

MUSICAL PERFORMANCES FOR WELLNESS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF EVANGELIST AMAKA OKWUOHA'S MUSIC AND BIOGRAPHY

**Blessing U. Onyeke
and
Paschal C. Ozoaghuta**

Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed significant growth in the development of gospel music which has brought about spiritual and physical wellness of society. Regrettably, most of these songs are not adequately documented on music score sheet. Based on this shortcoming, this paper aims to discuss the music and biography of Amaka Okwuoha, transcribe, analyze, document the selected songs and highlight the spiritual impacts of her songs on the social, physical and spiritual lives of the people of Nigeria. The researchers adopted historical and descriptive research methods using content analysis and an observation as an instruments for data collection. The researchers were able to uncover that Amaka Okwuoha had a challenging upbringing which gave her inspiration coupled with her religious affiliation. Also discovered was that the lyrics of her songs are believed by her to be an inspirational to her generation and the generations to come. Her songs are free from the praises of men. They are also for the propagation of the gospel and for the physical and spiritual wellness of the people.

Evangelist, Mrs. Amaka Okwuoha, popularly known as “Chioma Jesus” started her music when gospel music in Nigeria was in vogue, therefore, most of her music falls within the gospel genre. As a result of this, the researchers considered it necessary to consult some music articles and books with particular emphasis on how gospel music came into being. Subsequently, what we termed as gospel music

today is a genre of Christian music composed and performed for many purposes including aesthetic, pleasure, religious ceremonies and for entertainment (Keazor, 2015). It usually has dominant vocals (often with strong use of harmony) with Christian lyrics but is not mostly documented in staff notation like the hymns below.

The image shows a musical score for the hymn "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise". It is written for four voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The music is in the key of B-flat major (two flats) and 3/4 time. The melody is simple and homophonic, with the lyrics "i - mor - tal in - vi - si - ble God on - ly wise" written below the notes. The notation includes stems, beams, and rests for each voice part.

It was first formally documented in the late 19th century in the USA. It was invented by a man called Thomas A. Dorsey, who was born outside Atlanta in the year 1899 but later moved to Chicago as a teenager. Dorsey was regarded across the globe as the father of gospel music. He was a popular "Jazz and blues pianist" around the town who combined choral composition with blues and jazz. He had toured with Ma Rainey throughout the roaring '20s and sold millions of copies of his blues song called "it's tight like that". Then his life was shattered. While on the road, Thomas A. Dorsey was informed that his wife had died during the childbirth. Rushing to his home, he learnt that his child too had died.

"My wife died and the baby died, and I had my life's hope in the baby. Dorsey said later. I lost quite a bit of trust. I lost a lot of confidence. In the lord or somebody. It was quite a while before I could get myself together." (Thomas, A. Dorsey, 1989)

Thomas A. Dorsey, aside the blues, poured his musical gifts into writing songs of faith. He had dabbled in religious music before, but now it became his passion, prompting him to write a new type of religious songs. He introduced syncopated rhythms, melancholic vocal lines and other blues elements to religious music. Dorsey invented the gospel song music that was neither totally sacred nor secular. Just a month after his personal disaster, Thomas A. Dorsey penned down another song called 'take my hand, precious lord'. The musical piece was regarded as one of the most popular of all the gospel songs he had composed. Over the years, he wrote such anthems as 'peace in the valley', 'today' and 'search me, lord'. After establishing gospel music at the pilgrim Baptist Church at 33rd street, Indiana

Avenue, he created the National convention of gospel choir and choruses. He started the first gospel publishing company and staged the first commercial gospel concerts all in the 1930s.

Not quite long, the company became centre of gospel music. It was Dorsey who coached, trained and inspired the first generation of gospel music singers, with Chicago greats such as Roberta Martin, Sallie Martin, Clara Ward and Mahalia Jackson. They usually performed in churches and concerts halls around the world. The gospel stars who followed him were James Cleveland, Edwin Hawkins, the singer (who hit the pop space with 'oh happy day' in the year 1969), the Soul Stirrers, Albertina Walker's Caravans, the Barrett Sisters, Shirley Caesar, Inez Andrews and Bassies Griffin. They all built upon Dorsey's innovations in Gospel music. However, it is worthy to note that gospel music today is an international industry. Its sound, having evolved into something considerably more high-tech than the sweet piano and tambourine settings of Dorsey's youth gospel music, yet the music owes its origins and its flowering to Dorsey, who created an entire genre of music and taught the world how to sing it (Keazor, 2015).

Gospel Music in Nigeria

Gospel music experts, otherwise known as gospel musicians comprises of men and women. They see themselves as artistes and as well as God's ministers by using music to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom (Adedeji & Loko, 2019). In Nigeria, Christian religious activities began in the 1840s and developed over the years till around 1900. These years witnessed the rebellion of Africans against the Western beliefs and practices and the establishment of indigenous African churches (Omoyajowo, 1975 & Asaju, 1995). It later produced various Pentecostal churches (Akangbe, 1977). The trends of events also produced different forms of music with gospel music inclusive. The gospel music types that were developed during these years above were propagated by individuals that started as church musicians. It originated from a fusion of traditional Christian hymns as performed by church choirs. The first pioneers received their training directly from the missionary schools where music was taught and in the churches as choristers and organists. Omojola (2014); Kehinde (1992); Adedeji (2010 & 2015); & Onwuekwe (2018) have a detailed account on the historical development of gospel music in Nigeria. They observed that Christian music in Nigeria was first introduced in the 16th century by Portuguese catholic missionaries to Benin and Warri through a rudimentary form of

Portuguese liturgical music during the early evangelization of those kingdoms between 1485 and 1600.

However, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that the robust missionary activities of the UK based church missionary society (CMS), wide-spread evangelization occurred across what was to become Nigeria. The CMS church introduced the choral music of the Anglican Church, which largely involved congregational singing. The pioneer of a uniquely Nigerian variant of choral music was the Rev. Josiah J. Ransome-Kuti, who began experiment with the fusion of choral music with Yoruba languages and melodic structures in the 1890s. He composed choral pieces, as church organist of the St. Peters church, Ake, Abeokuta embodying the language and style of the Yoruba people. His works were so recognized that he was invited to the United Kingdom in 1922 to record an album. A total of 43 tracks were recorded and some of these became standards such as "Egbeawonangeli", "Oyigiyigilorunwa" "Jesuobaalaanu". He was the first West African to record an album.

Ransome- Kuti, the grandfather of Fela Anikulapo- Kuti can thus be said to be the father of Nigerian gospel music. The other influential personalities in the growth of gospel music in the early 20th century was Christopher and composer Ikoli Harcourt-Whyte, who was the first person to compose Christian choral music in Igbo language of South-Eastern Nigeria. He began his experimentation with both forms in the 1930s. Ransome -Kuti and Harcourt -Whyte became the models for several generations of Nigerian gospel musicians. Gospel music now in Nigeria has many types or genres which include Gospel hip- hop, Afro-gospel, Makosa, Ariaria, Calypso, Western Gospel style, Reggae, Gospel rock, Gospel blues, Spirituals, and Hymns.

Amaka Okwuoha (A.k.a Chioma Jesus)

Amaka Okwuoha (A.k.a Chioma Jesus), is a Nigerian gospel musician. She is an International gospel music minister, recording artiste and Evangelist, who hail from Imo state, Nigeria (Praisewine, 2019). She loves the things of God and she is a core Christian right from her early life. Evangelist Mrs. Amaka Okwuoha, was born on the 12th of February (1972) in Imo State of Nigeria to late Nze, Euzebius Chukwumaeze Ebizie,

Omeokachie 1 of Amanator and Lolo Dorathy Ebizie of Ogboza autonomous community, Amanator clan in Ideato South Local Government Area, of Imo State in Nigeria. She is happily married to Evangelist Calistus Okwuoha and her marriage is blessed with three children.

Amaka Okwuoha popularly known as Chioma Jesus has been endowed with a supernatural talents and gifts from God which has projected her to the whole world. Amaka is a gift to her generation. She composes songs on her own and inspires the crowd whenever she is invited for a program. Her songs are prophetic and therapeutic. Her songs have gone a long way to revive talents, heal many broken hearted, weak souls, and down casted. Through the lyrics of her songs many have received the touch of God in their lives as she performs on stage. *Source: (<https://m.facebook.com/Amaka-okwuoha-aka-chioma-jesus>)*

Inspiration and Spiritual Wellness of Amaka Okwuoha's Music

Inspiration is the process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, especially to do something creative or edifying. Amaka Okwuoha through the lyrics of her songs inspires her followers with messages of hope and possibilities which have brought about the people's spiritual wellness in many ways. For instance, in one of her albums titled (Chi m adighi onye o n' echezo) meaning (My God does not forget anyone), she expressed messages of hope, restoration, faith and inspirations to her listeners through her powerful musical lyrics.

It is pertinent to understand at this juncture that good music with good lyrics can provide the perfect soil for spiritual growth. That is why in the Bible, we are told to be transformed by renewing our minds and music is regarded as a powerful tool for that. In Col. 3:16, Paul stated that singing has a component that allows the word of Christ to dwell in us richly as well as to encourage those around us. Her music even causes many to have a spiritual experience. This is to say that when truths of the scripture are composed with rich lyrics and beautiful melodies, they become like water to a dry and thirsty soul like ours. Many of her songs energize our moods and provide an outlet for us to take control of our feelings, especially when they are created from a genuine heart and with truth and pure intention.

Amaka Okwuoha's music also expresses messages of hard work and dedication. This was depicted in one her songs titled "Agam abu ihe Chineke siri na

mu ga-abu oooo, aga'm abu, olu aka madu apughi igbochi ya meaning that (I will be what God says I will be, the works of men can never prevail). This song propels the listener and promotes internal motivations. It helps the listener to achieve a certain level of focus and concentration in different places of their human endeavours. Her music also diverts the minds from fatigue and pain that might creep during exercise. However, listening to her music while exercising increases the efficiency of that activity. Also, for the physical and spiritual well-being of the people, Amaka Okwuoha has involved her audience majorly during her performances by instructing them to clap, dance and even sing after her.

Since the Holy Bible says in the book of 1st Timothy 4:8 that “Physical exercise has some value but spiritual exercise is valuable in every way, because it promises life both for the present and for the future. *Source: (Good News Bible)*. She has been able to lead her audience into a hot praise and dance which is good for our spiritual and physical wellness. Many have, through this method received their permanent healings, deliverance and miracles. Example; *Dunamis Church Abuja, Live Performance, Oct. 20th 2017*.

Her Experiences and Challenges

One might rightfully think and say that Amaka Okwuoha is “lucky” and “favoured” being a daughter of a royal family. But, unfortunately, Chioma Jesus lost both parents at a tender age, leaving seven children with her as the eldest among them. Before this tragedy, Chioma Jesus faced a lot of persecutions especially from her mother. She got born again in the Christian faith on the 28th of August 1986, at a very tender age in a revival program organized by her local church in her village. Also, she is a member of the Scripture Union (SU). She said;

“Years ago, people of God, when I gave my life to Christ, my mother persecuted me so much that one day, my mother came home, brought a bible and dictionary and asked me to pick one. The bible representing my faith and the dictionary representing my education.”(Praise wine, 2019).

As a highly committed born again Christian, she suffered several persecutions both at home and in school. Chioma Jesus engaged herself in business while in school. She was selling “Mama Put” restaurant at Lagos before she released her

first album “Chioma Jesus Vol. 1”. That was how God promoted and lifted her up from poverty. And this gave her a name “CHIOMA JESUS”. She is popularly known with that name till today.

Early Motivations and Her Musical Career

Amaka Okwuoha started singing in her local church at the age of nine (9). Her pastor encouraged her to develop her talent by helping and enrolled her in one of the Colleges of music. At this point, she was learning English Language as all her lyrics were always in Igbo language. Though, her first song was written in Yoruba language, but the song “Chioma Jesus” in 2003, was the song that made her popular in Nigeria. With a passion to win more souls for Christ, Amaka Okwuoha’s heart cry is to see gospel artists becoming what God has called them to be.

She also came into prominence after being nominated for a category in the Delta Yadaah Award in 2010. She did not win then, but she did win in 2011 and 2012. Delta Yadaah is an annual concert which takes place in Asaba, Delta state of Nigeria. It featured seasoned, anointed and professional gospel music ministers who are proudly some of Nigeria’s finest. Her most popular album is “prophetic praise” released in 2011, which made it to the top of the Nigerian gospel chart. She has collaborated with other gospel artistes like Samsong in “Odogwu”, Nathaniel Bassey in “Jehova Shammah”, and Mercy Chiwo in “Oke Mmoo”. She has been described as one of the consistent best gospel artist with anointed voices in Nigeria and abroad without mixing up with worldliness in her music, dress and style. This has given her the popular name “**The Queen of Praise**”.

She has also attracted several awards from several churches, organizations and denominations. This includes;

- Omega Legend Awards as the most outstanding gospel artist in Nigeria.
- Advocate of Christian excellence in Christianity. An award by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Ideato South Chapter.
- HTTBF Award for Transparency and Integrity in the Gospel Music Ministry.
- 2015 Gospel Music Legacy Award by the Spirit Filled International Network of gospel ministry and churches in conjunction with Kingdom Life Gospel music across ethnic and National frontiers.
- Award of meritorious services to the gospel of music in Nigeria and of Christ in general.

- Award for the sustained support of the work in Redemption Ministries and the world at large by Redemption Ministries Port Harcourt.
- Award for Excellence in Service of the Lord, by Men's Christian Association (MCA) New Generation Faith (ANG.) Church City of Favour Port Harcourt.
- Ambassador for Peace Award by United Nations in collaboration with Platinum Standard Publications Limited Lagos.

Stage/ Staging

Chioma Jesus has worked with many artistes both locally and internationally and has shared stage with ministers such as Ron Kenoly, Sinach, Cece Winers, Donnie McClurkin, Micah Stampley, Don Moen, Kurt Kay, Juanita Bynum, Lionel Peterson, Mercy Chinwo, Nathaniel Bassey and Samsung, to mention but a few (Praisewine, 2019). She started Chioma Jesus charity foundation and this has over the years impacted pastors, their wives and ministers across Nigeria

Samples of Amaka Okwuoha's Music

Chi Oma

♩. = 100

Solo

Chorus

4

Solo

Chorus

8

Solo

Chorus

1.

2.

m'ee, Chi o- ma. Chi o- ma m'ee, Chi o- ma Chi o- ma

Chi o- ma m'ee, Chi o- ma m'ee, Chi o- ma

A Ga M Abu

♩. = 100

Solo
Chorus

A ga ma - bu i - he Chi - ne - ke si na m g'a - bu ee; a ga ma - bu, o -

4
Solo
Chorus

lu a - ka m - ma - du a - pu - gh'i - gbo - chi ya. A ga ma - bu i - Chi mu oo

7
Solo
Chorus

he Chi - ne - ke si na m g'a - bu ee; a ga ma - bu, o -

9
Solo
Chorus

lu a - ka m - ma - du a - pu - gh'i - gbo - chi ya. A ga ma - bu i -

Chi Na-Enye Nwa

♩. = 100

Solo
Chorus

Nw-a b'o - nyi - nye Chu - kwu; a di - gh'a - zu ya n'a - hia. A di - gh'e - me ya

3
Solo
Chorus

n'u - ba; a di - gh'e - me ya n'i - ke. Chi n'e - nye nwa

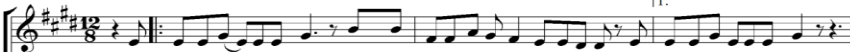
6
Solo
Chorus

O bu Chu - kwu n'e - nye nwa oo

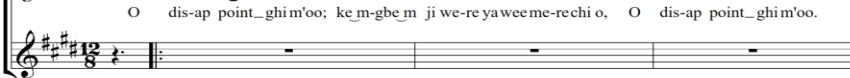
Chu - kwu Nwa bu o - nyi - nye Chu - kwu

O Disappoint Ghi Mu

♩. = 100

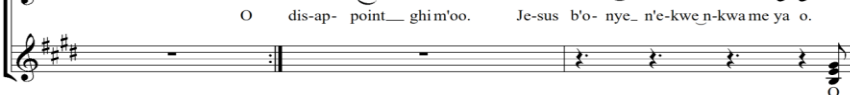
Solo 

O dis-ap point_ghi m'oo; ke m-gbe m ji we-re ya wee me-re-chi o, O dis-ap point_ghi m'oo.

Chorus 

Solo 

O dis-ap- point_ ghi m'oo. Je-sus b'o- nye- n'e-kwe n-kwa me ya o.

Chorus 

Solo 

Je-sus

Chorus 

dis-ap- point_ ghi m'oo; ke m-gbe m ji we-re ya wee me-re-chi o, O dis-ap- point_ ghi m'oo.

Solo 

b'o- nye_ n'a - za me-kpe - re oo.

Chorus 

O dis - ap- point_ ghi m'oo; ke m-gbe m

Solo 

Chorus 

ji we - re ya wee me - re chi o, O dis - ap- point_ ghi m'oo.

The Ukwu Ga Eme

$\text{♩} = 100$

Solo
 I-h'u-kwu g'e-me; o g'e-me n'e-be a taa. E-be-le-be g'e-

Chorus

3
 Solo
 gbu; o g'e-gbu n'e-be a taa. M-gbi-di ga a-da o; o g'a-da n'e-be a taa. O-ku g'a- gba;

Chorus

7
 Solo
 o g'a-gban'e-be a taa. E-be-le-be g'e-gbu nu o; o g'e-gbu n'e-be a. M

Chorus

10
 Solo
 1. tu-be y'a-ha o, tu-be y'a-ha o, tu-be y'a-ha o, 2.

Chorus
 I-h'u-kwu g'e-me; o g'e-men'e-be a taa. o g'e-men'e-be a taa.

Visual Data of Amaka Okwuoha's Works

Amaka Okwuoha has released so many inspirational albums with some other singles currently in the market as follows:

1. Oke Mmoo (Chioma & Mercy Chinwo)



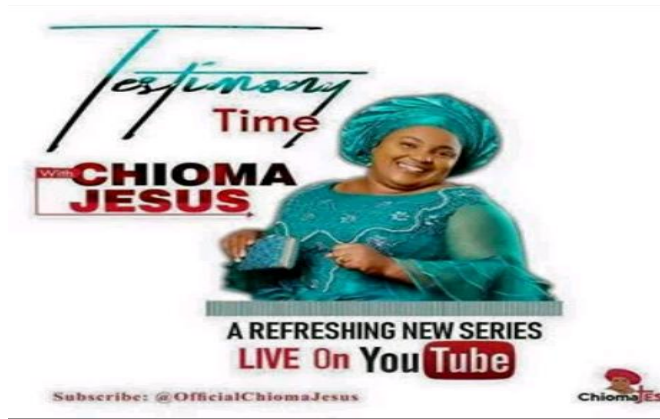
2. Testimony Time



3. Sacrifice of Praise



4. Chioma Jesus 1&2



Conclusion

It is clear from this brief survey that Evangelist Amaka Okwuoha is a renowned and talented gospel musician. There is no gain suppressing the fact that she ranks very high among gospel musicians in Africa and the world at large. Like we have noted in this work, the artist takes winning of soul for Christ more serious and so her artistic sense of proportion ensures that her messages from the gospel is never lost. Also, as busy as she is, she still creates time on social media to reach out to her fans. She also started a television show where people will come and share their respective testimonies and build their Christian faith.

However, having studied Evangelist Amaka Okwuoha (A.k.a. Chioma Jesus), the researchers wish to suggest the following which would also help in the promotion and documentation of Nigerian gospel music and musician's biographies.

- A more conscious and systematic step needs to be taken in documenting the Nigerian gospel music in score sheet for contemporary use.
- The biography and works of other gospel musicians; the likes of Mercy Chinwo and her unique musical practices should also be studied.

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