ekwe/Ikolo, showing a melodic line with eighth notes. The fourth staff is for the Igba, with a similar melodic line. The fifth staff is for the Okpokolo, consisting of a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The next three staves (ENO, EBO IHU, and EBO ETITI) are for vocal parts, each starting with a rest in the first measure and then playing a rhythmic accompaniment. The final three staves are for the voice parts: Tenor (top), Tenor (middle), and Bass (bottom). Each voice part has lyrics written below the notes: "a ka t'e vu r'o gwe a ye le a ye le a".

3

Udu

Ichaka

Ekwe/Ikolo

Igba

Okpokolo

ENO

EBO IHU

EBO ETITI

MGBE

T.
ye a ka t'e vu r'o gwe eh eh eh eh eh

T.
ye a ka t'e vu r'o gwe eh eh eh eh eh

B.
ye a ka t'e vu r'o gwe eh eh eh eh eh

5

Udu

Ichaka

Ekwe/Ikolo

Igba

Okpokolo

ENO

EBO IHU

EBO ETITI

MGBE

T.
8 a ka t'e vu r'o gwe a ye le___ a ye le___ a

T.
8 a ka t'e vu r'o gwe a ye le___ a ye le___ a

B.
8 a ka t'e vu r'o gwe a ye le___ a ye le___ a

7

Udu

Ichaka

Ekwe/Ikolo

Igba

Okpokolo

ENO

EBO IHU

EBO ETITI

MGBE

T.

ye a ka t'e vu r'o gwe eh eh eh eh eh

T.

ye a ka t'e vu r'o gwe eh eh eh eh eh

B.

ye a ka t'e vu r'o gwe eh eh eh eh eh

8

General Structure:

This section includes both instrumental and vocal aspects. The vocal aspect both in melody and harmony is composed in Aeolian mode using a pentatonic scale involving C#, E, F#, G#, and B.

Other Music Features:

Mode: Aeolian mode. **Tonality:** C# minor. **Time Signature:** $\frac{8}{8}$. **Meter:** Compound Quadruple

Tempo: Allegretto. **Dynamics:** Forzando, Animato, Agitato, Bravura

Texture: Polyphonic, Homophonic and highly polyrhythmic

Accompaniment Instruments: Piano, Xylophone, Udu, Okpokolo, Ichaka, Igba & Ikolo/Ekwe

Other Harmonic Techniques: Call and Refrain, Repetition Technique, Use of Polarity...

Ekwe Mma Dance (Only Instruments and can only be danced by initiates.)

The musical score is arranged in a vertical staff format with nine instruments listed on the left. The instruments are: Udu, Ichaka, Ekwe/Ikolo, Igba, Okpokolo, ENO, EBO IHU, EBO ETITI, and MGBE. The score is divided into two measures by a vertical bar line. The Udu part begins with a triplet of eighth notes. The other instruments play various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, often with accents. The key signature is C# minor (three sharps) and the time signature is 8/8. The notation uses a mix of treble clefs and common time signatures for different instruments.

5

Udu

Ichaka

Ekwe/Ikolo

Igba

Okpokolo

ENO

EBO IHU

EBO ETITI

MGBE

Moderato Solenne

12

Udu

Ichaka

Ekwe/Ikolo

Igba

Okpokolo

ENO

EBO IHU

EBO ETITI

MGBE

General structure:

This piece involves two sections. The first section is boisterous and mainly instrumental involving occasional vocal interpolations and ululations. It is also made to be danced to and is strictly tetratonic involving only C#, E, F# and G both in the vocal and

instrumental dimensions. The second section is solemn and strictly instrumental involving also a pentatonic scale with these notes: C#, E, F#, G# and A#

4.3.2 Other Musical Features

Mode: Aeolian mode. **Tonality:** C# minor. **Scale:** Pentatonic and Tetra-tonic scales. **Time Signature:** $^{16}_{16}$, and 4_8 . **Meter:** Compound Quadruple. **Tempo:** Allegro, moderato. **Vocal Range:** E² -G⁴. **Dynamics:** Agitato, Bravura, Solenne. **Texture:** Polyphonic and highly polyrhythmic

Accompaniment Instruments: Xylophone, Udu, Okpokolo, Ichaka, Igba & Ikolo/Ekwe

Other Harmonic Techniques: *Repetition Techniques, Use of Polarity*

Conclusion

As Onyeji (2016) opines, 'proper understanding of structural and formal theoretical merits of indigenous African music, vocal or instrumental, is considered a key to composing original music, which will be African in general content and specific to the creative tradition.' (p. 33). The attempt made in this research is only a small venture in the direction of at least exposing an indigenous music.

In this light therefore, it is recommended that further attempts be invested in studying further this special type of music called 'Ekwemma.' It is hoped that this would enable the researchers evolve the different paradigms that motivate African Indigenous music. There is need for a measurable framework not just for the creation of Indigenous Art music but also for the assessment and evaluation of such in terms of authenticity to 'africanness.'

These researchers also share the concern of most ethno-musicologists about the insufficiency of western style of notation to capture the African spirit, the energy field and body feel of African music especially given the imprecise sound and vision of African musical arts. In this light therefore, we aver that what we have posited above on rigid scientifically precise graph paper or squares as notation score should only be understood as mere abstractions of the original African genius which is continuously a vital force, contingent and spontaneous.

As regards the 'Ekwe mma' music of Nsukka, further studies are recommended into the different nuances of this cultic music. It is expected that a conceptual framework that can explain both the construction and establishment of sonic differences among the different slabs that make up the xylophone, be evolved. Again, attempts should be made to burrow into other cultures in Nsukka zone that celebrate their cultural deities in order to discover common grounds and differences.

Finally, an exhaustive treatment of African xylophones especially as it concerns acceptable and representative rhythmic patterns is also highly recommended. In conclusion, though, this academic endeavour does not claim an exhaustive treatment of pertinent issues in the peculiarities of this instrumental ensemble and its indigenous music nor even does it offer a sufficient information on this instrument and the manner

of instrumentation, yet it has contributed to the repository of knowledge on African xylophone, with special reference to the 'Ekwe mma' or 'Ngede Njiko' of Eha-alumona. This for us is a movement in the right direction. As Onyeji (2016) observes, 'it is pertinent to note that within the prevailing music scene in Nigeria, there is undue dominance of choral music. There is a dearth of instrumental music of symphonic scope.' (p. 41).

It has also served to justify Akpabot's position that "Legends, myths and symbols in African music are expressed through musical instruments, music sound and number symbolism, all working under the umbrella of ritual beliefs." (1998, p. 87). It finally reinforces Okafor's view that "Igbo traditional music is still vibrant and a dynamic art form since its sustenance is deeply rooted in Igbo life, religion and cultural affinity" (2017, p. 328).

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