

# **AFRICAN SENSIBILITY IN THE TRAINING OF NIGERIAN GOSPEL MUSICIANS**

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## **Introduction**

Gospel music practitioners, otherwise known as gospel musicians comprise men and women many of who see themselves as artistes cum God's ministers, using music to proclaim the good news of the kingdom. Christian religious activities in Nigeria that began in the 1840s developed over the years till around 1900 that witnessed the rebellion of Africans against the Western beliefs and practices and the establishment of indigenous African Churches (Omoyajowo, 1975, Asaju, 1995). This later produced various Pentecostal churches (Akangbe, 1977). The trends of events also produced different forms of music. Gospel music types that developed after the native airs were propagated by individuals that started out as Church musicians.

The first set of pioneers received their training directly from the missionary schools where music was taught and in the Churches as choristers and organists. The subsequent practitioners were ushered into the fold after having one form of orientation or the other. For detailed account on the historical development of gospel music in Nigeria, see Omojola (2014), Kehinde (1992), Adedeji (2010&2015) and Onwuekwe (2018) The concern of this paper is to examine the indigenous African underpinnings and traits in the training of the contemporary Nigerian gospel musicians for the purpose of assessment in chatting ways for positive improvement in the quality and effectiveness of the genre.

The indigenous knowledge system of Meki Nzewi (2005) and cultural theory as applicable to Christian sacred musicology by Adedeji (2013) guided this study

throughout. While the former seeks to understand, teach and learn music with models and real life patterns of the traditional African ways of life, the latter advocates for understanding Christian religious music through the spectacles of the people's culture. The two theoretical frameworks agree on the indispensability of application of indigenous legacies in contemporary Christian artistic expressions.

In the contemporary scene, it is observed that quite a significant number of gospel musicians are not trained; few passed through apprenticeship directly or indirectly, while some received formal music education in higher institutions and others went through private schools of gospel music or theological seminaries.

### **Adedeji's Bi-Disciplinary Approach**

Adedeji (2015) identified informal and formal methods of gospel musical education. While the informal is based on African indigenous models, the formal is built on Western structure. For the formal, Adedeji advocated for a bi-disciplinary education for gospel musicians in addition to basic education. This includes musical and theological education. This is because, gospel music as a musical genre is essentially theological. While the musical should involve fundamental courses in music theory and practicals with biases in gospel music, the theological equips the would-be gospel artiste in handling theological messages as song contents among other necessary qualifications. On the musical, Adedeji (2015) submitted:

*There are secular higher institutions of learning such as Universities, Colleges of education and polytechnics that have music departments. A would-be gospel musician may seek admission into such institutions. They offer wonderful opportunities and open one's eyes to innumerable chances in the chosen career... (16).*

On the theological training, he asserted:

*A would-be gospel musician needs to be familiar with the above messages and know their biblical theologies (46)....To have Christian leadership skill, a short-term seminary education may be necessary, where one may study among other courses, 'Principle*

F. S. Adedeji & O. O. Loko: *African Sensibility in the Training of Nigerian Gospel... of spiritual leadership' and 'principles of Church/human management' (104-105).*

It is observed that the two dimensions could be achieved through private schools of gospel music or theological seminaries having Christian music programmes: On this Adedeji stated

*...There exist schools of gospel music nowadays, which one may attend. I see this as the best option or as an addendum to option No 2. In addition, music education, which is seminary based falls into this category. A good example is the Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso that has a whole Faculty of Church Music. Life Theological Seminary, Ikorodu has also commenced a Church-based music education. These and others will give the indispensable biblical foundation/ethics which are absent in secular institutions (16).*

### **The Training of Nigerian Gospel Musicians**

There is no musical group that does not require specialist for its good performance and this is one of the reasons why the training of musicians must be of paramount importance. It is evident that many Nigerian Gospel musicians do not have any formal training in their career. According to Nketia (1975), traditional instruction is not generally organised on a formal institutional basis, for it is believed that natural endowment and a person's ability to develop on his own are essentially what is needed.

It is a mark of ignorance for some Nigerian Gospel musicians to think that their vocation is a divine ministry that God calls them into, and hence does not need any formal training, believing that anointing is all they need. It is so unfortunate today to see many gospel musicians boycotting training, forgetting that the essence of training is to acquire skills. Natural endowment or talent is not enough there is need for our gospel musicians to seek for more skills; it will help them to make use of their musical talent effectively.

The question comes; how are Nigerian gospel musicians that trained in acquiring skills and what are the African sensibility in their training? First, we shall

look at the first step to be taken before the training, which is basically for guidance. All over Africa, the belief in oracular consultation and divination is very strong. This is to know the minds of the supernaturals in taking any decision or on a clumsy or confusing issue. The Yoruba would go to the *Babalawo* (Ifa Diviner) for such ventures. As a carried over from African indigenous practices, a significant number of gospel musicians believed God chose and called them into the profession. They would therefore want to know the mind of God or His counsel as to how to go about their calling. Of this Adedeji (2015) remarked the ideal

*After you have confirmed the calling, the next thing is to pray for guidance as regards the next line of action. You see, prayer should permeate both the preparatory and the training periods. In the same calling, approach, mode and emphases differ. God may therefore lead you differently to the way he led another person. For instance, God may want brother 'A' to go to music school directly and wants you to first serve under a practising gospel musician in order to learn one thing or the other. It would therefore be wrong to think that because brother 'A' has gone to music school; you must also go to that very school. Verify from God himself. Let him lead you! (9).*

In conformity with indigenous African practices, there are certain methods or modes of training in Nigerian gospel musicianship. They are childhood exposure, apprenticeship (using rote and imitation) and formal training.

As part of indigenous training systems in Africa, musicians started their career as children of established musical parents, which later developed into apprenticeship. This kind of childhood exposure to musical tradition is especially noticeable among the Yoruba *dundun* musicians. Same way, Most Nigerian Gospel musicians were exposed to Christian music as choir boys/girls in the church, where they received their foundational musical training. A very good example is G-Willz, a gospel musician in Jos, who developed his singing talent by observing rehearsal sessions of his church choir, especially those that sing very well. He started as a choirboy, then, he was playing the drum in Redeemed People's Mission in Taraba with Headquarters in Jos. In 2011, Nicholas Babajide Ogungbade (a.k.a Bab J) was interviewed; he said he started singing from Primary

School where he represented his school in singing in Alafia Institution, Ibadan. He said he was among the first set of Choir in Surulere District of Cherubim and Seraphim Church Movement (Ayo Ni O) in Lagos.

Sometimes, musical talent tends to run through families and that is why children are encouraged to start learning early, especially if it involves learning musical instruments that the family is known for. Almost all the children of Evangelist Bola Are are gospel musicians, some of them are instrumentalists while the lady is a lead singer of her gospel music ministry (Yetunde Are with a lovely and unique voice like her mum). Music runs through the family and one way or the other, the children would have learnt a lot from their mother. Also recently, a gospel musician was interviewed on FM 105.1, named Diamond Band, he said his father was a choir leader and pastor; he was his mentor who taught him how to sing praises to God. Mr. Ogungbade once mentioned that his grandmother was a lead singer who sang at the funeral of people of her age-group in their hometown, he said he was always observing and imitating the way his grandmother sang. Just like the bandleader of Sam Jay Gospel band who said he grew up in a home where they sing almost every time. Samuel Adewoye recounted many occasions when he would have to sing with his siblings just for entertainment. They all grew up to be music lovers. His elder brother is a choirmaster, and his younger brother is also a choirmaster of one of their church branches in London.

Training by rote is another indigenous practice by which gospel musicians are trained. During an interview with G-Willz, he said many times he gets ideas for new songs by listening to other gospel songs. In the same manner, Nicholas Ogungbade was always listening to I.K. Dairo and BoroBoro of Celestial Church of Christ, Makoko. He was always travelling to anywhere these two men performed. He concluded that they were the sleeping emotional power behind his latter day composition.

According to Adedeji (2015), self-development through rigorous practice is the most important way to acquire skills in the music profession. This is another practice inherited from traditional indigenous systems. Handful of the gospel musicians interviewed make daily practice a point of duty. Evangelist Oluwatoyin, the bandleader of Anointed Praise Ministry in Abeokuta, Ogun State, said her good style of singing was because of her regular rehearsals either personally or

with her group. Her personal rehearsal is on daily basis while she rehearses with her group three times in a week. She never went to any music school but rather started from the church. Adedeji (2015) explained that in his discussion with Panam Percy Paul in the year 1985 at the Living Spring Music Festival in Ile-Ife, he asked him the secret of his skill, Panam told him he practiced at least seven hours daily. The more the practice, the more skillful the artiste would become.

There is need for teachers, guides and mentors towards discovering and fulfilling purpose in the field of gospel music. Through our interactions with some of these gospel musicians, in the likes of Evangelist Seto and Bab J, they learnt a lot from older gospel musicians through active observation, imitation and supervised performances. Evangelist Seto said she never went to any school of music but started her singing ministry as a Chorister in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, where she met some other good singers that she always observed their singing styles, later she began to imitate their singing styles and sometimes she was corrected and guided. This was how she finally established her own gospel music ministry known as Shalom Gospel International Gospel Band in Ondo State. However, Adedeji (2015) commented that ‘many people in the gospel music ministry today are bastards – no father, no mother, no mentor, and no teacher’. There is then the need for older gospel musicians to guide the upcoming ones, while the upcoming ones too should be humble enough to submit themselves to guidance.

Training through musical apprenticeship is another indigenous model that is found in the training of some Nigerian gospel musicians. In this case, a gospel musician has members of his/her band who also serve as apprentices. They later gain freedom to establish their own gospel bands. There is no fix number of years required for freedom; it depends on several factors more so that there is no formal agreement. A significant number of gospel musicians were trained this way.

The book by Adedeji used as reference point in this paper, titled *The Making of a Gospel Musician: Theological and Pragmatic Perspectives* (2015), is itself an African-based training manual, written to assist untrained gospel music practitioners and those who desire to have more training. The book, which was ‘foreworded’ by Panam Percy Paul and divided into twelve chapters, treated pertinent issues such as definitions and clarifications, the call of a gospel

musician, prerequisites of a gospel musician, preparation and training of a gospel musician, the message of a gospel musician, compositional sources of a gospel musician, developing the skill of a gospel musician, performance - contexts of a gospel musician, the ethics of a gospel musician, the spiritual life of a gospel musician, the administration of a gospel musician and problems of a gospel musician. The book was adopted as a main reference book at Bola Are School of Gospel Music and other individuals who yearn to be trained also use it as a self-training, or self-guide manual.

### **Bola Are School of Gospel Music**

Bola Are School of Gospel Music was established as a private training institution by the veteran Yoruba gospel artiste – Bola Are in 1990 at Ibadan. The school which runs a two-year Diploma programme in Gospel Music, is coordinated by Prof. 'Femi Adedeji, who himself as an astute gospel musician ran a gospel music institute in the 1980s and 90s. The school has turned out young gospel artistes, some of which are pushing well in the industry. While the school lacks basic facilities, it offers necessary instructions to the students. The school attracts more females since the proprietress is also a female. Out of an average of 35 students, the males are less than 20%.

### **Panam College of Music Ministry**

Panam College was established in 1998 as a private institution by Bakulipanam Percy Paul Mokungah, commonly known as Panam Percy Paul, a foremost gospel musician based in Jos Plateau, to train budding gospel music ministers. A highly talented multi-instrumentalist, songwriter, recording engineer and producer; to him, gospel musicians are not just artistes, but ministers who should preach through music (Panam, oral interview). According to Gupai (oral Interview), the college runs a year certificate and two-year Diploma programmes. The average number of students annually is said to be between 120 and 180. The college is currently working towards affiliating with University of Jos, and hence reason for taking additional courses from its Department of Music.

### **Appraisal of the Schools**

The two schools, if properly harnessed, have the propensity to positively influence and enhance the development of gospel musicianship in Nigeria. A close study of their curricula revealed that the African essence is significant. For

instance, this is clearly demonstrated in the Objective of Bola Are School of Gospel Music:

*The purpose of the Diploma in Gospel Music programme is to give basics of Gospel music education to desiring candidates within two years. The programme is designed to equip the students with musical skills, and skills in Gospel musicianship in an African setting, worked out in the context of a theological framework that builds on the rich musical heritage of the Christian faith. Candidates who successfully complete the course would be qualified to perform as a gospel musician.*

They feature basic theoretical and musicianship courses. However, emphasis is placed on practicals and the spiritual, following the indigenous African knowledge systems. For instance, Bola Are often selects students to accompany her on her itineraries, where they are exposed to her stylistic techniques, moral ethics, stage-craft and singing nuances. Some are even made to stay behind with her after the completion of their courses, to have more practical experience. At Panam College, Panam often come to class himself to demonstrate practical musicianship in addition to giving the students practical studio exposure in which he is actively engaged (Longshak, in an oral interview).

### **Some Problems**

There are however some problems militating against the effectiveness of indigenous training for gospel musicians in Nigeria. First is the unabated influence of foreign gospel music styles that continue to adulterate the new generation gospel artistes. This trend is not limited to gospel music but has affected every other aspect of Nigerian urban popular culture. Our Youths, through impressions received from imported VCDs, Television, Internet and social media, now wants to dress like the whites, make their hairstyles like the whites, live, worship, talk and sing like the whites. Thus, their interests and tastes for indigenous values and qualities are supplanted with foreign ideals.

Socio-economic problems such as corruption, unemployment, poverty, displaced values, juvenile delinquencies, etc., also constitute factors that enhance cutting corners, influx of unscrupulous elements, sycophancy, copy carts, amateurism and syncretism. It is rather unfortunate that the Church, which is the



harbinger of gospel music has also become so degenerated and corrupt, hence the poor quality of the performances found in the works of many gospel artistes. There are so many entertainers in the field now, whose sole interest is quick riches and materialism, such do not engage in any form of meaningful training or practice. They are not to be taken serious.

### **Result of Training**

Despite the aforementioned problems, it has been observed that a combination of talent and relevant training produces great skills that result in effectiveness in Nigerian gospel musicianship. Examples of gospel artistes that attain this level are Panam and Bola Are who served as apprentices themselves, Lani Stephens, 'Femi Adedeji, SegunOluwayomi, Hubert KunleAjayi (Ibadan), KunleAjayi (Lagos),Jeremiah Gyang and Nathaniel Bassey. They are all outstanding in the field and are effective in gospel music ministry in the real sense of it.

### **Conclusion**

We can conclude from the findings in this discourse that Adedeji's bi-disciplinary training approach and the two schools – Bola Are school of Gospel Music and Panam College of Music Ministry are making some positive impact in the training of gospel music in Nigeria, within an indigenous African milieu. Although the African essence is appreciable, it is still far from being adequate. There is the need to make the training of gospel musicians more African inclined, for the purpose of better positive transformation of the society.

### **List of Informants**

Bab J

Dr. Panam Percy Paul (Proprietor of Panam College of Music Ministry, Jos)

Evangelist Bola Are (Proprietress of Bola Are School of Gospel Music, Ibadan)

Evangelist Oluwatoyin (Abeokuta)

Evangelist Seto

G-Willz

Mr. Olufemi Michael (Senior Lecturer, Bola Are School of Gospel Music, Ibadan)

Nicholas Babajide Ogungbade

Pastor HarrisGupai (Administrative Officer, Panam College of Music Ministry, Jos)

Samuel Adewoye

Yeshua Longshak (an alumnus of Panam College of Music Ministry, Jos).

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<https://www.facebook.com/Panam-College-Of-Music-Ministry-PCMM-451755581506372/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Dr-Bola-Are-Gospel-Band-758725720827366/>

<https://www.wafcol.org/evang-dr-bola-are/>

### **Appendices**

#### Appendix 1: Photographs



Photo 1: Evang. Bola Are. Source:<https://www.wafcol.org/evang-dr-bola-are/>



Photo 2: Panam Percy Paul. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/Panam-College-Of-Music-Ministry-PCMM-451755581506372/>

## Appendix 2: School Curricula

### **1. Bola Are School of Gospel Music, Ibadan, Oyo State: Curriculum for Diploma in Gospel Music**

**Purpose:** The purpose of the Diploma in Gospel Music programme is to give basics of Gospel music education to desiring candidates within two years. The programme is designed to equip the students with musical skills, and skills in Gospel musicianship in an African setting, worked out in the context of a theological framework that builds on the rich musical heritage of the Christian faith. Candidates who successfully complete the course would be qualified to perform as a gospel musician.

<b>Course Title</b>		<b>Credit</b>	<b>Status</b>
DGM	111 Rudiments and Theory I	3	C
DGM	112 Rudiments and Theory II	3	C

DGM	121	Musicianship I	3	C
DGM	122	Musicianship II	3	C
DGM	131	History of Gospel Music	2	C
DGM	141	Gospel Music Education I	3	C
DGM	142	Gospel Music Education II	3	C
DGM	151	Basic Keyboard I	1	C
DGM	152	Basic Keyboard II	1	C
DGM	161	Primary Instrument/Voice I	3	C
DGM	162	Primary Instrument/Voice II	3	C
DGM	163	Secondary Instrument/Voice I	2	C
DGM	164	Secondary Instrument/Voice II	2	C
DGM	166	Conducting	1	C
DGM	171	Gospel Choral/Band Ensemble III	1	C
DGM	172	Gospel Choral/Band Ensemble IV	1	C
DGM	182	Composition I	3	C
DGM	211	Rudiments & Theory III	3	C
DGM	212	Rudiments & Theory IV	3	C
DGM	213	Form & Analysis (Gospel emphasis)	2	C
DGM	221	Musicianship III	3	C
DGM	222	Musicianship IV	3	C
DGM	223	Gospel Music Education III	3	C
DGM	255	Basic Keyboard I	1	C
DGM	256	Basic Keyboard II	1	C
DGM	261	Primary Instrument/Voice III	3	C
DGM	262	Performance Project	6	C
DGM	263	Secondary Instrument/Voice I	2	C
DGM	264	Secondary Instrument/Voice II	2	C
DGM	271	Gospel Choral/Band Ensemble III	1	C
DGM	272	Gospel Choral/Band Ensemble IV	1	C
DGM	282	Praise-Worship	2	C
DGM	284	Hymnology	2	C
DGM	291	Composition II	3	C
DGM	293	Introduction to Music Technology	2	C
BBS	101	Old Testament Survey	2	R
BBS	102	New Testament Survey	2	R
BBS	103	Systematic Theology	2	R

BBS	105	Discipleship	2	R
BBS	106	Spiritual Life	2	R
BBS	207	Evangelism	2	R

### **Electives**

GES	111	Basic English Grammar I	2	E
GES	112	Basic English Grammar II	2	E

**Total: 97**

## **2. Panam College of Music Ministry, Jos, Plateau State: Curriculum for Certificate and Diploma Courses**

<b>Course Code</b>	<b>Course Name</b>	<b>Unit</b>
MUS 111	Tonal Harmony (i)	2
MUS 122	Applied Music (i)	4
MUS 124	Sight singing (i)	2
MUS 125	Instrumental and Choral Ensemble (i)	2
MUS 127	Introduction to African Music (i)	2
MUS 128	Introduction to Western Music History (i)	2
ENG 131	Spoken English	2
MOM 111	Christian Worship	2
MUS 111	Tonal Harmony (ii)	2
MUS 122	Applied Music (ii)	4
MUS 123	Composition (i)	2
MUS 124	Sight singing (ii)	2
MUS 127	Introduction to African Music (ii)	2
MUS 128	Introduction to Western Music History (ii)	2
MUS 134	College Band/Orchestra (i)	2
MUS 112	Industrial Attachment	6
MUS 222	Applied Music (iii)	2
MUS 223	Composition (ii)	3
MUS 225	College Band/Orchestra (ii)	2
MUS 226	Research methodology and field work (i)	2
MUS 227	African Music History (i)	2
MUS 228	Western Music History (i)	2

MUS 211	Tonal Harmony (iv)	2
MUS 222	Applied Music (iii)	2
MUS 223	Composition (iii)	3
MUS 226	Research methodology and field work (ii)	2
MUS 227	African Music History (ii)	2
MUS 228	Western Music History (ii)	2
MUS 215	Music Therapy	2
MUS 213	Project	6
		<b>Total: 74</b>

### **Seminar Courses**

1. Entrepreneurship
2. Intellectual Property

### **Elective Theological Courses**

Music Ministry  
Bible survey  
Hermeneutics  
Ministerial ethics  
Introduction to church history, etc.