

Impact of Communication Media on Igbo Choral Art Music:1930-2000

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Abstract

From records of history, the experimentation of Igbo choral Art music began in 1930s and it has over the years developed to a world class art. From the time of experimentation of Igbo choral Art music through its developmental stages, various communication media available at each point in time played vital roles in composition, transmission, dissemination, preservation and performance. However, some Igbo scholars have done much work on Igbo choral Art music but there seems to be a lacuna in the area of the roles played by various communication outlets in shaping Igbo art music practices. This research therefore, examines the impact of various communication media on Igbo Art music practices from 1930s to 1990s. The study is hinged on media ecology theory as propounded by Marshall McLuhan in 1960. Data for this research was collected through library sources, oral interviews and observation. This work concludes that the advancements in communication technology positively shaped Igbo choral Art music practices.

Introduction

Music's communicative ability is a widely acclaimed view in that it elicits some responses from the audience/listeners and in some cases, from the performers themselves also. Response, whether positive or negative, to any particular music depends on the meaning attached to the music by the listeners/audience or the message the music sends across to the listeners/audience. Eyre in Lawal as cited by Nwobu and Umezina (2022) explains that communication goes beyond mere giving of information but giving of understandable information and receiving and understanding of the message, so that the message is acted upon by the receiver.

The manner in which a people receive and respond to a particular music is largely dependent on their understanding of the music and the socio-cultural relationship of the music with such people. In his discussion on the concept of music, Okafor (2005) states:

It is essentially human activity denoting or expressing human emotions and the relationship of the emotions to the environment... In its truest sense, it cannot exist without man... Since each culture has its own collective or individual experiences, ideas, outlook and environment, the organization of sounds into music does vary from culture to culture. (pp. 383-384)

The various Christian missionary groups that evangelized the Igbo land in the second half of the nineteenth century tagged the works of art, including music of the Igbo people fetish. They introduced their own music as the acceptable music for the worship of God. The hymns and chants of the European missionaries which were translated to Igbo and accompanied with the reed organ are foreign to Igbo culture and thereby, could not adequately meet the indigenous musical taste of the converts, although the converts had to sheepishly accept what was offered them. The hymns and chants hindered the eurhythmic body movements that usually occur either as reflex or intentional response to Igbo songs. Also, the strophic structure of the hymns most times defies the speech rhythm as well as the tonal inflexions of the Igbo texts. Agu (2022) corroborates thus, "The hymn tunes offered them (the early converts) no opportunity for polyrhythmic improvisation. Repetition, which constitutes a stimulatory factor in Igbo choral music practices was also lacking in the hymns" (p. 32).

Consequently, the emergence of Igbo art music was as a result of the frantic efforts of its early composers to create musical works that possessed indigenous musical qualities, in order to evoke the desired response from the congregation, which the hymns and chants could not adequately achieve. Blacking in Agu (2002) states that "music stands or fall by virtue of what is heard and how people respond to what they hear" (p. 86). Although the translated hymns and chants were not expressive of the Igbo musical taste, they still play very significant roles in Igbo Christian worship. The Igbo choral art music according to Agu (2002), "came into experimentation from early 1930's" (p. 82) and had undergone several stages of development to become a world class art. In the course of the development of this genre of music, however, various communication media that have evolved have contributed in shaping the Igbo choral art music practices. The focus of this paper therefore, is to examine how advancement in communication media has shaped Igbo choral art music in the areas of composition, transmission, dissemination, preservation and performance of Igbo choral Art music from 1930 to 1990.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on McLuhan's (1960) media ecology theory which explores the relationship between media, technology and society. It suggests that media in different forms have profound influence on human perception, communication and social organization. McLuhan discussed his theory in five key points:

- The Medium is the Message
- Technological Determinism

- Global Village
- Media as Extension of Human Sense
- Media Ecology and Environments.

This study focuses on the first point, Medium is the Message which states that “medium itself, rather than its content, has significant impact on the society. Different media forms, such as print, television or internet, shape the way information is conveyed and received, influencing how people think, interact and understand the world” (McLuhan, 1960, n. p.). The theory, according to Akpan and Ogude (2018) “claims that media defines society in four epochs which include tribal era, literate era, print era and electronic era” (p. 25).

The Tribal era covers the period in which indigenous means of communication thrived. For example, the Igbo traditional means of communication comprise town crying, use of musical instruments for speech surrogacy, use of smoke, oral tradition and so forth. Subsequently, the advent of Christianity in the second half of the nineteenth century brought about the **literate era** (conventional written tradition). Later on, there was emergence of the **print era** and finally, the **electronic era**. Consequently, the awareness and utilization of various means of communication as development in technology advanced, greatly influenced Igbo choral Art music in the areas of composition, transmission, dissemination, preservation and performance.

Igbo Choral Art Music

Art music is a term that refers to a musical tradition implying advanced structural and theoretical considerations and a written musical tradition. African/Nigerian art music is “a genre of music created and developed by African musicians who had training in techniques of western art music” (Adegbite, 2001, p. 77). African/Nigerian Art music involves the combination of Western and African musical materials such as harmonic styles, rhythm, melody, language and Western conventional music notational system. Art music could be vocal (solo or chorus), instrumental as well as a combination of both. It could also be sacred or secular.

Conversely, the Igbo choral Art music, according to Agu (2002, 2012), which came under experimentation from the 1930’s, gained prominence in the Anglican Communion of the Niger Diocese in 1940s. It kept developing and pervading the entire Igbo land until the late twentieth century when it got to a level of near perfection. Agu (2002) identifies two periods in the development of Igbo choral Art music, namely: the Early Stage (1930-1960) and the Period of Realisation (1960-2002). Nwamara (2009) classifies Igbo Art music composers into two generations. The first generation he names **ancient generation** while the second generation he called **modern generation**. The first generation of Igbo Art music composers according to Okafor (1976) had no formal music training. The musical knowledge they had was what they learnt from schools and Teacher Training Colleges, with their success depending to a very large extent on their interest in music. Agu (2002) elucidates that interest alone could not have taken composers to great height but with talent, commitment and hard work. In his views on the first generation of Igbo art composers, Nwamara (2009) states thus:

The fact notwithstanding that they inherited art music making and composition directly from the missionaries and were indoctrinated to follow the western music concepts, idioms and ideologies, strictly and sheepishly, they were able to create their own works especially through translating the texts of English songs to Igbo texts, creating new texts for existing folk tunes, creating new tunes for new texts or new tunes for existing lyrics and in some cases, rearranging existing tunes. (p. 145)

The structure of the compositions of the first generation composers inhibited the adherence of their melody notes to the tonal inflexions and speech-rhythms of the Igbo texts as well as altered the mood of the texts in most cases. Also, the hymns and chants they were exposed to limited their ability to develop their compositions to appreciable length. The composers of this generation according to Agu (2002) include Dan Ojukwu, Ishmael Nwangene, Nelson Okoli, Rev. Ofili Kerry and Ikoli Harcourt Whyte. Following this batch are Rev. David Okongwu, Goddy Okeke, Ben Okagbue, Uzoma Asiji, Godson Opara and others. These were all teachers.

The second generation of composers emerged as a result of the establishment of the department of music in some Nigerian institutions of higher learning, starting with that of the University of Nigeria Nsukka in 1960. These composers were exposed to both Western and African musical concepts and they were able to blend the idioms of Western and African music in their compositions. They improved on the flaws identified with the music of the first generation composers in the process of creating their own music and consequently, took Igbo Art music generally to a higher level that is near perfection. They include Sam Ojukwu, Joshua Uzoigwe, Okechukwu Ndubuisi, Nwokobia Agu, Dan Agu, Humphrey Nwafor, Ugochukwu Onwuka, Christian Onyeji, Joe Onyekwelu, Alvan-Ikoku Nwamara, Agatha Onwuekwe, Chuma Chukwuka, Chukwudi Ezeokoli and numerous others.

Communication Media

Communication is a process that deals with transmission and reception of intelligible information/message that occur between two parties, whereby the receiver is meant to give intelligible response based on his/her clear understanding of the message. It could be between a person/group and a person/group. It could also occur inwardly within an individual. Various levels of communication as identified by Nwobu and Umezina (2022) include interpersonal, intrapersonal, group, mass communication and machine-assisted communication. Nwobu and Umezina (2022) assert that “communication is far more than simple information transmission. It enlightens all of man’s actions because it is occasioned by his need to interact with his fellow man” (p. 300). Communication can be classified into verbal, non-verbal, visual or written.

Verbal communication is the type that involves right use of spoken words of a language (literally or figuratively) that is understood by the individuals involved in the communication process. **Non-verbal communication** involves the use of body signs as well as facial expressions. Most times, both verbal and non-verbal modes of communication work hand in hand for effective communication to be achieved. While the specific message is embedded in the spoken words, gestural and facial expressions as well as variation of tones help to articulate those spoken words. **Visual communication** utilizes the use of pictures and diagrams as means of message/information transmission whereas **written communication** uses texts or writing in a language comprehensible to the receiver. However, for communication of any kind to take place, there is always a means, channel or outlet through which the message is transmitted. The various channels through which information are transmitted are known as communication media. Examples of communication media include oral means, radio, television, telephone, print media (books, magazines, newspapers, posters etc.), outdoor media (billboards, placards, signs etc.), internet (email, social media etc.), manual media (handwritings on paper or board) and so forth.

Igbo Choral Art Music and Communication Media

Having established earlier of music’s communicative ability and that a people’s response to any kind of music depends on their acquaintanceship with the socio-cultural compositions of the music, Igbo art music emerged out of the relentless efforts of the early composers to create music for Christian worship with indigenous flavour. This genre of music elicits desirable responses among the Igbo worshippers because of its socio-cultural qualities which include polyrhythm, imitation, cyclic movement, use of Igbo figurative statements, and agreement of melody notes values with the rhythm and tonal inflexions of the text.

However, for music to communicate effectively, there requires the medium through which the musical message is conveyed. Igbo Art music practitioners utilized different available communication media from the time of its experimentation through various stages of its development. Those communication media serve their various purposes at the time of their usage not minding their deficiencies. The focus of this study is on how these communication media influenced Igbo art music in composition, transmission, documentation and dissemination and performance from 1930 to 2000.

Igbo Choral Art Music and Communication Media (1930-1950)

In 1932, radio broadcasting was introduced in Nigeria by the then British Colonial authorities as an experiment of the empire service of the British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC). One of its main tasks was to relay the overseas service of the BBC through wired systems with loudspeakers (Udomisor, 2013). Later, individuals began to have access to privately owned radio sets. According to Agu (2002) which we quoted earlier, the contemporary Igbo literary choral music came under experimentation from the 1930’s. However, the materials for this experimentation were made available by radio broadcasting because the early composers of Igbo choral Art music adapted some of the African tunes played by the radio station and replaced the texts with sacred texts. Okafor (1976) informs that with the access they (composers) had to privately owned radio sets in the 1930’s, and the subsequent arrival of commercial gramophone records, they began experimentation in indigenous Church music. Their first compositions were not original; since they extracted the tunes of some of the G. V. Rhumba records, then in vogue and Igbo folk songs, and fitted Igbo hymn texts to them. Dan. Ojukwu’s *Fichaa Mgbachi Windo* (Open the window), which he adapted from a Yoruba palm wine song, *Iya Dakun* is an example.

Ficha Mgbachi Windo (Open The Window)

Dan Ojukwu

Doh is G

Fi-cham - gba chi win - do, Fi-cham - gba -chi win - do, Fi-cham - gba -chi win

do_ k'i - fen - go - zi nwu-ba - ta, k'i - fen - go - zi nwu-ba - ta, k'i - fen

go - zi nwu-ba - ta, k'i - fe n - go - zi nwu-ba - ta, k'i - fe n - go - zi nwu-ba - ta.

D.S. al fine

The songs that were composed in this period were learnt by rote. Rote learning was possible and easy during this period because of the shortness of length, and harmonic structure (parallel harmony at intervals of thirds, fourths and fifths as well as their inversions) of the early compositions. However, in terms of preservation and dissemination, many of the early compositions have gone extinct because they were only scored by the composers for their personal use but passed on to their various choirs through oral tradition. They were also performed only within the confines of the composers' operation. The only compositions that survived are those that were documented by such scholars as Prof. William Wilberforce Echezona, Prof. Laz Ekwueme, Prof. Richard Okafor and Prof. Dan Agu around 1960s and 1970s.

Igbo Choral Art Music and Communication Media: 1950-1980

Around 50s and mid-60s, music were written on the black board, which the choristers copied into their note books after the singing class. Within this period, there was a development in style of music composition in Africa as a whole and this was brought about by the exposure of the Africans to Western musical concepts as well as the systematic study of music of the Africans.

According to Adedeji (2014):

African musicology, broadly defined, encompasses the scientific study of musical expressions in Africa and its diaspora in all its complex manifestation (<http://musicology.ucla.edu>)... Musicology as a field of study in Africa started with the pioneering works of European anthropologists in the nineteenth century...

The foundation of what is known as African musicology is laid by Western ethnomusicologists.... It entailed the propounding of initial universal theories and methods. On the other hand and at the same time, African musicologists such as T. K. E. Philips (1920s), Fela Sowande (1940s-1970s), Ephraim Amu (1920s-1940s), Nketia (1950s-1970s), Francis Bebey (1960s-1970s), etc. evolved theories that are more culturally relevant to Africa. (pp. 85 & 86)

Consequently, the establishment of the Department of Music, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) and the Advanced Teachers Colleges that had music in their curriculum in 1960s provided great opportunity for the then young talent Igbo composer to study music professionally at the tertiary level. Based on the exposure these composers gained from these institutions, they were able to blend both Western and African musical idioms and started writing more expanded musical works. Composers like Sir Sam Ojukwu (one of the first set of music graduates produced in UNN) and some others from the mid-60s cut their works in stencils, produced the number of copies they needed using cyclostyling machine and distributed to their choristers. Although this reduced the stress of copying music from the black board by the choristers, cutting of stencil was a tedious task. However, once the task of cutting the stencil is accomplished, it could be mass produced and that made it possible for wider circulation of music scores. Also, this enabled composers to market their works to any choir that wished to perform them because the composers had their compositions originally in stencils which could not be mass produced by any other individual except the composers themselves.

The manual typewriter was also used to typeset solfa notation by those who could afford it. Its use made composers lose full control of their works because their works could now be typed and mass produced without their consent. The use of the typewriter also contributed to a wider distribution of musical pieces and it made musical works neater than handwritten scores. Unfortunately, the manual typewriter was deficient in punctuating solfa notes correctly because of its limited keys/functions. Also, because many of the typists were not trained musically, they could not identify differences in the punctuations of various musical note values. These deficiencies as a result, made some composers resort to the use of dictation approach instead. During an interview with Prof. Dan Agu, he informs thus:

When I started composing lengthy songs of over 50 bars, I started dictating the songs part by part, to my choristers. At a rehearsal, I would dictate only the portion I wanted us to learn in one rehearsal and the choristers would copy them and learn from their notes as the rehearsal proceeded. Before I adopted the dictation approach, I first taught my choristers how to write tonic solfa, laying emphasis on notes and their values, bar lines, beats, rests, pitch markings, and so forth. This made it easy for my choristers to copy correctly, the notes I dictated to them. We kept copying the lengthy songs in segments, as we learnt them, until the entire song was copied and learnt...I did not make use of the typewriter at any point in time, for typesetting my songs. I continued with my dictation approach all through the period the typewriter was in vogue. (D. C. Agu, personal communication, February 14, 2022).

It is pertinent to note that the use of dictation method also limited performance of music compositions to the areas of operation of the composers. As Igbo art musical works started spreading beyond the reach of the original composers, the problem of misinterpretation arose. This problem of misinterpretation is as a result of the inability of some church choirmasters to interpret African rhythm and pitch markings as well as poor punctuation of tonic solfa using the typewriter.

Igbo Choral Art Music and Communication Media: 1980-2000

The emergence of studio recording in the 60s as well as subsequent establishment of State owned radio and television stations in the 70s and 80s respectively, in the Eastern part of Nigeria, contributed immensely to the improved quality of performances of Igbo Art music. In the 1980s, some choirs started doing audio and video recording of Igbo Art songs, although Dan C. C. Agu had the first recording of his compositions in 1976. The recording studio is not a medium of communication but the recordings were stored in audio and video cassettes which are communication media. Performances of Igbo art music were also aired by the television and radio stations. Agu (2002) corroborates that radio and television studios have tremendously inspired Igbo art composers to great height and that an appreciable number of original Igbo compositions and folk arrangements have either been recorded on cassette, video tapes or on discs with numerous audience patronage. Radio and Television according to Okafor (2015) “not only provide avenues for performances but also expose the choirs to good performances by other choirs. Consequently, they induce awareness, educate and increase the knowledge of choirs on good quality choral performances” (p. 14).

The commercial use of photocopying machines which gained popularity in the early 90s enabled duplication of musical scores without any alteration. Photocopy saved composers the time and burden of dictation and cutting the stencil, and also, the limitations of the manual typewriter were overcome. Musical pieces could be disseminated widely the way the composers have written them. Nevertheless, there are composers who have written very good works but because of their poor handwriting, their works did not gain wide acceptance.

Furthermore, printing press played vital role in documenting and preserving Igbo choral art compositions and also made works of Igbo composers accessible and presentable to the wider world. Although printing press was established in the Eastern region of Nigeria in the later part of the nineteenth century, it was in the 1990s that few Igbo art composers started publishing their works in book form. Examples of such books according to Agu (2002) include Harcourt Whyte's anthems published in the tonic solfa notation, Laz Ekwueme's Dan Agu's original compositions and arrangements published in the staff notation.

Conclusion

For communication to take place, there requires a medium through which message is transmitted. Music's communicative ability is an unarguable fact but it communicates more effectively when its materials are derived from the culture of its practitioners. The Igbo art music was borne as a result of the desire of the early composers to create musical works with indigenous flavour. The various available communication media in Igboland in the course of the development of Igbo art music from 1930s to 1990s, such as the radio/gramophone, television, oral tradition, writing tradition (music copying on the blackboard and paper), manual typewriter, photocopying machine and so forth provided sources of inspiration for composers, enhanced mode of transmission, aided preservation and wider circulation of musical pieces as well as contributed to improved performance of Igbo art music. The researcher therefore concludes that advancement in communication technology positively influenced

Igbo art music and suggests that further research on the subject matter be conducted beyond the period covered by this study.

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