

## DANCE AS THERAPY IN AFRICAN MUSIC

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper is a discourse on Dance as therapy in African Music. In African society, Music is not only performed or appreciated as a creative artwork. The roles, functions, and features of music give it meaning in Africa. Recently, scholars and researchers in African Music have been making references to the therapeutic function of African Music. Music and Dance are interwoven in Africa. Eurhythmics is a system of rhythmical physical movements to music used to teach musical understanding or for therapeutic purposes. This qualitative research is carried out through descriptive approach with a combination of several methods to source for its data, which include participant observation, and bibliographic methods. The paper concludes that, African Dance as an exercise describes the psychology and physiology having to do with movement or sensation, especially within the body which is stimulated by music rhythm. Dance in Africa is an experience that requires the combination of skills, energy, sensibility, emotion and the materialization of thought and musical/rhythmic idea. Thus, the tool of Music and Dance should be well utilized to the benefit of man and well-being.*

### INTRODUCTION

Nature has a way of making everybody to dance either consciously or unconsciously, the challenges and the vicissitudes of life have a way of pushing human being forward, backward, sideways and turning at different directions including moving the hands, legs and different body parts to measurable and immeasurable rhythm and pulsation. Movement is one of the fundamental characteristics of a living thing. In the ancient Greek society, music and gymnastics were part of basic education. In his reasoning, Plato postulated that music enriches the soul while gymnastics develop the body. These together will result in a balanced person. African dance is as rigorous as gymnastics, displaying physical agility and coordination.

This paper titled, “dance as a therapy in African Music” examines African dance as an exercise and its healing potency. The value of dances in Africa transcends entertainment and aesthetics. In recent time, the potency of music to facilitate healing has attracted scholarly interest among Nigerian musicologists which has birthed the field of music therapy studies in some universities. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations members in 2015, created 17 world Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They were created with the aim of “peace and prosperity for people and the planet. SDG 3 which is “Good Health and Well-being” is the focus of this study. The goal is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages. Music therapy foresees a holistic concept of health in the sense of health in the mind and body.

Music has the potency to attract a lot of attention in the mind and soul and also facilitate responses in the brain. In the prehistoric world, music had magic power among the Greeks, people believe it could heal sicknesses, and purify the mind and body. Music affects the cognitive, affective and the psychomotor domain of humans. Similar power is attributed to music in the Hebrew scriptures in the story of David curing saul’s madness by playing the harp (1 Samuel 16:14-23). This corroborates one of the notable quotes of Williams Shakespeare “*The man that hath no music in himself, nor is moved with the concord of sweet sounds, is fit for treasons stratagems and spoils. The motion of his spirit are dull as night and his affection as dark as Erebus. Let no such man be trusted*”. Therefore, harnessing the potency of musical sound to prompt human responses will allow for skills development and for therapeutic function in certain distresses.

### STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

There has been silence on the healing potency of African music which may be have been assumed that every African should know about such information. When music students are taught courses in African music, little or no references is usually made about the healing potency of African dances. Thus, the therapeutic nature of African music and dance needs to be properly investigated and documented.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study relied on a mixture of methods to elicit data, which include manual library search for books, journals and other relevant materials. To enrich the quality of information, a deep internet search was also carried out to source for information about recent research on Music Therapy. Relevant literatures were reviewed, field study where dances were performed was also carried out in Federal University Lokoja located in Kogi State in the North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

## **THE CONCEPT OF MUSIC THERAPY**

Historically, music has been known to as a powerful tool to heal and purify the mind and soul of man. The word therapy originated from the greek word “Therapeia” which literally means “Healing”, in other word, treatment of a disease. Alvin (1975. P4) the founder of the British Society for Music Therapy, postulated that music therapy is the controlled use of music in the treatment, education and rehabilitation of children and adults suffering from physical, mental or emotional disorders. Wagram (2000) also opined that music therapy is the use of music in clinical, social and education or psychological need. In the same vein, Mereni (2004) clarifies music therapy as an imperial study research in systematic musicology with necessary resources and relevant ancillary disciplines particularly, social and health sciences and aim at the practical exigency of health care giver.

While addressing the use of music in healing in Africa, Nzewi (2002:2) clarifies that “preventive health includes scheduled and mandatory environmental cleaning avoidance rite to ward off evil forces (human and spirit mien), as well as constant musical arts theatre that coerces mass participation, annual group spirit purgation, music-drama (New year rites, compound hygiene etc.)”.

In Nigeria, Mereni (1997) highlighted five healing aspects in his explanation of music therapy. These are: Anxiolytic music therapy (aims to free one from fear, fright or anxiety), Tensionlytic music therapy (aims to relieve one from physical and mental tension resulting from manual or spiritual labour) Algolytic music therapy (Aims to relieve physical pain) Psycholytic music therapy (aims to loosen a person from the group of evil spirits) and Patholytic (aims to relieve the grieve of bereavement).

As opined by Aluede (2009; 2010), there is either no need for a new term to qualify one of the general attributes of African Music or that there is a need to carve out a more realistic name for music healing and healing activities with music in Africa. The reasons for such opinions are based on the fact that that the concept, form and context of music healing in Africa needs to be fully examined and distinguished it has been examined by scholars in ethnomusicology that in the African context, music in therapy is different from music as therapy. Music in therapy addresses the use of music and other associated rituals in bringing about healing while music as therapy is about the sole use of music to bring about total well-being of the individual. The need for an encapsulating nomenclature to envelope the connection between music and health or music healing activities in Africa has led to the term ethnomusic therapy.

The term ethnomusic therapy will be partially discussed without talking about the cosmology and understanding of disease in Africa. Disease in African cosmology was explained by Aluede (2008) who identified four kinds of causation of disease in Esan as well as in Yoruba cosmology which are: Natural sickness, sickness caused by witches and wizards, sickness induced by the ancestors and sickness carried over from one’s past life. We can therefore say that not all sicknesses in Africa are medical.

Dance and music are interwoven in Africa. Some of the fundamental elements of African music which include, Singing, dancing, clapping and playing of musical instruments have proven from previous researches to improve the health of the participants.

## **AN APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF DANCE AS A THERAPY IN AFRICAN MUSIC**

In Africa we do not only listen to music with our ears but with the whole of our body, including the mind and brain. A developmental approach that can be applied in this study is Eurhythmics. Also known as Dalcroze eurhythmics, it is one of several developmental approaches including kodaly method, Orff Schulwerk and Suzuki method used to teach music to students. Eurhythmics was developed in the early 20th century by a Swiss musician, composer and educator, Emile Jaques-Dalcroze. Eurhythmics teaches concepts of rhythm, structure and musical expression using movement, and is the concept for which Dalcroze is best known for. It focuses on allowing the student to gain physical awareness and experience of music through training that takes place through all of the senses, particularly kinesthetic. Dalcroze Education has been in existence for more than a century. It features interactive games and exercises that help students learn to trust their ideas and develop their own intuitions. Dalcroze Education is a playful, experiential approach to teaching and learning music. It is a process for awakening, developing, and refining

innate musicality through rhythmic movement (often called eurhythmics), ear-training, and improvisation. Eurhythmics makes participants to feel, express, and master the flow that is essential to music, dance, and the other performing arts.

In a Dalcroze Eurhythmics class, students are moving in some way: in traveling around the room, or in gestures with hands, arms, heads, or upper bodies. Their movements are responsive to the music in the room. The teacher is probably improvising this music at the piano or on another instrument. (Sometimes recorded or composed music is used.) The task is typically to move in space using certain guidelines, specific to the musical piece. For example, the teacher may ask the students to walk around the room, stepping the beat. Then, when the students hear a specific cue, they should clap the beat instead. The game continues, with the students challenged to find new ways to express the beat with their body.

In the same vein, eurhythmics can be applied in the study of dance as a therapy in African music. Participants should be taught different patterns to beats in African Music as well as movements to the beat, students taking African music should be given the challenge to find different ways of expressing beats with their body. African music is highly rhythmic. The music either vocal, instrumental or a combination of both usually creates an association of rhythm with a physical experience in the body of the performers and participants, thereby reinforcing the awareness of the position movement of the body parts by means of sensory organs. In discussing the complex of song-texts and healing in Nigeria, Adedeji and Aluede (2020) established that Music traditionally has been characterized not only by the sound but by action, and by interaction among makers of Dance-Music. This typically describes African music which is characterized by actions and audience participation. African music is closely related with dance based on a strong emphasis on rhythm and percussion. Diverse forms of Rhythm are the heartbeat of African Music.

#### **AFRICAN DANCE**

Dance and African Dances have been described by many art scholars, musicologists and scholars from in the social science. Mackrell (2024) defined dance as 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. Mackrell explained further that dance is a powerful impulse, but the art of dance is the impulse channeled by skillful performers into something that becomes intensely expressive and that may delight spectators who feel no wish to dance themselves. These two concepts of the art of 'dance as a powerful impulse and dance as a skillfully choreographed art are the two most important connecting ideas about the subject.

As expressed by Monyeh (2007: 111), Dance is an avenue for total expression of the natural and the supernatural, a masquerade in its performance communicates to the living and the underworld. In this case, there is the relationship with the world of the living and the world of the spirit. The body could make the invisible concrete thus creating a completely self-contained world for dancers in which they can perform physical feats and prowess which are far beyond normal daily occurrence or normal movement.

Harper (1997) opined that all African dances are closely knit to percussive music. A repetitive rhythm is initiated by a musical instrument and is then taken up by the dancer in a localized part of the body, such as the rhythmic beating of the feet or rapid constructions of the hips or shoulders from which the movement flows through the dancer's body. Dance is always expression of emotion which gives a deep sense of pleasure to the dancer and the spectators. The Africans love to show their response to music through verbal or physical behaviour. The responses elicited reveals that the music and the dance serves as a singular degree as modes of expression of African feeling or as an accompaniment to social or religious activity.

According to Adekogbe (2023), Dance in African context can be classified into traditional, modern and contemporary dances. He explained further that Traditional dances are those dance steps that are created from local and indigenous ingenuity. Traditional dances are the conventional and unconventional dance patterns, steps and moves and performance that have been passed from older generation to this present generation by our progenitors. Every African tribe has its unique type of traditional dance practices and it has different function and meaning to the people that belongs to the tribe. For example, among the Yoruba in the southwestern part of Nigeria, the Bata dance holds a significant place in their cultural and spiritual practice. Modern dances involved dance steps created from individual's or group's creative ingenuity while Contemporary dances are those dance steps modified from traditional dances. It has the combination of African and Western dance styles elements. The contemporary dance is the present hip-hop music dance moves. They are popularized by popular musicians in their music videos and very

common in social centers like club houses and in modern parties, examples include, yahooze, skelewu, and gbese dance.

**SOME AFRICAN TRADITIONAL DANCES**

- i. **BATA DANCE:** The Bata dance is a prominent traditional dance among the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria. It is very acrobatic and entertaining. The most important aspect of the dance is the drumming accompaniment from the Bata drums. The dance is done in synchronization with beats from the Bata drum which is characterized by expressive body movements and rhythmic relationship. Prehistorically, the dance is believed to be a communication channel between Sango (the god of lightning and thunder) and his worshippers. The dancers try to emulate his character by using their legs, hands and shoulder to express the dance. The gymnastics energy of the dance complimented by the thundering sound of the Bata drums play tribute to Sango.



The Bata drum ensemble comprises of three drums of different sizes (Iya Ilu Bata, Itotele and Okonkolo). The largest which is Iya ilu is usually played by the master drummer and sets the rhythmic activity for the ensemble and also depict the role of a mother instructing the children which are the itotele and okonkolo. The middle sized drum which is itotele, converses with the Iya ilu while the smallest which is okonkolo keeps a steady rhythm.

- ii. **UMUOMA DANCE:** The Umuoma dance is a cultural dance of the igbo people in the Southeastern part of Nigeria. As observed during the field study, the dance was performed by the students of Federal University Lokoja during ensemble examination in the first semester, 2023/2024 session. The dance is energetic with vigorous body movement with the rhythm of the pot drum, skin drum and gong accompaniment and the performers wear a costume made of the spotted skin of a Leopard which depicts strength and energy.



- iii. **ATILOGWU DANCE:** The Atilogwu is a spirited youth dance from the igbo ethnic group of Nigeria that focuses on vigorous body movement and often include acrobatics. In igbo language, the word “Atilogwu” translates to “has magic”. The tempo of the dance matches the tempo of the music, which is dependent on the beat of the drum and a metal gong (ogene). The dance is usually performed during festivals



### SOME CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN DANCES

- I. **YAHOOZE:** Yahooze is a song released by a Nigerian recording artist, Olu Maintain which was officially released in October 2007. The music video was shot in Nigeria with its unique dance movement. The dance style involves making a “V” sign with the index and middle fingers on both hands and throw them into the air while listening to the song. That is basically the “Yahooze” dance which was made popular by Olu maintain.



- II. **ETIGI/KUKERE:** The dance became popular when Iyanya released the video for his hit single, Kukere. It is modernized from the traditional dance of the Efik people of Cross Rivers state.



- III. **SKELEWU:** The dance was popularized by Davido in one of his musical tracks titled skelewu. The song gave the Nigerian Artist more recognition all over the world. It was played during the half time of Spanish La Liga match in 2013.



- IV. **SHAKITI BOBO:** This dance style was popularized by the Nigerian artist Olamide



African dance therefore can be described as the art of movement to the rhythmic pulsations of music particularly the percussive sounds, drums and idiophonic instruments. African dance encompasses a wide array of styles each with its own peculiarities and function. The dance of African people is intertwined with music and other form of arts such as theatre and visual arts. African Dance is the various dance styles of African People that originates from different regions of Sub-Saharan Africa which include the North Africa, South African, East Africa, West Africa and Central

Africa. In traditional African societies, children begin to learn their traditional songs, rhythms, and dances from the early childhood age. Many children's games and recreational activities in Africa include elements that enhances the understanding of the child in the aspect of rhythms and dances.

The major element of African dance includes is the Rhythm and Musical Accompaniment. There is a strong connection between dance and music. Rhythm is the life wire of African Dance. It is usually accompanied by beating of drums and percussive instruments that plays diversities or rhythmic structures.

### **THE THERAPEUTICS OF DANCE IN AFRICAN MUSIC**

Performing and Listening to the Music of Africa which is characterized by a strong emphasis on rhythm presents opportunity for people to connect with one another and engage in dances that is physically challenging and also results in physical and mental and mental exercise. The findings from this research shows and describes some physical and mental health benefits of African Dance

African music, dance, drumming, have proved to be excellent tools for engaging in physical and mental therapy. An American Professor of Theatre/Dance Franklin (2013) describes some African dance physical health benefits:

1. **Warm-Up:** African dance, like other movement practices, requires students to warm up to lessen the likelihood of injuries, increase blood flow, and prepare the body for more movement. Through the use of African and African-derived dance, Roots of Life participants are provided a structured warm-up and stretching period. The entire body is used in African dance; in many instances, the movement is highly aerobic and provides an intense cardiovascular workout.
2. **Body Awareness:** People learn basic dance language and how to control parts of the body, separately and together.
3. **Space, Time, Energy:** Space, time, and energy are fundamental elements of dance. African dance introduces these concepts to young learners. Space is the area that the student uses to move. Time is an integral aspect of West African dance that encourages students to practice listening and moving to a specific rhythm. Energy refers to the quality of movement (sharp, light, fast, slow, etc.)
4. **Repetition:** Movements in African dance are repeated over and over and are completed in sync with the rhythm of drums. The repetition supports the learning process by allowing students time to catch on to the movement.

Likewise, Atinuke (2003: 67-73) have shed light on the dynamics of African dance in the aspect of Psychological behavior, Therapeutic behavior and Physical behavior.

### **Psychological Behavior**

As an emotional experience, African dance affects the quality of life and adjustment of an individual's self-existence and life. Dance creates the right atmosphere or mood or stimulates and maintains it. The application of experimentally derived principles of music and dance therapy to the treatment of psychological disorders has been proved to be very effective. The musical/dance therapy techniques differ from psychiatric methods, in that it controls the nature of the muscular contractions involved in terms of the consequences of the behavior. The kind of music that is played for healing is always slow, and it has the capability to create the right atmosphere for conscious processes, achieving new insight, or bring about fundamental personality change.

In Europe, according to Valery (1983: 60), the art of dance is the expression and transference through the medium of bodily movements of mental and emotional experience that the individual cannot express by rational and intellectual means. Woodward (1977:70-88), in discussing the Ballet dance, reveals that the psychological appeal of the dance art are based on some major physical constituents such as body contact, mental stimulation, emotional mobility etc.

### **Therapeutic Behaviour**

The healing dance has been the subject of several scientific treatises by social Scientists. The Vimbuza dance is a performance carried out for sick people in Northern Malawi, with drums of the Ng'oma and Mohambo type. The dance derives its name from a psychosomatic disorder called Vimbuza in the Chitumbuka language. The facial expression of the sick person reveals the psychological problem. The dance costume, consists of a skirt of fiber material bound round the hips, and an additional cloth bound round the waist at the top of the stomach, thus marking out the body area used in the dance. This is also evident in Europe; private and public hospitals encourage the use of music and dance to eliminate the oppression of demons in psychosomatic disorder Patient.

### **Physical Behavior**

According to Nketia (1974), affective response to music may be shown outwardly in verbal or physical behavior. The values of African societies do not inhibit this on the contrary, it is encouraged, for through it, individuals relate

to musical events or performing groups, and interact socially with others in a musical situation. Moreover, motor response intensifies one's enjoyment of music through the feelings, increased involvement and the propulsion that articulates the beat that physical movement generates. This is also a common characteristic of European dance because it is sometimes seen as an exercise, which gives mental poise, physical grace and fitness. According to Langer (1983: 33), the relevance of the body to achieving athleticism in dance cannot be overemphasized, for the body must be patiently and properly trained to achieve the physical behavior in dance.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, African Dance as an exercise describes the psychology and physiology having to do with movement or sensation, especially within the body which is stimulated by music rhythm. Dance in Africa is an experience that requires the combination of skills, energy, sensibility, emotion and the materialization of thought and musical/rhythmic idea. The trademark of a good African dance performance is being able to involve all body part in the enactment. Every successful dance elicits and evokes feelings of elation, fulfillment and satisfaction. Music and Dance has healing propensities in Africa and it may function in more ways yet to be discovered. Therefore, the potency of musical sound to prompt human responses should be well harnessed for therapeutic purpose.

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