

# **AFRICA-SENSED MUSIC EDUCATION AND CREATIVITY: EXAMPLES OF CHILDREN'S FOLK SONGS IN IGBO CULTURE**

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## **Introduction**

When we talk of Africa-sensed music, we think of music that is broadly associated with the Africans both in functions and ideology or musical activities within the confines of African orientation and appreciation. Ironically, the system of teaching and learning adopted in this modern time both in school and out of school is the type that left one to wonder whether we are still in touch with our 'Africanness' / Africa's perception of music. Our traditional music education has suffered serious setbacks and encroachments in the face of modern system of education and entertainment. Ordinarily, Africa's music education is a life time activity, spanning from birth to death with the ultimate intention of inculcating traditional values. It is this enculturation of values that ensures generational continuum.

Bothered with this aberration such as absence of moonlight games and introduction of modern technological facilities in place of traditional activities, the paper therefore draws our attention to the textual contents of some selected Igbo children's folk songs which were formally employed in inculcating societal values to the young during game period, most of which are now at the verge of extinction. The collection stretches from child birth songs to children's game songs. While anchoring on the theory of enculturation, the work employs survey method of data collection and songs were randomly selected to support the subject matter. A total of five songs were textually analyzed out of many of such songs that capture the true African sense in both creation and presentations. Through the analysis, it was

observed that what gives Africa its meaning and essence is contained in her folk songs and therefore should be upheld.

The researchers thought it good to describe the location where their work situates, and thus the question-

### **Who are the Igbo?**

Many stories and accounts are given on the origin, history and identity of the Igbo which were perhaps enshrouded in myths and uncertainties. But “one of the most notable facts of Igbo history is its length and continuity” (Isichei, 1977: 3). According to Okafor (2017),

*The Igbo are one of the three ethnic groups in Nigeria. They take their name from their language – one of the kwa language subgroups in the Niger-Congo or Niger Kordofanian family. In kwa, the word Igbo \either as prefix or suffix, connotes forest or farm...the term was first applied to the Ibibio who later became distinguished as kwa Igbo...(p.1)*

In Akaolisa (2003), the Igbo

*inhabit the Eastern part of Nigeria and are surrounded by the Igala in the North, the Delta city states in the South, and the Efik in the South East. At present, they occupy the seven states of Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Abia, Ebonyi, Delta, Rivers and parts of Akwa-Ibom and Benue. Within these areas, where Igbo language is spoken, one may also notice a kind of disparity in dialects and cultures. Definitely, every culture has a spatial and definite geographical distribution of traits, complexes and patterns. (p.2)*

One thing that is most common in all Igbo traditional societies is the utilization of music in all their life’s activities. Igbo people just like other Africans make music the hub of their social, educational, religious, political and cultural life. All these are made possible through three media of expression thus- song, dance and instrument. These major branches through which music is performed in traditional

setup have laudable meaningful communicative abilities. According to Ibekwe, (2017),

*whenever we are performing traditional music, some aspects of... traditional values are displayed which directly or indirectly provoke aesthetic appreciation of the spectators or rather the culture owners. It should be noted that whether we sing, dance or play instruments in Igbo indigenous setup a message is being communicated, also culture is rehearsed and perpetuated. (p. 62).*

Discussing dance as an important aspect of culture, Yerima (2006) avers that,

*dance represents the identity of the people. Through the body, dance uses the emphasis of areas of the body as metaphors and symbols. Specific parts of the body are used to reveal the history of the people, their occupational engagement, (and) their environment. For example, if they live by the river, the shapes, angles, the costumes, the music and even their colours, become symbol which emerges from the river or sea. If they live by the rocks, or hills, the feet movement, the jumps, the raising of the shoulders, the hand gestures, all point to the immediate environment of mountain climbing or long years of surviving by the rocks (p. 125).*

The same way dance is an expressive body language is the same way musical instruments play significant roles as language surrogates. There is no traditional instrument that has no useful impact both in music making and expression of societal values. While doing a descriptive drum language of the Yoruba people, Finnegan in Komolafe, (2012) stipulates thus, "Drum language is highly developed. Drum tends to be a specialized and often hereditary activity, and expert drummers with mastery of the accepted vocabulary of drum language were often attached to king's court... It adds to the verbal resources of language..." (p. 166). This implies that no aspect of traditional music is found wanting in terms of usefulness.

The discussion on Igbo folk songs in this platform is just a microcosm of music making practices in Igbo culture area, which are too versed to be attempted or

represented in a paper. Stretching it further, music making in any traditional society is all inclusive comprising traditional and contemporary genres, and thus, a culmination of spiritual, physical and environmental phenomenal interplay. It is the level of communal and individual commitments and involvements that give meaning and identity. The teaching, learning and creation of music in traditional system are never static due to its informal nature. The dynamic and ever-changing nature of folk songs presentations for instance, from one generation to the other accounts for varied versions observed within a given culture area, creativity is often time communal effected. Buah in Akaolisa (2003), decries the deficiencies of oral tradition thus, "it is easy to see that history (folk songs) learnt in this way can sometimes be wrong. In the first place people tend to forget certain things as the years roll by"(p.25). These variations as a matter of fact are as a result of creation and re-creation, and are mostly affected in the textual or dialectical content and structural arrangement of the music and not necessarily in the meaning. Thus the maxim *okwa mba na-achi n'onu n'onu* (a country's bird cries according to its locality).

The definition of folk song as an aspect of oral tradition is no longer a new discourse, but still much relevant to the topic of discussion. According to Okafor (2017),

*a folk song is one which people have found as an integral part of their culture...a composition that has grown with a race or a nation or even a community and whose authorship is enshrined in the midst of antiquity, that is, whose origin is unknown but which can claim community authorship because generations of race, the community or the nation have grown with it and added to it. (p.17).*

From the above dimension of definition, communal involvement is much emphasized. It has successfully unraveled what folksong stands for in African traditional society. Going further, he summarizes Cecil Sharp's views of folk song to be,

*dependent upon the three elements of continuity, variation and selection: continuity, which preserves the tradition; variation, which springs from individual creative impulse; selection, which pronounces the verdict of a community. A folk song is anonymous*

*not merely because the original author has been forgotten but because it has been fashioned and re-fashioned through many generations by countless individual singers and of these singers the contributions of the first may be no greater than that of the last. (p. 18).*

Folk song and folktale are normally integrated in performance, whereby the message bearing tales are imaginatively constructed, the folksong is meant to punctuate, spice and add colour to the tale. In other words, folktale is as important in folk tradition as folksong. Given the fact that both terms are congruent factors or catalyst of oral literature, and in some cases both are used together, it becomes necessary to briefly look at the definition of folktale in relation to its function to the subject of discussion. According to Akporobaro (2012), "folktale is an imaginative narrative in prose form. The story that constitutes a folktale may have a basis in real life but generally the story is an imaginative recreation of a memorable experience that is intended essentially to entertain rather than to record history or social experience" (p. 51). He further affirms that,

*folktales are basically false stories which are not meant to be believed to entertain by their artistic force. They are intended to illuminate the moral nature of man, and the themes of jealousy, love, endurance and moral conflicts. Because of their basic concerns with the communication of these humanistic ideas, folktales are considered to be didactic in form (p. 113)*

That is to say, folk tales are useful in the training of young minds just as folk songs. It could be observed that animals are personified during storytelling and folktale sessions, but the images they create always give a full representation of the messages they are meant or intended to give. Ibekwe (2012) maintains that no matter how "fictitious, fabulous and mythical folktales appear they still possess the potency, the charm and the transforming power that affect the life of the listener" (p. 346). In some cases, those personifications are meant to concretize an illusion and ensure long lasting retention. Discussing the role of concrete media and poetics in relation to song text in Ewe society of Ghana, Avorgbedor (2003) asserts that,

*song performance in the Ewe context also permits the use of visual or sculptured images to reinforce the text. During one of the Xaisevu performances in a village called Seva, a sculptural piece depicting an eagle hovering over a turtle was displayed. At one stage during the singing, both the performer and audience turned to look in the direction of the sculpture. The words being sung at that moment are reproduced here and they are related directly to the images. The visual memory of the sculpture will help concretize the text into a more permanent and effective whole” (p. 223).*

From the above submissions it becomes clear that images can be applied in folktales and folksongs for more permanent illustration. Another outstanding feature or attribute which folksongs and folktales share in common is oral tradition, and that is the main reason there are always variations and inconsistency in their presentation and performance among different communities, but in whichever way they are performed their primary functions revolve around enculturation and self-realization.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The work is anchored on the theory of enculturation. According to Conrad Philip Kottak,

*enculturation is the process where the culture that is currently established teaches an individual the accepted norms and values of the culture or society where the individual lives. The individual can become an accepted member and fulfill the needed functions and roles of the group. Most importantly, the individual knows and establishes a context of boundaries and accepted behaviour that dictates what is acceptable and not acceptable within the framework of that society. (Wikipedia –assessed 15<sup>th</sup> May 2020)*

Actually, Children’s folksong maintains its prime position as the greatest avenue of teaching and learning of cultural values among the Igbo. Through enculturation the younger generations are inducted into the tenets of society. Enculturation and socialization are related in that they share common attributes of learning by association and or interaction. When children play together, they learn from each

other and knowledge is shared. Mothers are said to be the greatest forces or factors of socialization due to the close affinity that exists between them and their children which continues up to adolescence.

### **Sensibility in Igbo Folk Songs**

Folk songs are created to cover a wide range of activities in Igbo traditional performance contexts such as birth, weaning, puberty, marriage, work, war, initiation, title taking, other ceremonies and death. It is all these cherished events that lend credibility and sensibility to folk song creation. It is of a truth that there exist some words termed nonsensical in the western music syllable; such does not exist in traditional African society. The texts of the music in our traditional society are derived from the various events as mentioned above, even when onomatopoeic sounds are used as response/s or to balance some phrases, their presence are structurally utilized. Analyzing the texts of some folk songs in her work titled, *the cultural perspectives on music performance in Africa...;* Ibekwe (2013) notes,

*It is important to note that texts analyses in Igbo culture are not subjected to word for word or line by line translation/explanation. Most often, the meaning of several texts or the entire texts are holistically treated to unravel the actual meaning of the text, lest it becomes incomprehensible. Some texts that constitute phrasal balancing are also allowed /adopted to give a feeling of completeness to the songs, but it does not mean that those texts have no meanings; their in-depth meanings are imbedded in their context of expressions which are best understood by the language owners. There is no statement or utterance in Igbo context that does not convey an intelligible message whether spoken or sung. (p. 173)*

Igbo folk songs are created to carry the people's folk thoughts, what they live by or what they live for. It is indeed the total expression of their life. Some examples of folk songs and their value implications are as follow:

### Child birth song:

| <u>Call</u>                    | <u>Response</u> | <u>Call</u>                                    | <u>Response</u> |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|--|-----------------|
| <i>Gini n'ebe</i>              | <i>ihii</i>     | what is crying?                                | <i>ihii</i>     |
| <i>Nwan'ebe</i>                | <i>ihii</i>     | child is crying                                | <i>ihii</i>     |
| <i>Ọn'ebenank'onye?</i>        | <i>ihii</i>     | where is it crying?                            | <i>ihii</i>     |
| <i>Na nke Wilfred b'anyi o</i> | <i>ihii</i>     | at wilfred's<br>( name is substitutable) house | <i>ihii</i>     |
| <i>O bepu o bechirikwa</i>     | <i>ihii</i>     | after this, let it continue                    | <i>ihii</i>     |
| <i>Ọnwaisi anyi abiakwa</i>    | <i>ihii</i>     | in six months' time, we come again             | <i>ihii</i>     |

The above song defines the context of birth. On event like this, women gather at the house of the celebrant to rejoice with her on the incidence of child birth. The song of their dance describes how desirous it is to have a child or children even in quick succession as identified in the last two lines. The response *ihii* does the same job as 'oh yes'. The child is the centre of this celebration and the occasion commemorates the importance of child birth in the society. This event though involves adult women, children are also present watching and imitating as the celebration goes on.

## Gini n'abee?

Anonymous

Gi ni n'e bee nwa n'e be

i hi i i hi



5  
o n'e be nan k'o nyc

5  
i na n ke Wi li fre -d b'a nyio i

9  
o be puo be chi li kwa o nw'i sii a nyia bia kwa

9  
hi - i i hi - i i

13  
hi-i

### Weaning song

#### ***Opunisi tulu nwa di n'ura***

*Opunisi tulu nwa di n'ura*

*mbelelembe*

*Opunisi tulu nwa di n'ura*

*mbelelembe*

*O gba afọ enye m gi ji mbanaocha*

*mbelelembe*

#### Translation

Let the child's brain cool so that he may sleep

*mbelelembe*

Let the child's brain cool so that he may sleep      *mbelelembe*

In a years' time I give you white water yam.      *mbelelembe*

The song is mostly rendered by mothers and nurse maids. It is a song in form of an appeal to make a child sleep. The section that reads *o gba afọ enye m gi ji mbanafọcha* is just to unravel the tradition of compensation and reward to every good deed. Water yam is a prestigious and exclusive food in Igbo tradition. It is mainly taken by the elders, titled men, or dietary patients, so giving it as compensation is quite a very rewarding promise. It is a lone performance though it sounds like call and response pattern, it is sung by the nurse maid or babysitter. The section that reads *mbelelembe* is an onomatopoeic expression that is used to balance the phrases, and on the other hand means 'let it be'.

## Opunisi tulu nwa di n'ula

Anonymous

The musical score is written in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It consists of two systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The lyrics are written below the notes.

System 1:  
Vocal line: O pu ni si tu lu nwa di n'u lao      o pu ni si tu lu nwa di  
Piano line: m be le le m be

System 2:  
Vocal line: n'u la      o gba fo e nye mgi ji mba n'o cha  
Piano line: m be le le m be      m be le le m

### **Egbe n'eri ji n'agu**

*Egbe n'eri ji n'agu*

Kite is eating yam in the forest

*Egbe n'eri ede n'agu*

kite is eating cocoyam in the forest

*Egbe n'ata abacha nkpo*

kite is eating dry cassava

*Egbe nu yooyooyoo*

this kite yooyooyoo

Egbe na-eri ji n'agu

Anonym



The song - *Egben'erijin'agu*, reveals to the child that kites normally live in forests and that they can vandalize or feast on people's crops such as yam, cocoyam and cassava. The section that reads *yoo, yoo* is an onomatopoeic expression that (may be interpreted as –shame, shame) shows disapproval for such a devastation. Through the song the child is taught that destroying people's things is not good, and whoever that does it is assaulted. It is a solo performance in simple rhythm of two-four with emphasis on every strong beat of the bar.

### **Onye n'onye jele b'enyi y'oma**

*Onye n'onye jele b'enyi y'oma*

*melelemme*

*onye n'onye jele b'enyi y'oma*

*melelemme*

*kpalibe ji n'aka n'aka*

*kpalibe ede n'aka n'aka  
akwa okuku mpia mpia  
ogaranya gbaraaji n'ukwu  
kpọ ya mereremme*

*melelemme o melelemme.*

Translation

Who and who went to their good friends' house *melelemme*

Who and who went to their good friends' house *melelemme*

Carrying pieces of yam in their hands

Carrying pieces of coco yam in their hands

Broken pieces of fowl's egg

A rich man with hairy legs

Call him *melelemme*

*melelemme o melelemme.*

## Onye n'onye jele b'enyi ya

Anonymous

The image shows a musical score for the song 'Onye n'onye jele b'enyi ya'. It consists of two staves of music in 3/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The melody is written on a treble clef staff, and the lyrics are placed below the notes. The lyrics are: 'O nye n'onye je le b'e nyi y'o ma 'nye n'onye je le b'e' and 'me le le m me'. The melody is simple and repetitive, with a clear rhythmic pattern.

7  
nyi y'o ma kpa'li be ji n'a ka n'a ka kpa'li b'e de n'a ka n'a  
me le le m me

13  
k'a kw'o ku ko m pia pia ogala nya gbal'a ji n'u kwu kpo ya me le le m

19  
me le le m me o me le le m me

The song - *onye n'onye jere b'enyi y' oma...centres on hospitality*. It shows open mindedness towards visitors who are always welcomed by their hosts; at times gifts are shared or given to such visitors. The section that reads *melelemme* structurally balances the phrases and provides some sort of completeness. The song which looks more like a call and response pattern is nonetheless performed by one person. The song is used to calm the child and as well introduce the traditional ethics of giving. Though at this stage the child has not fully developed cognitively to understand the in-depth meanings of all the messages of the song but as it grows the message continues to unfold. The main function of this type of

song is to pacify the child or arrest the child's attention through the sounds and rhythms of the song, at the same time teaching the child the folk tradition of the people.

### Okereke Okereke

#### Call

Okereke, Okereke  
Okoroafo, Okoroafo  
Mgbe miri na anwu  
Onye ka o gata ama  
Iwu anyi malu

#### Translation

OkerekeOkereke  
OkoroafoOkoroafo  
When the rain and the sun  
Who will be a defaulter  
The law we have made

#### Refrain

du duduyaya  
du duduyaya  
garaogun'ikpa  
oganaamanje m  
onye achiwuna n'ibuo

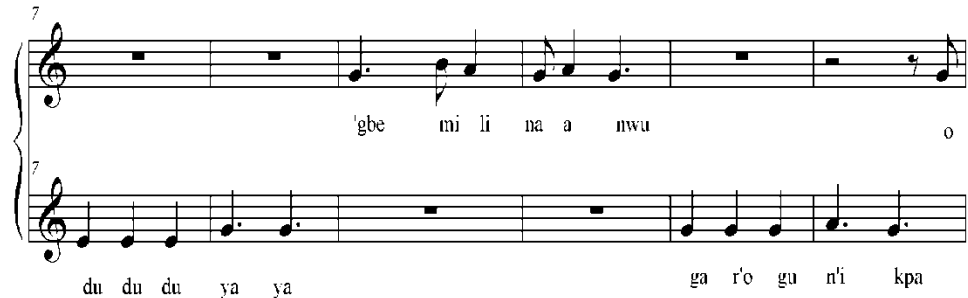
du duduyaya  
du duduyaya  
went to fight in the wilderness  
it must continue moving  
let no one take two at a time

## Okereke Okereke

Anonymous

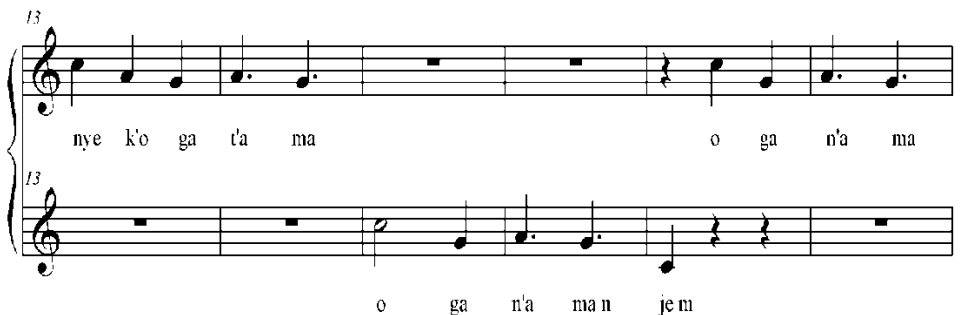
The image shows a musical score for the song 'Okereke Okereke'. It consists of two staves of music. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The time signature is 4/4. The melody is written on the top staff, and the lyrics are written below it. The lyrics are: 'O ke re ke o ke re ke' followed by 'O ko r'a fo oko r'a fo' and 'Du du du ya ya'. The bottom staff contains a simple bass line with notes corresponding to the lyrics 'Du du du ya ya'.

7



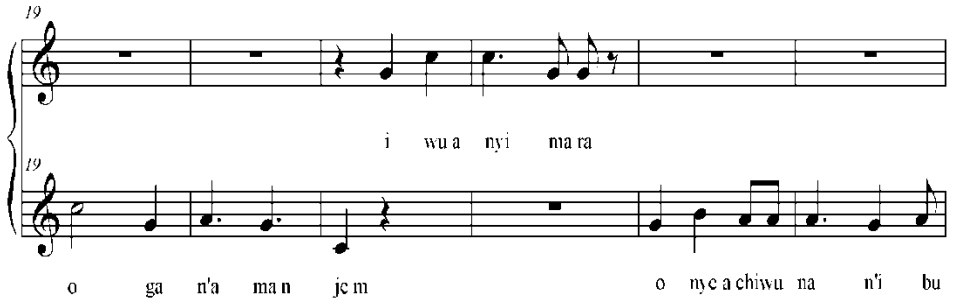
'gbe mi li na a nwu o  
du du du ya ya ga r'o gu n'i kpa

13



nye k'o ga t'a ma o ga n'a ma  
o ga n'a ma n je m

19



i wu a nyi mara  
o ga n'a ma n je m o nye a chiwu na n'i bu

25



i wu a nyi mara  
o nye a chiwu na n'i bu o

The above is a children's game song. It is done in a sit down circle formation. Each participant is expected to have one stick at his/her possession while the game is going on. As the leader sings the song, each person passes his/her stick to another person. The song is meant to stop abruptly, and when that happens anybody found with more than one stick at his/her possession becomes a victim or defaulter and that person withdraws from the ring. As the remaining participants continue, the elimination process also continues until the champion emerges, that is, the person who has never defaulted. This game is intended to instill in children spirit of diligence, discipline and agility. Any participant who is dull is easily eliminated. The translation is provided to give the literary meaning of the song. The section that reads *dududuyaayaa* has helped to balance the phrases as well as employing the Igbo man's ideology over facts and symbols, cause and effect and so on. Here the sound *du* mimic or ape the onomatopoeic sound of a head of palm fruit (*duum*) when it falls from a palm tree to the ground (or sound of big pot drum/ mother drum when it is sounded) and *yaa* represent the sound of palm frond as it falls to the ground when they are cut from the palm tree. *Yaa* in another context could mean okay, concur or agree. (the above excerpts are taken from Ibekwe, 2018)

All these musical examples are meant to teach children their traditional values, the dos and don'ts and acceptable way of life. Unfortunately, these music traditions are phasing out with the introduction of new mode of learning. Even in the period when everything has shifted to the classroom, the teachers whose duty it is to impart such knowledge, most of them are not interested in local tunes. They rather prefer exotic renditions to traditional tunes probably, because he or she has no interest in it.

### **Music Education in Igbo Traditional Society**

According to Nketia (1974), "traditional music instruction is not generally organized on a formal systematic basis, for it is believed that natural endowment and a person's ability to develop on his own are essentially what is needed" (pp. 58-59). Nevertheless, the fact that folk music education does not take place in the class room does not limit its pedagogical scope and credibility in traditional milieu. In the past, children stay around the fire place or under a tree at leisure time either in the company of the elderly people or their parents and listen to folk songs, folktales and didactically packaged words of wisdom. It was at this period that



families and communities' history are acculturated to the young. During moon light nights, people converge at designated arena for this traditional ritual, playing all kinds of traditional music-song, dance and instruments. Agu and Okpara (2016) identify two major types of music practised and studied in Nigeria to include, "indigenous and contemporary music types" (p. 24). Contemporary music type is not within the scope of this discussion. Nonetheless, the major aim of any type of education (be it traditional or contemporary) is to achieve attitudinal change. In the words of Olorunsogo, (2012) "one of the main purposes of education is enculturation" (p. 257). Traditionally, he equivocally asserts that, "informal African education has built into it the practice of folklore, age-grade rites and the celebration of festivals as method of educating the young in the culture of his people" (p. 257).

The Igbo have a vast array of such activities where the young ones are tutored through folk music involvement. Aside the ones listed above, others include, peer-group's activities, age-grades, children's game songs, puberty or adolescence songs and cult / ritual activity songs. The young ones learn through guided listening, observation, imitation and participation. At older age, traditional music education for special skills could also be enhanced through apprenticeship.

Sadly, in this recent time the entire process is being threatened by change. According to Olorunsogo, "colonialism and its educational system which we imbibed had slowly, gradually steadily destroyed and attempted to erode traces of this traditional method of passing on the culture to the young" (p. 257). These observations are quite true of the situation on ground but should not be complacently yielded into or allowed to take its devastating toll on cultural sustenance. The scholarly ethnographic and ethno-musicological researches and documentations show some massive attempt to preserve the reminiscence of such traditional values, problems of variation and inconsistency in data collections notwithstanding. There are always some dialectical and structural differences recorded when gathering information during field work. This tells much of the communal involvement in creation and re-creation of folk music and generational changes, yet the messages are still maintained under a given contextual terrain.

## Conclusion

Africa and the Igbo in particular utilize music beyond entertainment purposes, the appreciation is highly event oriented, and that's why the texts are carefully selected not in isolation but to match each event and as such all aspects of their music are in tandem with their folk thought and ideology. Nketia, (1974) emphatically maintains that, "the nature and scope of music (in Africa) is generally related to the aims and purposes of a specific social event or to the needs of the performer" (p. 27) and for that no musical activity is selected or performed in isolation. It should be noted that enculturation is inevitable for the sustenance of Igbo folk music. This is not the same in the Western societies where music can be presented purposely for entertainment with no specific event in mind except for the show of dexterity in several harmonious combinations and manipulation of sounds or notes.

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