

PROLIFERATION OF EMERGENT GOSPEL MUSIC ARTISTES IN NIGERIA: EFFECTS AND DEFECTS IN A DISTRESSED ECONOMY

Emmanuel I. Aimiuwu, Ph.D.

Introduction

Announcements in most Nigerian churches during Sunday worships are usually cadenced with promotion and launching of a member's album CD video – visual or audio. In this period of economic recession, music making has become one of the ways of keeping the youths busy and providing them a means of livelihood. Some churches have even gone into the production of their own music basically for fund raising without consultation or involvement of music professionals. The effect and qualities of such CDs and DVDs in most cases fall below minimum musical standards; they in most cases, keep recycling and duplicating rhythmic contents of existing popular songs. The problem is that people with little or no musical knowledge and training dabble into the so-called gospel music as emergent solo gospel artistes. The rate at which these artistes are coming up is alarming and the quality of their products is of a big concern spiritually and professionally.

This paper attempts to address the issue of the emerging proliferation of solo Gospel musical artistes in Nigeria and the effects and defects in Nigeria's distressed economy. In other words, the advantages and the disadvantages of this proliferation is the main focus of this paper. It is a common knowledge that in Nigerian society, the number of gospel musicians is on the increase. This fact can be attested to by the evidence of the numbers of CD/DVD video and audio in circulation for commercial purposes in our urban and rural areas, particularly in Christian dominated cities and states in Nigeria.

Gospel music practice is not new in Nigeria. In fact it predated Nigeria's independence. According to Omojola (1995) in his book, *Nigeria Art Music*;

The emergence of new musical idioms in Nigeria should not be seen as a novel phenomenon as change has either through internal processes or the influence of a foreign culture affected Nigerian music.... Perhaps the most far reaching of such changes is the introduction of European classical music

He informs that such introduction and performances often take place in the church, schools and public halls in the cities such as Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu, Calabar, Benin, Jos and other Nigerian cities. Traditionally, in most cases, musical performance was predominantly communally practiced and musicians who grew up to become soloists are usually born into families with long history of communal music making. But these days, things have taken an explosive dimension leading to a number of solo gospel musicians emerging on daily basis, which may be attributed to depressed economic situation in society.

The Nigerian government may have declared that the Nigerian economy is out of distress, but for the common man in the street, he knows where the shoe pinches. The growing number of unemployed Nigerian youths has affected the society in such a way that some people have engaged in all manners of lawful/unlawful means of survival. One of such lawful means of livelihood is probably through music. This situation has given rise to the emergence of a good number of gospel artistes that are now popular and financially well to do. This explains why many Nigerian youths are delving into music production and some becoming emergent gospel artistes.

Gospel Music

Gospel music can be described as religious music based on folk music melodies with the elements of the story of the good news about the salvation of the soul as offered by the lord Jesus Christ the savior of mankind. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, Gospel music is a genre of American protestant music, rooted in the religious revivals of the Twentieth Century, which developed in different directions within the white European American and the black African

American communities of the United States of America. Over a period of time, this tradition was disseminated through song publishing, concerts, recordings radio and television broadcast of religious services; such that it later developed into a popular music commercial genre. Until early Twentieth Century, gospel music was generally guarded by serious religious doctrine related to hymns. These rules in gospel hymns were changed in the second half of the Twentieth Century by the protestant religious revival that caused a major influenced in the popularity and styles that breaded variety of gospel music.

Black Gospel Music

The tradition that came to be recognized as black American gospel music emerged in the late 20th century alongside ragtime, blues, and Jazz music that was notably blended with black spirituals slave songs and white hymnody. Among the prominent black gospel music composers and performers were;

- i. Rev. C. A Tindley (1851-1933). He was the composer of the tune "I Will Overcome," which may have influenced the American civil rights movement anthem "We Shall Overcome."
- ii. A blind priest, Rev. Gary Davis (1896-1972), who was a wandering preacher and guitar soloist. His works include the every green "Precious Lord and "Take My Hand."
- iii. Mahalla Jackson (1911-1972).
- iv. Sister Tharpe (1915-1973).

Guitar and vocal works performances introduced gospel music into night clubs and concert theatres. That is the reasons some would define gospel music as a religious music which is highly emotional and evangelical music that originated from among Americans Christians and was a strong influence in the development of soul music. (Keazor, 2015).

Nigerian Gospel Music

The origin of Nigerian or African gospel music style has its root from what started in the 19th century in the United States of American Churches by white and black African Americans. Nigerian Gospel was later introduced by the Portuguese catholic missionaries to Benin and Warri through a rudimentary form of Portuguese liturgical music during the early evangelization of those kingdoms from 1485-1600. However it was during the middle of the 19th century, when Church missionary Society (C.M.S) came to Nigeria to spread the gospel message

through the Anglican Church that main Nigerian Gospel music was established by the pioneers, of which one was Rev. Josiah Ransome-Kuti, who began experimenting with the fashion of choral music with Yoruba Language and melodic structures. In the same vein, Ikoli Harcourt Whyte composed some Christian choral music in Igbo Language. Ransome-Kuti and Ikoli Harcourt Whyte became the models for several generations of Nigerian gospel musicians; as gospel hymns in various languages evolved with church services in indigenous languages. At the beginning of the 20th century, changes as a result of American gospel music influences were felt in Nigerian gospel music; in such way that American gospel music stars like Jim Reeve, Johnny Nash, Ron Kenoly and Don Moen were commanding large followership in Nigeria. This influenced led to the emergence of a new generation of contemporary Nigerian Christian musicians and many Pentecostal evangelical groups. In the east emerged the Voice of the Cross; from the west emerged Evangelist Bola Are and the Good Women Choir of the Christ Apostolic Church; in the Midwest, emerged Ogbonmwan a blind Evangelist and a powerful gospel singer in Benin; and Panam Percy Paul from the Northern part of Nigeria. The successes recorded by these artistes led to the development of a number of secular musicians releasing gospel oriented musical albums and cassettes. Popular musicians like Sonny Okosun, Kris Okotie, Ebenezer Obey, Sunny Ade and many others were among the leading secular artistes in this era.

In the -90s, a new generation of American stars emerged in gospel music and their manifestation gave rise to gospels artistes such as Kingsley Ike, Sammie Okposo, Ese Agese and many others who took after their American heroes, such as Kirk Franklin, CeCe Winans, Ron Kenoly and Don Moen.

By year 2000, gospel music had established itself as an important genre in Nigeria. Churches provided grounds for the youths who have no money by purchasing and providing them with musical instruments and equipment in various Churches. This encouraged many youths who had musical talents to join the Church bands; thereby making gospel music an essential part of the development of Nigerian music industry.

Nigerian Gospel Artistes/Singers

As a matter of fact, the list of gospel artistes in Nigeria is an exhaustible one, as it increases in direct proportion with the growth of Churches in Nigeria. Due to

economic recession, many Nigerians delve into Church planting and music making as means of soft-income generation that does not need much capital; other than good knowledge of the bible and/or a good voice and access to a digital recording studio. The following is an attempt to list TOP TEN Nigerian gospel artistes according to NAIJA.com 2018 <https://www.naija.ng/1148403-list-top-niegrian-gospel-singers>.

1. Mera: A talented woman from Ijaw speaking people in Niger Delta Area of Nigeria. One of her popular songs is “Nanaowe Mbana” translated as “God Thank You”.
2. Lara George: A talented producer, singer and music director. One of her popular songs is Ijoba Orun.
3. Joe Praise: His song “Mighty God” which is on his debut album entitled “My Praise” is well known in Nigeria.
4. Tim Godfrey: He has great talent and has collaborated with many international gospel artistes like Kirk Franklin, Tye Tribbet and so on in performances and recordings.
5. Ade Ehi: Her musical career started when she was only 10 years old when she was backup singer for a little star named Tosin Jegede. Some of the songs that brought her to fame are Testimony and Only You.
6. Frank Edwards: He is blessed with an incredible voice and talent. Songs that brought him to fame include “*Oghene Doh*” *Mwa Mwa*, etc.
7. Steve Crown: He became famous in 2016 following the releasing of his songs, “We wait on you” and “You are Great and Awesome God”.
8. Nathaniel Bassey: He is one of the most popular Nigerian gospel artistes. He is also a saxophonist.

Nigerian Gospel Artistes in a Recessed Economy

In times of great difficulty such as in a recessed economy, people tend to seek help from God than in normal circumstances. This explains the reason many young Nigerians are now becoming emergent gospel musicians in order to make ends meet. Unlike the rich musical background of notable Nigerian gospel artistes like Panam Percy Paul, Sunny Okosuns and many others of their category, many Nigerian gospel artistes in recent times, are only in the music business by virtue of the need to survive and thereby taking advantage of available digital technological advancements in the music industry. Most of these new generational gospel artists have little or no proper musical training apart from raw natural talents.

The availability of modern digital recording technology has enabled some artistes produce their works in the comfort of their bedrooms; as well as have same publicized for public consumption on social media through android phones, without any considerations of quality and standard. Due to this development, music making has become one of the easiest ways of keeping the average Nigerian youth busy in this era of economic recession.

Sadly, many Churches do not bother about the quality and standard of the works of these emergent gospel artistes found in Churches. Many do not even care about the content of these songs; the lyrics, costumes, or even images displayed in the visuals of such musical videos. The motivating factor here is money and the desperation to survive in a recessed economy.

Digital recording has made possible the recycling of songs and rhythmic duplications of existing known popular songs. There also exist many music producers whose main aim is to make money and therefore, they throw professionalism overboard in their attempt to maximized profits. Digitalization of music production process is adversely affecting the need for musicians to be trained in the process and the result of these developments is dangerously inimical to the church, the musicians, and society in general. To the church, there is a dwindling fortune of hymns and singing of hymns, the dearth of quality indigenous compositions for the church, the emergence of lyric airs (choruses) as replacement for anthems and hymns, non-availability of well-grounded and tested choirs to perform works and maintain musical ethics of the founding fathers of church music. The issue of spirituality in Church music that was peculiar to some Church denominations in Nigeria is gradually becoming a thing of the past. Most churches have adopted the new systems of singing and dancing in their churches to the point of turning some Churches to quasi entertainment centers due to the proliferations of emergent gospel artists in the face of distressed economic woes. Gone are the days when the sacred hymns and canticles expressing God's infinite mercy, love, joy and peace usher you into his holy presence" (Abogade, 2003). It is now a common practice to jeer, yell, and scream and even "discorize" dance steps in Churches; as opposed to initial serenity and solemnity which the Church was used to be known for.

Musically, the trained musicologists and composers are being outwitted by the un-trained emergent gospel artistes aided by technology of digital recording.

Similarly in the area of what may be called contemporary art music budding; composers of all sorts have emerged from every look and cranny, village choirmasters with little or no musical training have become composers (Gospel Artistes) of native airs, with the conviction that their works are better than all others or at least as good as the best of the works of well-trained musicians (Ekwueme, 2000).

Effects, Defects and Conclusion

The proliferation of emergent gospel artistes of all sorts in Nigeria portends danger for the development and adequate training of musicians/musicologists as well as the future of trained composers and musicologists. Secondly most of the songs composed or recorded by these self-trained composers or so called gospel artistes are subject of launching and dedications in various churches. They are mostly scraps of melodies, patterned all manner of styles of music found in the secular world, accompanied with heavy musical instrumentation backed up by high digital technology and unfortunately copied from others electronically. It is sad to note that some of these songs lack originality in content, styles and patterns.

In a distressed economy, a lot of problems abound; ranging from civil strife to crisis and many other vices. Musically and socially, one of the biggest problems is the proliferation of emergent gospel artistes or musicians who would have no business with the art of music making and compositions but for the distressed economy. The role of music in Church development cannot be over emphasized but the proliferation of “man must work” gospel artistes, with little or no training in the art of music poses a lot of problems. These have been discussed in this paper, highlighting their effects and defects with a conclusion that their activities have eroded various societal and musicological values; despite the economic relief their kind of art offers them in this distressed Nigerian economy.

It is therefore recommended that the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) liaises with musicologists, music educators and the federal government, states governments, local governments and other organs of authorities to look into the ills of this proliferation of emergent gospel artistes in Nigeria and possibly enact laws to guide and possibly minimize/regulate its rate.

References

- Aboyade, B. (2003). Drumming in the house of God. *Punch Newspaper* Dec. 17, pg. 16.
- David A. (2014). *Journal of Popular Music Studies*.
<http://doi.org/10.1111/JPMS12095>. cited 8/05/2018.
- Ekwueme, L. (2000). Music in Nigerian social development: Step forward. In Bode Omojola (ed) *Music and social Dynamics in Nigeria*. Ilorin: Department of Performing Arts.
- Emielu M.A. (2013). *Nigerian highlife music*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC).
- Gospel Music, (2015). *Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopediia –Britannica ultimate*. Referenced suite Chigaco: Encyclopedia Britannica.
- Olusoji, S. (2006). Music in Nigeria contemporary Churches: The social commitment of the composer. *Nigerian Musicology Journal (JAMIN)* Vol. 2, pgs 176-187.
- Omojola B. (1995). *Nigerian art music*. Institute Frengis de Recherche en Afrique French Institute for Research in Africa. Ibadan: University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Internet Sources

<https://www.musicinafrica.net...//>... Gospel Music in Nigeria. Retrieved 15-05-2018.