

**A STUDY OF *MGBAGA* CULTURAL DANCE OF OBIOFIA UMUENEM OTOLO NNEWI IN NNEWI NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ANAMBRA STATE**

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**ABSTRACT**

Dance music plays an important role in a typical Africa society, therefore the researcher investigate the *Mgbaga* dance music of Obiofia Umuenem Otolu Nnewi North Local Government Area. As an ethno musicological study, this work delved into the musical activities of the aforementioned group, their origin/historical background, costumes, their place of rehearsals/performance. The data for the research was sourced through relevant literatures, oral interviews and research assistants. Findings show that rural and urban migration among the members of the *Mgbaga* dance group has really affected their musical activities. As a cultural art, the act of musical art performance is seen by the people of the community as a means of sustaining and transmitting the different cultural ethos of the community to the next generations, this they do by involving their young ones (males) in early musical activities such as initiating them to dance group in the community. The researcher found out that the group has codes and conducts that serve as a platform for individual/collective reformation and development of their members.

**INTRODUCTION**

**Background of the Study**

Dance is the most important and most captivating amongst other cultural music in Africa. Dance as an art plays a vital role in an individual or group of individuals. There is this saying that “*Africans are dancers*”. According to Wikipedia (2019).

Dance Music is music composed specifically to facilitate or accompany dancing. It can be either whole musical piece or part of a larger musical arrangement. In terms of performance, the major categories are live and recorded dance.

Dance music also serves as a medium for recreational activities. Onwuekwe (2014: P. 193). Indigenous dance can be a visual art or recreational activities. This music also creates rooms for cultural displays in the traditional musical chambers which helps add more reputation in norms add of every community.

This research work will look at the following: The historical background of the group, their initiation, social cultural values and activities of the group; their music and dance steps, their costumes, place of rehearsal and their place of performance. Data will be sourced through the means of interview and observation.

Obiofia people are sons and daughters of Dogonu, which constitute of:

Dunualo  
Dala anumudu  
Jibuaku  
Nneana.

Dogonu fought war with Awka-Etiti which was that time closest to them in terms of boundaries. The war lasted for many years which made Awka-Etiti people that was not killed to run away from their land for their lives. Obiofia people always come back victorious whenever they go to war. *Mgbaga* dance was introduced by their fore fathers in the community. During the war, *Mgbaga* dance was composed by their fore-fathers before going to war to their neighboring town, they perform the cultural dance and when they return back from war, it was also perform. This is evident in their culture. They perform in all kinds of events example: Religious festivals they celebrate yearly with one music. Ofala community day, initiation of title, burial ceremonies, traditional marriage ceremonies etc. there are different types of music performed by different cultural dance group in Obiofia of which the *Mgbaga* dance group is one of the group.

Agu (1990) said Nigerians are great lovers of Music, who create and perform music to enrich every activity ranging from birth to death. All musical creation serves specific purpose and performances are carefully chosen to fit specific function and activities appropriate (p.79). Music and dance is part of life in Obiofia just like every other community in Igbo land.

### **Statement of the Problem**

*Mgbaga* cultural dance has been one of the best of Obiofia in Nnewi North Local Government Area of Anambra State. Which contributed extremely in terms of *Mgbaga* traditional music art, norm and values? It appears that the group (*Mgbaga* Dance Group) is having organizational challenges steaming from their leadership.

### **Scope of the Study**

This research work covers only the Ethno musicological study of *Mgbaga* cultural dance group of Nnewi North Local Government, Obiofia Community.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main aim to review the musical activities of the *Mgbaga* dance group, its origin, their musical instruments, notate the music of *Mgbaga* dance of Obiofia in Nnewi North Local Government Area of Anambra State, find out their costumes, places of rehearsals and their places of performance.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this research work is aimed at:

- i. The ethno-musicological study of the aforementioned group, preserving the work of this group, by eutectics, making it ready for both academic and for easy accessibility of the work.
- ii. By doing this it will help in projecting the music of *Mgbaga* dance group and the Igbo in general to the entire world.
- iii. This work will also serve as a reference point for future researchers who may want to further a course on one or more aspect of this group.

### **Research Questions**

Relevant questions were raised in the process of studying this group, these questions include;

1. What is the origin/historical background of this group.
2. What is their mode of recruitment?
3. What is the impact of the *Mgbaga* dance music in the social cultural life of the members of the group and the community in general?
4. What is their costume like?
5. What are their places of rehearsals, performance and their performance conditions?
6. What is the relevance effect of the dance and music in the individual lives of the members?

### **Literature relevant to the research work is reviewed under the sub-categories below:**

#### **Conceptual Literature Review**

Dance has been defined by many scholars. Ugo A. Onwuka (2012) defined dance as “an imitation of actions, characters and passions by means of gestures and rhythmical movements”.

Encyclopedia American (1978) defined dance as the “motion that arises from emotion”, the initiative challenging of energy into rhythmic forms that will convey meaning to both the holder and the doer”. Plato in Ugo A. Onwuka (2012) defined dance as “An instinctive desire to explain words by gesture”.

Encyclopedia Britannica (1971) said that Dance is the movement of the body, in a rhythmic way usually to music and within a given space, for the purpose of expressing an idea or emotion, releasing energy or simply taking delight in the movement itself.

Therefore dance is an instinctive desire to express an idea or emotional feeling and pattern of daily activities. Dance is the rhythmic movement of the body that response to a particular music. Dance involves some series of formations

that suits the rhythmic pattern of music that accompanying the dance. Onwuka (2012) observed the styles of dance. (Formalized dance and free medley dance). He further explains that “formalized dance is characterized by concerted action and uniformity of movements of dancers in time and space.

According to Nadel (1978), dance is not as substance that can be felt, lifted or weighed. It is something that occurs when a human entity moves direct pattern. Consciously performing specific movement while other human views this phenomenon. People don’t just appreciate dance because of their instruments and costumes, but it involves the performance. That is why dance ought to be planned and arranged with these elements that makes it expressive, for instance, the instruments, facial expression and the body movements. With all this listed a good performance is sure.

Encyclopedia America (1973:465) dance is the motion that raises emotions. It is that undulating response to pulse energy that comprises the act of dance not only the body of the dancer vibrates in the dance action but this action by its rhythmic character also spur’s the watchers (viewers) to a vibrating response.

Dance is a machine that connects peoples mind from different places. It is also an aspect that develops the muscles which results to a good flexible body just like dance aerobics (aerobics exercise).

Okoye (2012) explains that:

The free medley dance is seen as a powerful impulse that requires individual’s freedom in its composition and movements. The stylized dance is a skillfully choreographed art practiced largely by a professional. It requires fixed choreographically patterns and sequences with varying signs of aesthetic communication (p.3).

We have to understand that dance brings different people and region together because of its power. Dance is referred to as the movement of the body, usually rhythm of the music. The concept of dance has been viewed from different dimensions by different scholars.

### **Music and Dance in Culture**

The world is full of entertainment; it helps in advertising and increasing music and dance. No event is against it rather they perform according to the event agreement. No matter how developed the society is today music and dance must be heard. Due to the relationship between music and dance, dance cannot be performed without music or music without dance i.e. (movement of the body). That is to say that before dance can be performed (music) the master must be present to accompany it. People feel happier in every occasion where music and dance is present that is why Agu (1001:198) said that most Nigeria cultural music and dance serves as an intricate part of mind, body and soul. In addition serves as a medium for entertainment.

Anoke (2004:39) says music and dance nearly embrace all aspect of African life. They are vital ingredients to various activities in African human life such as rituals, marriage, initiation, coronations, festivals, puberty and birth etc. Music is also use for entertainment in the society. Africans are said to be great music lovers, who performs music in all kinds of event. In Igbo community, these two characters (music and dance) are well respected and recognized in the society. Culture is the people’s way of life; it can be exhibited through music and dance, language, attitude etc. There is no way these two bodies (music and dance) can be stopped from existing in the community.

According, Enekwe (1991:12) observed that:

Even in the urban area where traditional African culture clashes with that of European culture, interest in dancing remains high. Outside their traditional communities, people especially women form a dancing group (team) that keeps their local tradition alive. Sometimes such groups are attached to union form which they draw their materials.

Nketia (1975) notated that; “Although purely contemplative music, which is noted designed for dance drama, is practiced in African societies in restricted context, the cultivation of music that is integrated with dance or music that stimulates effective motor response, is much more prevalent” (p. 206). Dance music could be categorized in three different ways y- the instrumental dance, the vocal dance and the combination of both vocal and instrumental music. Here the vocal or the instrumental part supplies the rhythm which the dancers dance to. This means that vocal and instrumental dance music must be present in other to give meaning to the dance performance.

According to Onwuka (2012) noted that dance is stimulated and accompanied by appropriate musical, which makes them wonderful art of traditional performance become spirit-lifted and divinely edifying.

### **The Socio-Cultural implication of Mgbaga Dance Group**

Tradition is one of the things that keep the community going. Any community without tradition is bound to fail as a community. That is why Obiofia community still survives today. It is a series of festivals, ceremonies etc. These are performed through music and dance. *Mgbaga* is known as a cultural dance but it does not mean that this group is the only existing cultural dance group in the community. "*Mgbaga*" grew to an extent that anyone who sees them performing never gets tired of watching and never want to miss every part of the performance (dance). They perform in all kinds of events. Example; burial ceremonies, new yam festivals, marriage ceremonies, Ofala, community day, initiation of title, and other kinds of ceremonies.

Festivals are among the most important activities in Igbo Culture, it is full of music making and merriments by the community. Festivals answer different names by different people. In Obiofia community they celebrate the masquerades (Iti Mmanwu) every December 27<sup>th</sup>, they celebrate the new yam festival (iri ji) every year like other communities close to them, which comes annually.

According to Ugolo, (1993), festivals are celebrated various times in the year. They are given various names as a result of dialectical differences, the variation in the designation of the divinity that is placed and according to the particular historical incidents that is being commutated.

### **Theoretical Literature Review**

The importance of music cannot be overemphasized, as music has continued to play very relevant and practical roles in every society since creation. Research has shown that personal interest is strongly associated with acquired knowledge and skills. Chen & Darst (2001) which is confirmed by the better performance of boys with higher personal interest in skill and written test.

Gardner, Konesaroff and Fensham (2008) developed a qualitative of young people attending recreational dance classes. Dance classes foster respect for physical activity and expertise acquired over the long term. Participants gain self-confidence with respect to their body experience and social relationship. Dance classes increase respect between older and younger people in a physical activity content. Dance classes are sites for exploring or maintaining social, community/cultural, recreational or inter subjective value. Dance enhances self, body and the word that lie beyond the every day. Dance enhances self-esteem, body perception, its good for posture and helped the participants to feel more comfortable about intimacy.

Like any other art, dancing within the domain of theory, even when dancers believe that they are outside of theory in the pure domain of technique or communication. This is not just about a body set in motion opposite to and outside of writing but a body that is covered or involved, that is; mediated by the traces of writing about dance, body, movement, time, performance. Dance is determined by a significantly, characteristically and predominantly bodily movement. Dance is always already within a discursive grasp of bodily movement that it is a part of the most complex possibilities of the apparatus. Dance has the obvious function of representing/presenting the societal.

### **Empirical Literature Review**

Empirical studies indicate research finding of people that are relevant to dance. According to Karen Bond and Susan Stinson looked at the Super ordinary experience of children in their extensive investigation of dance in young people's experience and found it to be a source of deep meaning and satisfaction to young people.

According to Csikszentmihalyi considers dancing as on the physical forms of flow activity.

Through body practices, breathing are intended to focus attention and control on "what happens in the mind".

According the Fritsch(1988) Dance offers the opportunity to integrate the variety of movement possibilities.

Gurley etal (1984) explained that:

Dance gives the opportunity to involve different sense and connects movement to music with self-expression.

According, Zuge, (2012) observed that:

In accord with this presumption, especially representative of the dance education value dance as a specific opportunity to raise self and body awareness.

According to Block and Kissel, the interacting system of body and mind is reflected in the holistic activity of dancing. According to Mcfee (2018) treat dance – relevant action as part of what is needed to create and instantiate a dance work of art (dance work) with the focus being on the structure created by these actions. MCfee characterize dance as a particularly expressive form of art, or one that involves “action” in a particular way and also dance is necessarily expressive and transitive action. also he believes that dance work of art is created by choreographers and performed by dancers to fulfill the Choreographer’s intentions.

### **Methodology**

This chapter contains the details of the procedures used in carrying out the research, instruments for data collection, area of the study and the design of the study.

### **Design of the Study**

Data was collected through library research, location survey and organization of contacts and communication channels. This includes field work, comprising of photography. This contained post field work, collection of analysis of materials (library research and field work). This includes the research documentations, reports, processing and submission.

### **Sources of Data**

Data was sourced through the following means:

- Direct interviews
- Observations
- Journals
- Textbooks
- Notebooks

### **Study Area**

Obiofia Umuenem is one of the villages in Otolu Nnewi in Nnewi North Local Government Area of Anambra State. Obiofia Umuenem Community has the same weather condition with other communities in Igbo land. Nnewi is a city in Nigeria, It is one of the one town local government areas in Anambra State.

The name Obiofia encompasses sons and Daughters of Dogonu, which constitute of Dunualo Dalanumudu, Jibuaku, Nneana. Dogonu fought war with Awka Etiti which was that time closest to them in many years. Obiofia people always come back victorious whenever they go to war.

Mgbaga cultural dance is a traditional dance which is performed solely by their fore – fathers in olden days. It is performed before and after going to war. Before going to war to their neighboring town, they perform the cultural dance and when the return back from war, it is also performed.

Their forefathers generally agreed that on no account should another group or community play and perform the dance and that is why even if a particular groups watches them and tries to perform the dance, it is not successful because none of the community members will teach the cultural dance to another group or community. The cultural dance is performed by only the male members of the community both young and old. That is why every male in the community can play and dance the music. The music is only instrumental.

### **Data Analysis**

Data gathered through participant observation, oral interviews by some members and leaders of the group were presented in relation to research questions that were asked in chapter one in this research work.

### **Research Question One**

The History and Origin of *Mgbaga* dance music of Obiofia Umuenem of Otolu Nnewi.

The dance is transmitted from generation to generation by oral tradition.

According to Mr. Obinna Anazor (leader in the group), *mgbaga* cultural dance is performed by only the male folk from 12 years upwards. Once male child is up to 12 years, the father will introduce him to cultural troop from which he will be attending the rehearsal and start learning the dancing steps and playing of the instruments. The rehearsal is scheduled every Eke Okwu market day. Eke market day known as *Eke Ukpoko*.

According to Mr. Adirika Nwabueze (an elder in the dance group), the *mgbaga* dance group normally fixes their rehearsals on every Eke okwu market days. They rehearse in a compound or an enclosed space with fence and gate. The *mgbaga* group are normally invited for burial ceremonies, traditional marriage, new yam festivals, king ship, title taking, child dedication etc. He added they have one unique outfit which they use in every occasion. Their costume has one pattern which includes short wrapper mixed with black, red and yellow. Short shirt (Jompa) raffia (Agwor) made with pieces of cloth tied round the waist and piece of cloth tied round their heads.



The above pictures show dancers on stage.

### Costume

The mode of dressing in any group or dance group determines what the group is all about. That is why costumes are carefully selected to portray the mood of the music and also to transmit message to the audience (viewers). Costumes help in augmenting, life or raise performance.

Ibekwe (2019) said that costumes help to enhance in psychological performance of folk music.

Furthermore, she says that costumes are instrument that makes total texture in folk music. The *Mgbaga* dance group have a uniform (costumes) that beautifies their dance. The costume includes short wrapper mixed with black red, and yellow, short shirt (Jiomba), raffia (agwor) made with pieces of cloth tied round their waists and piece of cloth tied round their heads.

### Membership

The members of the *mgbaga* dance group were advised to adhere to the strict rules of the dance. It was generally agreed that on no account should member perform the dance with anyone that is not from the community because *mgbaga* dance is to be performed by only Obiofia Umuenem community male members.

The new member must attain all the rehearsals and performances and respect the senior members. If they should be absent, there must be permission from the leaders of the group otherwise, the absentee will undergo a punishment.

### Performance Style

In African traditional dance group, every group has his own unique way of performance know by them and they make use of the style, and it determines the shape of the performance. The *Mgbaga* dance style involves the entrance, the arrangement, and the dance steps. The instrumentalist come in first, instrumentalists settles according to their roles. The performance or presentation starts with the instrumentalists leading the dancers as they start coming in according to their dancing movements and arrangement.

### The instruments of *mgbaga* dance group.

Music is always accompanied with dance because of the rhythm associated with it. The instruments direct the body movements of the dancers. This signifies that instruments cover most of the major roles in cultural dance. This *mgbaga* dance group has specific set of instruments used for performances, these instruments include:

- Udu (idiophone)
- Ojanorchedfluk (Aerophone)
- Ogene (idiophone)
- Ikwe/oku (two slit xylophone with bucket resonator)
- Ikoro (Slit drum)
- Okpokoro (slit percussion knocker)

Picture of Udu



Udu is an Acro-idiophone instrument which critically designed to serve a musical purpose. This instrument is informed of clan. It has a long neck with a round hole on the base of the neck; it is beaten with paddled foam has a shape of hand fan which gives sound to the music.

Picture of Oja



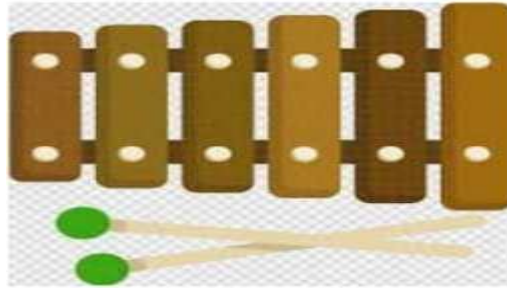
Oja is a norched flute and is an Aerophonic instrument. It is made up of wood with holes. It has three or four perforations on the body and also a hole at the top of it with which air is blown into it before it produces sound. It serves as a melodic instrument. The artist blows air through the carved hole and manipulates the sound of the music. They control the rhythm of the music with the two smallest holes on the top and leave the bottom hole alone to create sounds. This flute usually accompanies traditional songs and dances of Igbo people.

**Picture of Ogene**



It is an instrument of the struck idiophone class and is made of iron by specialist blacksmiths. The bell has a flattish, conical shape, and is hollow inside. The sound itself comes from the vibration of the iron body when struck, which is made to resound by the hollow inside of the bell. The iron body is usually struck with a soft wooden stick.

**Picture of Ikwe Oku**



Ikweoku is an Idiophonic instrument. It is made up of (six slabs xylophone), is designed to serve a purpose of three note scale (tritone) it serves the purpose of chord and arpeggio (Tonic, median and dominant). It is made up of two slabs tied on a bucket resonator. It is beaten with a stick.

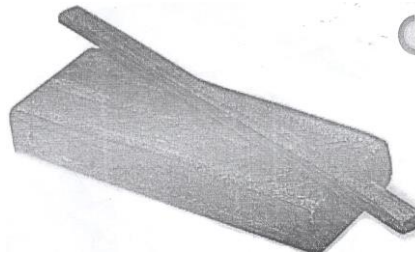
**Picture of Ikoro**



The wooden slit drum (ikoro) is a cylindrical wooden instrument. This instrument has two resonating lips which produce two different sounds. The wooden slit drum is not a true drum (like a membrane drum) but an idiophone, usually carved or constructed from bamboo or wood into a box with one or more slits in the top which give the sound.



**Picture of Okpokoro**



The Okpokoro is a slit percussion knocker made from wood or bamboo stems. It has two lips of different pitch. It can be beaten with a stick while held on the hand. The player either sits or stands while playing.

**Discussion of Findings**

The major findings of this research are: rural – Urban migration of the members of this ensemble has really affected the growth and the general performance of the group. It was as discovered that the sound of the instruments and voices during performances creates an entertaining atmosphere which by implications acts as a force that draws the interest of different people from diverse areas in that milieu as communal activity. This atmosphere create room for collective participation which by extension gives a sense of belonging to the people and as a result involves a kind of profound happiness in the minds of both the performers, as seen by the people of Obiofia Community as means of sustaining and transmitting the different cultural ethics of the community to the next generation, this they do by involving their young men in early musical activities such as initiating them into the traditional dance music in the community.

Being an organization with sets of codes and conduct, it was observed by the researcher to be a platform for individual and collection reformation and development of its members. Also it was observed that there are certain principle/conditions that guide the activities of the group such as the initiation of new members for example: The prospective members must be a member of the community and a male child. He must be within the age range of 12 years and above, after which he is introduced formally to the group members.

The new member must be active by attending their rehearsals on every Eke Okwu (The big Eke market day which comes up after three Eke market day known as Eke ukporo). They perform in ceremonial events like: Funeral ceremonies, traditional marriage ceremonies, house dedication, child dedication, Coronation of traditional titles, New yam festival (Iwaji festival) and other ceremonies in the community.

**Translation of Mgbaga Music**

<b>Igbo</b>	<b>English translation</b>
Anyi bu ndi new egwu <i>mgbaga</i> .	We the owners of <i>mgbaga</i> dance.
Anyi abiawo,	We have come,
Ora obodo bia furun’anyi abiawo.	People should come and see that we have come.
Mgbaga bu egwu nnene na egwu eji enwe anuri.	Mgbaga is a dance of joy.
Mgbaga bu egwu mmeri.	Mgbaga is a dance of victory.

**Summary of the Study**

It was stated that this musical danced called *Mgbaga* cultural dance, which is among the socio cultural musical ensemble of Obiofia Umuenem Otolo Nnewi. *Mgbaga* cultural is performed by only the male folk from twelve years upwards. It was also stated that the *Mgbaga* musical group started some many years ago in Obiofia Umuenem Otolo Nnewi, and had for many years been playing a very important role in the socio-cultural life of Obiofia community. The dance is transmitted from generation to generation by oral tradition. *Mgbaga* also is said to be in vocal and instrumental form, dancing is open to all the audience. Coming to the instrument use in *Mgbaga* traditional musical ensemble, but differs in some of the instrument, which are: Udu, Oja, Ogene, Oku/Ikwe, Ikolo, Okpokoro, *Mgbaga* as it was mentioned before, is just like other musical ensemble in Africa. The researchers discussed the practice, the performance, the organization, the costume, references for further research.

### **Conclusion**

Mgbaga dance is very interesting and exciting. It serves as an entertainment to the community and to events.

### **Recommendations**

The research has recommended that:

- Music students should be encouraged to go back to their respective villages to study and learn their various indigenous dance music styles.
- Authorities that are in position of promoting cultural activities, traditional music or Igbo culture in various Igbo communities should give positive moral/financial re-enforcements to those students' candidates that are embarking on topics on traditional music and igbo culture in their various communities.
- The media houses should be enhanced too to showcase indigenous traditional dance music of various communities to create more interest on the young generation.

### **Suggestion for further studies**

In Igbo land, most communities have an excessive good cultural dance groups that is yet to be discovered and supported. Students of music and theatre art are hereby advised to go into field of music and explore the various cultural dance music that are inherent in various villages and communities is our society.

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