

AYO BANKOLE: INFLUENCE OF HIS CHROMATICISM TECHNIQUES ON YORUBA CHORAL STYLE

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Introduction

Music in Africa is part of life and highly diversified. Among the several categories of music in Africa are traditional, art and popular. Each of these is divided into various musical genres within and outside its immediate environment. In considering therefore African art music, Adegbite (2001) submits that, the cross-fertilization of African and Western musical elements has resulted in a type of musical synthesis called 'African art music'. Omojola (1995) had earlier identified three main factors as directly responsible for the emergence and growth of Nigerian contemporary art music. These factors are:

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; and
3. a spirit of cultural awakening, when the educated African elites in Nigeria, who initially distanced themselves from the local populace and traditional Nigerian culture, later realized that political and economic independence needed to be preceded by a greater awareness of their own culture.

The foregoing factors made way for the emergence of Nigerian contemporary art music and national identity.

While taking a deep look at art music in Nigeria, Olatunji (1998) observes that:
In Nigeria today are a significant number of composers, trained in the universities and conservatoires both at home and abroad,

writing works which are conceived along the lines of European music but which often employ a considerable degree of African elements... the most important objective of these composers is to help create a modern tradition of Nigerian arts music through a fusion of European and African musical elements.

Nigeria has three major languages of which Yoruba language is one. Yoruba language is tonal in nature and the meaning of the spoken words depends on the intonation. Euba (1992) informs that Yoruba is a tone language in which the meaning of a word depends on the intonation used in speaking the word. The same combination of letters spoken with different intonations has different meanings, because of its “inflexionary” nature. Inflexion is defined as the way the sound of voice goes up and down when we speak. Therefore, Yoruba language can be wrongly used and interpreted as a result of distortion by composers.

Although Olatunji (1998) observes that studies have been carried out by some scholars into the theoretical bases of compositional processes of Nigerian contemporary art music, a good number of these art music composers are from the Yoruba ethnic group. It is therefore, necessary to continue the quest to know more about Nigerian contemporary art music composers by conducting more detailed biographical and analytical studies into their lives and works. Attempts have been made in the past by scholars and composers to study Ayo Bankole’s biography and works but none has been done on the concept of his “chromaticism.”

The music scene in Africa of contemporary times is highly diversified. Among the observable categories of musical types are the traditional music, popular music, religious music, and African art music. Idolor (2002) opines that art music is individually owned; it is the product of literary creativity imagined, notated, decoded, interpreted, appreciated and analyzed on academic basis. According to Aning (1972), contemporary African art music includes any vocal or instrumental work composed by an African or non- African who has had some experience in traditional African music. Such a composition may be for an African or foreign instrumental medium. Art music can also be defined as music designated for intent listening or presentation as ‘concert’ music; music in which expression of feeling is combined with high level of craftsmanship and a sense of beauty.

African art music is a specialized genre that reflects both Western and African elements. Euba (1977) however, defined it as music composed for performance by a body of trained musicians usually in an auditorium specially designed for the purpose, before a clearly defined audience which by mutual understanding, is specifically excluded from joining the performance. Lo-Bamijoko (2001) asserts that, African art music can be described as those musical compositions which Western trained musicians produced under the influence of their Western music training. The genre demands a high level of training on the part of the performer and a relatively high level of sophistication on the part of the audience.

From the foregoing it will not be out of place to submit here that contemporary African art music is relatively new, highly experimental and composed by Western educated African musicians and harnesses both African and Western musical idioms. It is designed purely for listening and for an audience that has been exposed to and developed a taste for Western music.

Ayo Bankole's Biography

Ayo Bankole, a native of Yaba, Lagos state, Nigeria, was born on 17th May, 1935, at Jos, in Plateau State of Nigeria, to the family of Mr. Theophilus Abiodun Bankole who was an organist and choirmaster in Jos. His mother was a music instructor for several years at Queens' School, Ede, Osun State, which is a Federal Government High School. Ayo Bankole, a music legend has contributed immensely to Nigerian art music through his creative musical artistry. As a creative composer, he has written a variety of works some of which include part-songs, piano works, cantatas, songs for solo voice, Christmas Oratorio, a requiem, an opera entitled 'A night of Miracles' and many others. Although Ayo Bankole contributed immensely to the development of modern art music in Nigeria, he did not live long to witness the fruits of his efforts. On November 6, 1976, at the age of forty-one, Ayo Bankole and his wife, Toro Bankole, were killed in very tragic circumstances. He is still greatly admired by Nigerian musicians for his magnificent contributions to Nigerian music as a composer, music teacher, musicologist, organist, pianist, conductor, and choral director- an extremely gifted man who was not able to develop his God-given gift to full potential.

Concept of “Chromaticism”

‘Chromaticism’ is a coined word from chromatic. *Harvard Dictionary of Music* defines it as, the use of raised or lowered notes, instead of the normal degrees of the scale. Chromaticism often serves to heighten the emotional tension of music. Miller (1972) calls it extensive use of accidentals in melody and harmony. And what is accidental in music? It is the sharp, flat or natural sign used to raise or lower a pitch of sound in music. Going by the history of Western music by *Harvard Brief Dictionary of Music*, chromaticism is rare in the works of Haydn and Mozart; it was fully exploited by the Romantic composers like Chopin, Schumann, Liszt, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, and others.

After 1900, chromaticism lost its former meaning as a “color-modification” of the diatonic scale, and became established as a new tonal realm based on the equivalence of the twelve tones of the chromatic scale. Chromaticism as a concept is realized in Debussy’s whole-tone scale and, much more completely, in Schonberg’s twelve-tone technique. About 1925, there began a reaction against excessive chromaticism. It found its most conspicuous expression in the pandiatonicism of Stravinsky. (Willi and Ralph, 1971).

During my undergraduate days in the Department of Music, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, I was privileged to be a member of the Departmental Choir under the directorship of Prof. Ademola Adegbite. The choir learnt and performed one of Ayo Bankole’s *Three Parts-Songs* for female choir entitled “*Enikeni to ba gbe Ara re ga*”. This experience enriched my interest in Ayo Bankole’s works as well as aroused a strong passion for in-depth study into his musical works especially, as touching his effective use of chromaticism in ways that absolutely agree with the tonal inflexions of Yoruba language. Since then, I developed a special interest in collecting more of the works of this musical “giant” who Euba (1977) describes as having the makings of a genius, a facility for composition and a gift for presenting his materials in an uncluttered and attractive idiom which bear comparison with Mozart and Schubert. In his preface to the *Three Yoruba Songs*, Bankole (1975) says;

... in the songs, I attempted to achieve truly logogenic melodies, without landing in the ‘square boxes’ that typify such folk-type melodies, and to fuse these with meaningful harmonic progressions in the European classical idiom. To my delight, it

was not only possible to achieve this synthesis, but to experiment with newer sounds which do not, at least, interrupt the logogenic flow of the melodic lines.

Hence, this study seeks to probe the compliance or otherwise of Yoruba choral works of Ayo Bankole despite the use of chromatic notes, the fusion of African and European idioms in some of his compositional works and his eclectic approach to composition.

Yoruba Choral Music of Ayo Bankole

Ayo Bankole was a renowned composer of art music of his time, who wrote music that he himself could perform. He composed a substantial amount of music for choral, piano, organ and orchestra, that is, technically oriented towards European performers. He was a creative man, and his creative ability procedure led to the synthesis of Yoruba and Western musical elements in his works. Most of his choral compositions are in Yoruba language, the greater part of which is secular and only few of them are religious.

Most African languages are tonal in nature. Bankole (1975) in agreement with this says that Yoruba is a tone language in which the meanings of words are related to the tonal patterns used in speaking it. Euba (1992), in his own view, observed that when Yoruba words are sung to pre-composed European hymn tunes, the tunes invariably conflict with the speech tones of the words and consequently interfere with the meaning. Consequently, the words either become meaningless or assume meanings other than those intended. The correspondence between speech and tones as obtained in Yoruba traditional music was not reflected when Yoruba texts were set to European tunes. T.K.E. Phillips, as quoted by Olatunji (1998), says that the sensitivity of words to tone inflexion in Yoruba speech is so great that the sense of words is often perverted and meaningless by slight alteration in the tones. Ekwueme (2001) also agrees with this by saying that Yoruba is a tone language in which the meaning of a word depends on the intonation used in speaking the word. These declarations have been agreed upon and become a source of inspiration to many scholars who have made tremendous contributions in the area of Yoruba choral composition. Prominent names of such scholars that come to mind include W.W. Echezona, who had used this same approach for Igbo language. Others are Akin Euba, Ayo Bankole, Samuel Akpabot, and Tunji Vidal to mention but a few.

Many Nigerian composers translate directly the European tunes of songs to sing with Yoruba text, while in the process the music becomes insignificant and the tonal language distorted. Olaniyan (2001) says that some choruses or songs originally sung in English language are translated into other Nigerian languages and in such a case, the same English versions are used for translated text and most cases the result is the distortion of the tonal inflexion of the indigenous languages. He continues by saying that when music is being performed in Yoruba community, the participating audience will like to know the meaning of the song text in case of vocal music and what the master drummer is saying in instrumental music. This shows that in Africa, music is used for communication and cultural expression thus; Omojola (2001) gives the example below to illustrate the ambiguity of Yoruba language;

From bi-syllabic Yoruba morpheme /o-wo/, different meanings may be intended depending on how the syllables are intoned. Thus,

- a) /ò-wò/: (low-low tones) means **respect or the name of a Yoruba town.**
- b) /o-wò/: (mid- low tones) means **broom**
- c) /o-wó/: (mid -high tones) means **hand.**

This shows that in Yoruba traditional music, melodic patterns often reflect the intonation and speech rhythms of words in order that the correct word meaning may be musically articulated. In the same vein, Olatunji (1998) emphasizes this point when he quotes Phillips, that, the reason while tonal inflexion must be followed even in music is that most monosyllabic (and even some bi-syllabic) words have several meanings according to their accents. This is vividly reflected in the example given below:

Jó – dance, burn; **Jò**- leak

Kó- learn, hang not; **ko**-write, crow, **kò**-refuse

Wá- come, search, **wà**- dig, paddle

Mí –breathe; **mì**- shake, swallow

So – tell, throw, **sò**- place down, complain.

The illustrations above reveal or drive home the point that Yoruba language is tonal, therefore, Yoruba art composers must ensure that their compositions maintain the tonal inflexion, so as not to distort the meaning of words. Because of the inflexionary nature of Yoruba language, T.K.E Phillips suggests that Yoruba art music composers should explore the use of pentatonic scale above other types of

scale in their compositional works. Quoted by Omojola (1995), Phillips cautions church music composers in his days that employed other European diatonic scales then;

Let me sound a note of warning to a certain class of composers of native airs who have lately come to the limelight and think that they are improving Yoruba music by frequently, almost invariably, using the semi-tonal ending 'te'-'doh' (leading note-tonic). I advise them to study canon, Kuti's collection of both original composition and of popular Yoruba folk songs (which contain) no single semi-tonal ending.

Omojola (1995) quoting Phillips further pointed out that,

It is known that every nation has been identified with a particular scale at various stages of its development. For example the Europeans, as all other nations of the World, began with pentatonic scale, followed by the seven-note scale with its mode, then the major/minor modes and lastly as it stands today, the chromatic scale of twelve tones.

He continues that:

Fortunately or unfortunately, Yoruba have no such succession of scale, yet, they have only the pentatonic scale to their credit, although at times some strange notes creep into their songs which might be regarded as the result of an instinctive feeling after variety and extension by means of embellishment.

The above was the view and ideology of T.K.E Phillips who was generally acknowledged as the doyen of Nigerian art music. This was contrary to Ayo Bankole's view and ideology about the usages of Western scales. Bankole used the European diatonic and chromatic scales to juxtapose African idioms. In Ayo Bankole's preface to his three part songs for female choir, he states that:

...the words of these part-songs have therefore largely determined their own melodies, although these melodies have been manipulated by the composer, who believes that the speech tonality of Yoruba music has not that strictness and rigidity which the Western scale system imposes on Western songs. Hence, the chromatic notes are those which would ordinarily occur if such

songs were taught to indigenous singers (without Western musical training).

In other words, Ayo Bankole's musical compositions really highlights the influence of European and African cultures on his music using the Western major, minor and chromatic scales. Omideyi (2001) in assertion to the foregoing,

In the development of Nigerian art music, there were two schools of thought and the protagonist of the first school was Dr. T.K.E. Phillips who argued that because most of Nigerian languages are tonal, particularly Yoruba language, Nigerian music could not use the European seven (7) tone scale. Only the pentatonic scale which has five (5) tones d, r, m, s and l should be used. This school of thought was accepted with swinging alacrity and great fanfare and it went on for many years. Many people toiled at it among them were two of my colleagues: A.B. David and A.A. Layeni both of whom were predecessors of Hubert Ogunde.

He continues by saying:

The second school of thought was promoted by later arrivals on the scene. These represented my set and included W.W.C. Echezona, Akin Euba, Ayo Bankole, Laz Ekwueme etc. In their view there were no serious harm done to Nigerian art music in terms of writing and performing, provided it was done well. Therefore, there was no reason why the seven (7) tone scale could not be applicable to Nigerian art music.

Now, it is clear that Ayo Bankole's viewpoint was to experiment the use of Western scales (major, minor and chromatic) and fusion of African/European idioms in his Yoruba compositions without distorting the tonal inflexionary nature of the language. In Bankole's opinion in the preface to *Three Yoruba Songs* for baritone and piano, he claimed to have attempted to achieve truly logogenic melodies, without landing in the square boxes that typify such folk-type melodies, and to fuse these with meaningful harmonic progressions in the European classical idiom; he acknowledged that it was not only possible to achieve this synthesis, but to experiment with newer sounds which do not, at least, interrupt the logogenic flow of the melodic lines.

On this note, Omojola (1995) agrees with Ayo Bankole's viewpoint above by saying that:

Bankole's style is defined by a personal approach to reinterpreting elements of traditional Yoruba music and their fusion with European idioms. Thus, although his harmonic style generally remains within the bounds of tonality, it is frequently characterized by features such as whole-tone scales, modality, the interval of the tri-tone and much use of chromaticism, often within a tonal language defined through repetition and emphasis rather than orthodox harmonic procedures.

Bankole's Chromaticism Technique in Yoruba Choral Music

According to T.K.E Philips, quoted by Olatunji (1998), the sensitivity of words to tone inflexion in Yoruba speech is so great that the sense of words is often perverted and meaningless by slight alteration in the tone. This can be true in harmonizing Yoruba songs, especially when one is trying to combine three or four voice parts. Many Nigerian composers of Yoruba arts music have written their works without adequate compliance with the tonal inflexionary nature of the language because some have limited themselves to the diatonic or pentatonic scale of Western music. Ayo Bankole experimented the use of chromaticism mainly in his Three Part Songs (for female choir) where he used Soprano, Alto and Tenor parts together to bring out the true logogenic flow of the melodic lines and sense of words used in the music.

He employed different forms of compositional techniques in his works. These include polyphony, inversions (retrograde) contrapuntal, responsorial, counterpoint, and sequential movements, etc. in addition to chromaticism, in order to achieve the real meaning of the song text. Ayo Bankole has experimented with the use of chromaticism in his vocal works to the extent that, hardly will one find any of his Yoruba vocal music without this concept of chromaticism, be it solo, duet, female choir or mixed choir categories.

One of Ayo bankole's predecessors and mentors T. K. E Philips, had worked tirelessly to ensure commendable compliance to tone inflexion in Yoruba language when singing. According to Olatunji (1998),

...argument on the tonal inflexionary nature of Yoruba language has always continued to be a source of inspiration to many a scholar who has later made tremendous contributions in this area prominent names of such scholars that come to mind include; W.W. Echezona, who had used this same approach for Igbo language. Others are Akin Euba, Ayo Bankole, Sam Akpabot, August .O. Vidal, Chief J.O. Ajibola --- to mention just a few.

According to Ayo Bankole (Junior), his father (Ayo Bankole) was inspired by some of his predecessors such as T.K.E Philips and Fela Sowande who had already advocated a perfect reflection of meaning of Yoruba lyrics when composing. So, coupled with his own experience both within and outside the country, Bankole went beyond the use of pentatonic and diatonic scale in his composition. He made use of whole-tone and chromatic scales. Ayo Bankole experimented with the use of chromaticism and whole-tone scale to achieve his long time desire of correct replication of the tonal inflexionary nature of Yoruba language in musical works, especially, vocal composition.

In Ayo Bankole's Three Part Songs for female choir, the three songs entitled '*Orisa bi ofun*,' '*Ile-iwe nikan lori yungbayungba*' and '*Enikeni t'o ba gbe ara re ga*', he demonstrated the use of chromaticism in part songs with retention of Yoruba tonal inflexion. Because of the semantic implications of many Yoruba language, Bankole deems it fit to represent the lyrics of the language well, when setting words to music. This is in accordance with assertion, as quoted by Olatunji (1998), that the reason why tonal inflexion must be followed even in the music is that most monosyllabic (and even some bi-syllabic) words have several meanings according to their tonal accent.

There are many instances where the replication of tonal inflexion on the inner parts (Alto and Tenor) at times, does not correspond in meaning with what the Soprano part is singing (textually) to the intended audience, just because of misplacement of notes by concentrating mainly on Western diatonic scale. This is one major achievement by Ayo Bankole to diversify the use of Western scale (diatonic) and Yoruba pentatonic scale and experimented with chromaticism. This is what Bankole did in his Three Part Songs for female choir '*Enikeni t'o ba gbe ara re ga*,' '*Orisa bi ofun*' and '*Ile-iwe Nikan l'ori yungbayungba*'.

Conclusion

The analysis of some of Ayo Bankole's Choral Compositions shows his ability to experiment with new sounds beyond pentatonicism of his predecessors to the level of chromaticism for effective reflection of tonal inflexionary nature of Yoruba language. It was also pointed out that Yoruba language at times; sounds ambiguous, (a word that has several meanings) according to their tonal accent. This was taken care of by Ayo Bankole in his choral compositions where many parts sing contrapuntally; in order to achieve the tonal inflexionary nature of Yoruba language.

In summing up, we can see Ayo Bankole as a Composer, Choral Director, Conductor, Instructor, Teacher and Ethnomusicologist, who had studied critically the traditional music of his people back at home (Nigerian) and Western Music (outside Nigeria). His life experiences are reflected in his musical compositions and his superseding creative ability appears to bring in the conservancy, development and the advancement of Yoruba music tradition within a new concept, chromaticism, even after his demise.

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