

AFRICA-SENSED MUSIC EDUCATION AND INDIGENOUS MUSIC COMPOSITION

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Introduction

Africa-sensed music education is the art of teaching and learning of music in a particular culture based on the cultural ethics and values of the people. It is concerned with the folk musical practices of the people of Africa which are derived from the way of life, beliefs and values of the people. This implies according to Omibiyi-Obidike (2001: 151) “an education based on African traditional music in schools at all levels. In other words, it implies the use of traditional musical resources in music education of the African.” Music is a very essential art to the African and is widely used in every rite of passage from the ‘cradle to the grave.’ No wonder then that Okafor (1994: 105) opines: “Music is unquestionably the most widely practised of the traditional arts in Nigeria. At any time of night or day, somewhere in the land, some Music is being made.”

Music is so important to the Africa that in one way or the other one rite of passage is performed to the accompaniment of music. It can be the birth of a child, the naming ceremony, the outing ceremony of the baby, the churching ceremony the marriage ceremony, the coronation or the title taking ceremony and finally the funeral ceremony which is given a lot of prominence in Nigeria and Africa in general. Discussing his views on what music is to the African, Idolor (2002) reiterates:

Different societies have various traditions of music origin, which can be broadly classified into Divine and human sources. There sources may have been philosophized from the various functions and uses (religious and social) into which music has been subjected by man. Some schools of thought hold that the art of

music was in existence before the emergence of man, like music of the spheres, while others say it was, divinely inspired, like the Igbegbe Akamaghwe of Okpeland. (p. 1)

He went on to explain the fact that what was important was how man used music to his advantage in different contextual situations.

Some Indigenous Practices that form the Basis for Africa-Sensed Music Education and Indigenous Art Music Composition

In communities where there is much emphasis on farming, farming strategies are learnt in the home even before the child goes to school for formal education. In other communities, where fishing is emphasized, fishing festivals contribute in no small way to the art of fishing even before the child attends a formal education. A community where blacksmithing is practised obviously gives their children opportunity to learn the art of blacksmithing. These arts are learnt through keen observation and participation in the indigenous practices of the different communities where they exist. Some dances that are performed in some communities stem from the indigenous practices of the people. A typical example is the *egwu amala* (boat dance) which is found in the riverine areas where they are conversant with rowing the boat and paddling the canoe. Those who take this dance to the upland areas are either married from the riverine areas or that conscious effort is made by the people in the riverine areas to come up to the upland to teach them. The beliefs of the people are also expressed in their dance, where they believe in the ability of the mermaid to endow them with children. During the women's dance (*egwu amala*), naturally they put on the traditional women's attire for the dance and the musical instruments they play come from the environment; even the language of the song they sing is their own. They cannot possibly sing to the melody of *egwu amala* in Yoruba language and they cannot put on the Yoruba women's attire for the dance.

These materials whether mentioned above or not are being used by indigenous music composers in their original art music compositions from different parts of Africa where they abound. The art music composer tries as much as possible to capture the folk music essence of the indigenous music for his original composition.

Nigerian Art Music:

In his write up on the historical background of modern Nigerian art music Omojola (1995) Opines:

European influenced musical idioms have been emerging in Nigeria since the beginning of this century. These idioms can be classified into four distinct categories: indigenous church music, urban syncretic popular forms, modern folk opera and Nigerian modern art music. The emergence of these forms is a result of an historical process which began in the middle of the nineteenth century. (p. 9)

He went further to explain the fact that three main factors can be identified as directly responsible for their growth:

1. the emergence of a Western educated, African elite and the consequent creation of a viable atmosphere for the practice and consumption of European music, which was vibrantly sustained in the nineteenth century by economic and political factors largely dictated by Europe.
2. the eventual frustration of the Westernized African elite who had hoped to gain more political and economic power from their European counterparts.
3. a spirit of cultural awakening, when the educated African elite in Nigeria, who initially distanced themselves from the local populace and, therefore, traditional Nigerian culture, later realized that political and economic independence needed to be preceded by a greater awareness of their own culture.

In his views on formal education and the development of African art music in Nigeria Idolor (2001) reiterates;

African art music education is a literary approach to the study of contemplative music which contains features of Africa traditional music. Considering the approach to its study the educational system is seen to be a dominant determinant of its advancement. (p. 135)

No wonder then that Michael Sessler, a renowned comparative educator of the second phase, the predictive phase of comparative education in Quitz (1984) explains that things outside the school matter even more than the things inside because they govern and interpret the things inside. In other words, the needs of the society should be reflected in the curricular of its schools. This implies that the musical needs of the society can only be realized through embedding same in the curricular of the schools. That is to say that the children in the school after formal education will eventually serve in the community where they belong and thus transmit what they have learnt in the school to the society.

In his views on African music theory in the music education curricular of Nigeria universities, Adedeji (2013) opines:

It has been observed that music education in Africa generally has not attained a developed status, especially when compared with its Western counterpart. Also African music education need to be made relevant to the needs of the society, for it to be more embraced. Our music education still prepares students to be focused on Western music at the end of which they never outshine their white counterparts on Western music. Sadly enough, they only possess a little or no understanding of their own music where they have the better chance of demonstrating superiority. One of the ways to correct these anomalies is to re-examine the place of African music theory in the curricular of our Universities (p. 35).

Indigenous Art Music Composition

It is natural for a composer to base his compositions on the happenings in the society in which he lives. This to a large extent helps in portraying the various practices in the community he finds himself. Thus, through indigenous music composition these values are transmitted from generation to generation through music composed whether the composer is known or unknown. Giving credence to the above view, Uzoigwe (2001) submits:

Composers of African art music, even though their music reflects the duality of Afro-European culture, must in their search for

African identity return to what might be described as the basic folk African musical tradition of which tonal concepts and organizations constitute but a part. (p. 162)

Upholding the above view, Nketia (2004) says:

Analyzing some of the materials encountered in my research enabled me to develop my composition theory, to determine where I could move from tradition to modernity without masking my African voice or losing my African identity. This has been particularly important to me as a composer, for although my research interest is the traditional African music with particular reference to its study, documentation, preservation and promotion as our cultural legacy, my creative interest lies in the application of my field experience and research findings to the development of African art music as a contemporary genre. (p. 4)

Language in Art Music Composition

Language is an important aspect of indigenous art music composition. The aim of indigenous art music composition is to put across important messages to the audience in terms of moral, religious, political, social and other aspects of life of the society. If appropriate musical tones are not assigned to the words, there results a distortion of the language of communication. The language of discussion here is the Igbo language.

The Igbo are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. They have a unique culture of hard work, perseverance and tolerance. Writing on the Igbo, Agu (2003: 33) says: "The Igbo inhabit the South Eastern part of Nigeria. They inhabit predominantly the Nigerian States of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, parts of Delta, Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Cross River." He went further to explain that cultural variations amongst the States exist in the forms of dialects, religious rituals and symbolism. The democratic claim of most Igbo societies stem from the fact that under normal circumstances every normal freeborn Igbo will ultimately be involved in the government of his community.

Igbo Language and Tonal Inflection

The Igbo speak Igbo language and Igbo language adheres strictly to the tonal inflection of the words. Writing on language and tonal inflection of the word, Onwuekwe (1994) submits:

Although in Nigeria the languages are different, the music of the various languages is controlled by the tonal inflection of the words. Linguistic approach to studies in African music is indispensable because of the tonal characteristics of every African language. As a tone language the relative pitch at which a syllable is uttered or the inflection given to it may affect the meaning of the syllables. (p. 6)

Writing on the problem of language for the African art music composer Ekwueme (2001: 18) reiterates:

The problem of language for the African composer is, however, a much more serious one. A lot of discussion has been carried out on the constraints posed by "tone" in setting an African (tonal) language to music.... Suffice it here to reiterate that "tone" which is a strong feature of many African languages is also a strong and often limiting determinant of many musical features of those languages. A composer of choral music employing an African language must therefore understand the musical properties and the limitations of that language. (p. 18)

Upholding the above view, Adedeji (2005: 146) opines that "while most of the songs featured significantly Nigerian melodic and harmonic flavours, some did not preserve the tonal inflection of Yoruba language." In line with the above view, Onwuekwe (2015) opines:

The rising and falling tones of Igbo language in no small way affect the meaning of the words. A sentence in Igbo language might have one meaning but when set to music, a totally different meaning is obtained. This can cause a lot of embarrassment to

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both the composer and the audience listening to the music. (p.
201)

A word may have one meaning if uttered at a relatively high pitch, and another meaning if uttered at a relatively low pitch, with a third and possibly fourth meaning if uttered with either a downward or upward inflection. For example among the Igbo of Nigeria the word “akwa” has different meanings depending on the tone markings of each syllable of the word, thus we have:

Ákwà = Cloth

Àkwá = Egg

Àkwà = Bed/Bridge

Ákwá = Cry

The above examples show why tonal inflection in any African language is indispensable in the music when it is recognized that most monosyllabic and disyllabic words have several meanings according to their tonal accents.

Relationship between Music and Language:

Music and language are interwoven. Whenever any vocal music is composed, it is associated with a particular language which has its characteristic rising and falling tones. Writing on the relationship between music and language Ogugua (2003) reiterates:

Music conveys meaning, at times more than a word or sentences in a language can convey because of the problem of language and the ‘must’ for language to obey the rules of syntax in grammar which music does not always obey and yet conveys meaning. (p. 119)

Expressing his views on the relationship between music and language Randel (2001) explains that music and language are closely associated with the vocal music of all cultures, yet in Africa the connection is particularly significant. Spoken or declaimed speeches of praise may be accompanied by drums and horns. Songs are sung by raconteur and audience, usually in responsorial fashion, in the telling of folk tales. Music is an important symbol in mythology and folklore. He further emphasizes:

Among the Bashi, flute pieces are said to have texts that are not sung or spoken but are known to and taught by the player. Composition of vocal melodies may be limited by the pitch movement required in the text. (p. 18)

In his contributions on the relationship between music and language, Uzoigwe (2001: 161) advises: “What composers of African art music therefore need most is to establish a language which is comparable to that of African literature.”

Effects of Igbo Tonal Inflection on Indigenous Music Composition

Tonal inflection of the language has significant influence on indigenous art music composition. The aim of the composer is to put across some messages to the audience. If the music distorts the message, the aim of the composer is defeated. Below are given some examples of how indigenous music can be distorted through assigning tones that are different from what the composer intended to pass on to the audience. For instance, a composer might wish to advise a good child to buy some cloths for the mother to put on during the celebration of mother’s Sunday. In Igbo language, the advice runs thus: *Ezi nwa, gotara nne gi ákwà ò ga-eyi n’ ùka nne.* (Good child, buy the cloth that your mother will put on during mothers’ Sunday celebration.)

Ezi Nwa (Good Child)

E - zin - wa, go - ta - ran - ne gi a - kw'o - g'e - yi n'u - ka n - ne.

From the music above, the composer is asking the good child to buy the egg that the mother will lay on mothers’ Sunday celebration. For the music to portray the real meaning, it has to be composed thus:

Ezi Nwa (Good Child)

E - zin - wa, go - ta - ran - ne gi a - kw'o - g'e - yi n'u - ka n - ne.

Again, a composer may intend to set the following sentence to music. *Nwa na-àkwá ákwā.* (The baby is crying.)

Nwa na-akwa akwa. (The baby is crying.)

N - wa na - kwa a - kwa. O na - kwa a - kwa.

The above piece of music has changed the meaning to the baby is sewing a cloth. It is important to point out the fact that only one note of the music has distorted the meaning of the sentence. The note is E flat, the subdominant, which is the fourth degree of the scale on the 4th bar of the music. How can a baby who is supposed to be crying turn out to sew a cloth? This is a typical example of distorting the meaning of the message which the composer intends to put across to the audience. In order to correct the above distortion therefore, the music should run thus:

Nwa na-akwa akwa. (The baby is crying.)

N - wa na - kwa a - kwa. O na - kwa a - kwa.

A closer observation of the above piece of music reveals that the subdominant note that caused the distortion in the first music on the 4th and 8th bars has been replaced with the dominant note. With this, the real meaning of the sentence has been restored. Thus, the baby is crying, the real message that the composer wishes to portray has been restored.

Many materials abound in different parts of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular in terms of vocal and instrumental music, which form the basis for indigenous art music composition. These materials could be manipulated in one way or the other for indigenous art music composition. In line with the above view, Onyeji (2014) recommends:

Rhythmic composition, structuring and formatting for African art music constitute significant part of the overall distinctions of the creative outcome. Drawing from the creative idioms of indigenous African societies is greatly recommended not only for identity but also for a level of authenticity in many societies. Qualitative rhythmic composition and structuring offer palpable link to the indigenous creative identity that African art music composers could and necessarily should employ to distinguish their creative outputs, if they would contribute to the quest for the development of African art music uniquely identifiable in the world music milieu.
(p. 36)

In practical terms, Uzoigwe (2014) demonstrates the use of material of folksong to compose an original music with piano accompaniment in the spirit of African pianism in his work titled *Tuzu*. Below is the opening section of the work.

TUZU

Composer: Joshua Uzoigwe

Moderately Fast

Soprano

Piano

S

Pno.

S

Pno.

Nwan-nem e - ke - na - zi - na Tu -

Al

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6

S

zu, nwan-nem e-ke-na-zi-na Tu - zu. M-bo-sia-nyi ga-ro-bo-d'a-la-ku

Pno.

8

S

ba, a-nyie-li-ro, a-nyia-la-ro, n'e-nu-ge-ne ka-nyi

Pno.

10

S

la-ro, bi-k'e-ke-ne-zi-na Tu - zu.

Pno.

Summary and Conclusion

The paper investigated Africa-sensed music education and indigenous art music composition. It pointed out the fact that Africa-sensed music education is that based on the folk musical practices of the people of Africa in terms of their folklores, folksongs and other musical practices that are embedded in the culture

of the people. The methodology used for the study is survey. Here, materials of culture that are used for Africa-sensed music education and hence indigenous music composition were highlighted. In communities where there is much emphasis on farming, farming strategies are learnt in the home even before the child goes for formal education. In some communities, where fishing is emphasized, fishing festivals contribute in no small way to the art of fishing even before the child attends a formal education.

A community where blacksmithing is practised obviously gives their children opportunity to learn the art of blacksmithing. These arts are learnt through keen observation and participation in the indigenous practices of the different communities that abound in Africa. The paper also discussed language as an important aspect of indigenous art music composition emphasizing the effect of tonal inflection on indigenous art music composition. Examples of the effect were highlighted and the appropriate music pointed out to correct the distortions that arose from using wrong tones for the compositions.

Recommendations:

Based on the above submissions, the following recommendations are made:

- Music educators and composers should look inwards and harness materials that abound in every nook and cranny of Africa for Africa-sensed music education and indigenous music composition.
- African art music composers should base their compositions on elements drawn from the cultural life of the people.
- Emphasis should be placed on the tonal inflection of the language on indigenous music of the people in order to avoid a distortion of the meaning, which the indigenous art music composer wants to put across to the audience.
- Any composer that wishes to compose music in another language he is not used to, should learn the meaning of the words he wants to set to music and be sure of the rising and falling tones of the words in order to avoid embarrassment to himself and the audience.

If all these and more are observed, I am optimistic that a viable Africa-sensed music education will arise. Composers who are proudly conscious of their culture and who look around for elements or materials drawn from their environment will emerge.

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