

CULTURALLY INFORMED PIANO INSTRUCTION IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY
INSTITUTIONS: A COMPOSITION OF THREE PIANO ETUDES CELEBRATING LOCAL
HERITAGE

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Abstract

A look into the piano works used for piano studies in the Music Departments of Nigerian tertiary institutions shows a preponderance of Western piano works. These do not speak to the cultural background of the students. This has led to a growing concern by African music scholars on the imposition of western culture and musical norms through music education curriculum. It has also created a problem which is that students struggle with African piano pieces. Therefore, it is upon this background that the researchers carried out this study to compose piano etudes based on African music rhythms to help students overcome this challenge. It was based on collecting folk songs of the Igbo which were transcribed, and analyzed to extract the folk idioms for original compositions of piano pieces. The methodology employed in the study was research-composition technique. This is a compositional approach that involves in-depth ethnomusicological research of indigenous music. Three (3) original piano pieces were composed based on the collected folk songs and the folk music idioms extracted from them. These original compositions were analyzed based on chosen criteria. Recommendations were made one of which is that composers should base their compositions on elements drawn from the folk idioms of the people.

Introduction

Music is a part and parcel of any culture. The music of any society helps in defining the culture of that society. This idea was supported by Adeogun (2008:21) when he explained that "music is central to the cultural life, and monitors the mental advancement of a society from generation to generation." Music is an expressive language of every culture including Nigeria. It therefore implies that the importance of music to the Nigerian society cannot be over emphasized. Buttressing this point, Obiesie and Nwamara (2019:1) opined that: "Music in Nigerian societies is conceived as object of aesthetic contemplation as well as a sociocultural phenomenon that plays multi-dimensional roles in every aspect of culture." Music is very important to the Nigerian society; therefore, music education is also important. Music education "refers to the teaching and learning of formal music making and listening." (Obiesie & Nwamara, 2019). It is an important tool in molding, forming and shaping a learner (Ekwueme, Odunuga & Ogunrinade, 2013). In Nigeria, music is taught in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. However, the focus of this study was on tertiary institutions, south east Nigeria. Music education in Nigerian tertiary institutions which started about five decades ago has evolved over the years. It has striven to improve with the view of meeting the current global standards. The Nigerian society looks to the departments of music of our tertiary institutions to provide graduates who possess many practical skills necessary for their success after graduation. This is why the national policy on education in Nigeria demands that tertiary education in Nigeria will provide graduates with many skills they can take into the job market, (FGN, 2004). Consequently, the curriculum for tertiary music education has been structured in a way that takes care of not only the

theoretical aspects of music. Consideration was also given to the practical aspect as well. Certain courses were provided to take care of the practical aspect of music learning. These courses include; keyboard studies, individual performance studies and ensemble studies.

Keyboard studies is the teaching and learning of keyboard instruments. It is crucial for promoting rounded and extended musicianship among music students. The acquisition of keyboard skills is a major means of securing a musical employment (Adeogun, 2008). There are many keyboard instruments but this study focused on the piano.

Although piano studies is an important part of the curriculum of Nigerian tertiary institutions, however, the piano works used in teaching the students are mostly the ones written by some western composers like Mozart, Handel and Bach. This has created a problem which is that "the students do well in western piano pieces but struggle with African piano pieces. Let us take for example the individual performance studies which involves both western voice pieces and African voice pieces. The researchers have observed that the piano accompanists to the singers usually do well in the Western voice pieces but do struggle with the African voice piece. This is mainly because they find it difficult to interpret African rhythms. This is also because they are not used to playing African rhythms because they use mainly western pieces for their studies. It is indeed very sad that a student will do well in western piano pieces but struggle with the African pieces which are our own. This is one of the reasons many Nigerian music scholars have stressed the need for balance in content and methodology of music education in the country (Onyeji, 2008). One of the scholars, Okafor (1992) wrote:

An examination of music education in Nigeria presents the observer with immediate and glaring anomaly. The focus of music education itself appears to be on western music, music transplanted or introduced into the culture of the indigenous Nigeria from an outside culture. The syllabus of the educational system, the curriculum content, and the philosophy and thrusts of the institutions which teach music place strong emphasis on Western music. The student and even the Nigerian teacher of this type of music will, therefore, have to grapple first with an understanding of the method of teaching it. (p. 89).

His opinion is that the method of teaching music takes the students away from their culture. This is why Nzewi (1981) argued that the learner's cultural background has been ignored in the approach to music education in Nigeria. In addition to this, Adedeji (2013) opined that "this has been one of the main reasons accountable for the underdevelopment of music education in Nigeria." This approach has affected piano studies in our tertiary institutions.

Therefore, it is upon this background that the present researchers carried out this study with a view to composing three (3) piano etudes using musical idioms from Igbo folk songs from the researchers' inspirations. These piano works which emphasize African rhythmic styles are intended to help the students with their interpretation of African rhythms.

Statement of the Problem

Music education in Nigerian tertiary institutions has been structured in a way that covers both the theoretical and practical aspects of music. The courses that are contributing to the practical aspect are; piano studies, individual performance studies and ensemble studies. However, a look into the

performance of students in these courses shows that they struggle to play the piano accompaniment for the African solo voice and chorus pieces. This struggle most times leads them to even vamping the pieces. These are the same students who do better in the western category. It is as a result of this that the researchers composed three piano etudes using musical idioms from Igbo folk songs to proffer solutions to the seemingly existing problem.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to make a culture-based approach to piano playing in Nigerian tertiary institutions with special reference to the South East region. To this end, three (3) original piano pieces were composed based on the folk idioms extracted from Igbo folk songs.

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- To collect Igbo folk songs from the South East region of Nigeria.
- To analyze collected Igbo folk songs with the view of getting musical idioms from them.
- To use the musical idioms of the folk songs to compose piano etudes with emphasis on African rhythmic styles.
- To analyze the composed piano pieces based on chosen criteria.

Significance of the Study

Music scholars in Nigeria have raised the need for an African best practice to enhance African-sensitive music education (Onyeji, 2019). This study is intended to make a contribution towards that. The piano etudes which were composed using musical idioms from Igbo folk songs will contribute to the preservation of Igbo folk songs. These etudes which were composed with emphasis on African rhythmic styles will help students improve in their interpretation of African rhythms. It will provide teaching tools for piano teachers in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The piano works will also add to the repertoire of piano compositions in Nigeria and even globally. It will enhance piano studies in tertiary institutions of south east Nigeria by providing piano works which considers the cultural background of the students who are mainly Igbo students.

Methodology

The researchers employed research-composition technique in this study. This is a compositional approach that involves in-depth ethnomusicological research of indigenous music (Onyeji, 2019). This method was used to study some selected Igbo folk songs and some other selected Igbo art compositions.

It should be noted that at the heart of every music composition is inspiration. Composition cannot take place without inspiration no matter one's knowledge of music theory. The researchers have discovered from their years of experiences in the academia that the most important tool for composing piano works is the inspiration that comes from the composer's mind. This inspiration can be stimulated through listening to music, studying other compositions and active musical engagements.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Research-Composition Technique. This term as explained by Onyeji (2019) is " the compositional approach that gives a background in-depth to ethnomusicological research of indigenous music." (p. 276). In this approach, the composer is expected to study and analyze indigenous music with the view of deriving musical idioms for his compositions from them.

Piano Etudes

This is a piano composition intended as a basis for the improvement of the performer's technique. (Kennedy,2007). It is a short musical composition that a musician plays mainly for practice with the view of improving on certain musical skills.

African Pianism

African Pianism is one of the terms that came up as a result of efforts by Nigerian art music composers. It is, as explained by Boamah (2012) " a style of piano music which employs techniques and styles used in the performance of African traditional songs and African popular music." (p.1). Boamah observed "the term African Pianism was coined by Akin- Euba, a renowned musicologist. In furtherance of his arguments, Akin- Euba in Boamah (2012) discovered:

A possibility of evolution in the use of western pianoforte in combination with African drums and other instruments of percussion. The piano already displays certain affinity with African music and by creating a type of African Pianism to blend with African instruments; it should be possible to achieve a successful fusion (p. 1).

Thus African Pianism could be likened to playing the African drum on the piano.

African-Sensed Music Education

There has been a growing concern by African music scholars of the imposition of western culture and musical norms through educational curricular for music (Onyeji, 2019). This has raised the need to develop music curricular that considers the cultural background of the students. This means that the focal point of music education in Africa especially in Nigeria which was hinged on western music should be brought home meaning a maneuver or insert of western culture into the culture of the Africans should be reconsidered to embrace Africanness in our education sector as exemplified below:

Ariri

Emeka Egbonu

Allegro

6

11

16

22

27

2

32

Musical notation for measures 32-36. The system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). Measure 32 starts with a whole note chord in the treble and a half note in the bass. Measures 33-36 show a melodic line in the treble with eighth and sixteenth notes, and a bass line with eighth notes and rests.

37

Musical notation for measures 37-41. The system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). Measures 37-41 continue the melodic and harmonic patterns from the previous system, with the treble staff featuring eighth and sixteenth notes and the bass staff featuring eighth notes and rests.

42

Musical notation for measures 42-46. The system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). Measures 42-46 show a continuation of the melodic line in the treble and the bass line with eighth notes and rests.

47

Musical notation for measures 47-51. The system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). Measures 47-51 show a continuation of the melodic line in the treble and the bass line with eighth notes and rests.

52

Musical notation for measures 52-56. The system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). Measures 52-56 show a continuation of the melodic line in the treble and the bass line with eighth notes and rests.

57

Musical notation for measures 57-61. The system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). Measures 57-61 show a continuation of the melodic line in the treble and the bass line with eighth notes and rests.

62

Musical score for measures 62-66. The piece is in a minor key, indicated by a single flat in the key signature. The music is written for piano in a two-staff system. The right hand features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving bass lines. A double bar line is present after measure 64.

67

Musical score for measures 67-71. The right hand continues with a melodic line, incorporating some grace notes. The left hand maintains a steady accompaniment pattern. A double bar line is present after measure 70.

72

Musical score for measures 72-76. The melodic line in the right hand shows some chromatic movement. The left hand accompaniment remains consistent. A double bar line is present after measure 75.

77

Musical score for measures 77-80. The right hand features a melodic phrase that concludes with a half note. The left hand accompaniment continues. A double bar line is present after measure 80.

81

Musical score for measures 81-84. The right hand has a melodic line with a sharp sign on the second measure. The left hand accompaniment concludes with a final chord. A double bar line is present after measure 84.

The piano piece "Ariri" is in rondo form. Rondo is a form of composition, usually instrumental, in which one section intermittently recurs. (Kennedy, 2007). Onwuekwe (2013) went further to explain that "a rondo contains sections or episodes which are smoothly joined when necessary by little linking or bridge passages." (p. 31). The sections in a rondo are usually identified as ABACADA. The opening section A is the section that intermittently recurs.

A closer look at this rondo piece shows that a piece of music material stated at the beginning of the piece from bars one to sixteen keeps recurring, alternating with the episodes. The first episode is found from bar seventeen to Thirty-Two. This episode is section B. The second episode is from bar Forty-Nine to Sixty-Four. This is section C. The piece ended with a coda from bar Eighty One-Eighty Four.

Structural Analysis

Form:	Rondo (ABACA)
Medium:	Piano solo
Length:	84 bars
Tempo:	Moderato
Meter:	Six-eight time signature
Bars 1-16:	Section A
Bars 17-32:	Section B
Bars 33-48:	Section A again
Bars 49-64:	Section C
Bars 65-80:	Another section A
Bars 81-84:	Coda or tail

Egwu Okereke

Emeka Egbonu

$\text{♩} = 140$

7

13

19 *più mosso*

25

The musical score is presented in five systems, each consisting of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The first system begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 140. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The first system contains measures 1-6. The second system contains measures 7-12. The third system contains measures 13-18. The fourth system contains measures 19-24, with a time signature change to 4/4 at measure 19 and the instruction 'più mosso'. The fifth system contains measures 25-30.

2

30

35

40

45

The piece "Egwu Okereke" is in binary form. Onwuekwe (2013) explained the binary form as a "musical composition which consists of two parts, (AB) each usually repeated"(p .29). She went further to say that the two sections are usually related but differ in such important respects as key, mood, texture, tempo, thematic materials, time signature, or dynamic level (p. 29). Binary form simply means a musical composition in two sections, section A and section B.

Structural Analysis

- Form: Binary (AB)
- Medium: Piano solo
- Length: 48 bars
- Tempo: Allegro
- Meter: Six-eight time signature from bars 1-22 and four-four time signature

Ije Awele

Emeka Egbonu

$\text{♩} = 160$

6

11

17 *trmw*

22

27

2

33

Musical score for measures 33-38. The piece is in 2/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The right hand features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving bass lines.

39

Musical score for measures 39-44. The right hand continues the melodic development with some rests, and the left hand maintains a steady accompaniment.

45

Musical score for measures 45-50. The right hand has a more active melodic line with eighth notes, and the left hand features a walking bass line.

51

Musical score for measures 51-55. The right hand has a melodic line with some rests, and the left hand continues the accompaniment.

56

Musical score for measures 56-59. The right hand has a melodic line with eighth notes, and the left hand continues the accompaniment.

60

Musical score for measures 60-65. The right hand has a melodic line with eighth notes, and the left hand continues the accompaniment. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

The piece "Ije Awele" is in "Through Composed Form." This is a musical form of composition in which new musical ideas are presented throughout, with no repetitions of themes (Onwuekwe, 2013). A closer look at the piece also shows call and response between bars five to ten. The right hand calls while the left hand responds. This is shown in the figure below.

Fig 1

An Excerpt From Ije Awele

Allegro

A deeper analysis of this piece also shows that from bars forty six to fifty nine, the melody moves to the left hand while the right hand becomes an accompaniment for this left hand melody as shown in the figure below.

Fig

An Excerpt From Ije Awele

2

Allegro

Structural Analysis

Form: Through Composed
 Medium: Piano solo
 Length: 64 bars
 Tempo: Allegro

Meter: Six-eight time signature

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Music scholars in Nigeria have raised the need for an African best practice to improve African-Sensitive music education (Onyeji, 2019). Unfortunately, a look into the piano works used for piano studies in the music departments of Nigerian tertiary institutions shows a preponderance of western piano works composed by western composers like Mozart, Handel and Chopin. These works do not speak to the cultural background of the students rather it takes the students away from their culture (Okafor, 1992). Consequently, students struggle with interpreting African piano works.

Therefore, the researchers are of the opinion that the composed piano works that speak to the cultural background of the students as contained in this study be used in teaching and learning of piano in our tertiary institutions. This study also makes a case for more African piano works that are based on African rhythms hence the study is a move in that direction. It contains three (3) original piano etudes aimed at helping students improve on their interpretation of African rhythms.

Recommendations

The need for music students to improve their interpretation of African rhythms cannot be over emphasized. Therefore, the researchers are of the opinion that there is need for more piano works that are based on African rhythmical patterns. Students will improve in their interpretation of African music when they practice with more African piano works.

Finally, the researchers are urging piano instructors in our tertiary institutions to consider using more of African piano works in both their teachings and evaluation of students.

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