

THE USE OF AFRICAN MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN COMPOSITION: METHOD AND ANALYSIS

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Introduction

Composition, which is the putting together of musical notes in this context, is not foreign to Africa. Composition in African music can be purely instrumental, purely vocal or both. Compositions in African music do not simply emerge; it is a creation of human beings either consciously or unconsciously. The fact remains that certain methods were applied in such compositions and such compositions can be analyzed. This work seeks to discuss the method that can be used to achieve efficiency in African instrumental composition and a way to analyze such composition. The method involved in this research includes library review, collection of discography, observation and analysis of live performances of Annang (African) music ensembles.

African musical instruments are very important to Africans because this is one of the ways they can display their musicality. African music is a communal art where everybody is involved even right from childhood. Speaking of the musicality of Africans and importance of African musical instruments, Bebey (1975) submits:

At this early stage in life, it is evident that the child is merely a listener, but as he begins to grow up, he very soon takes an active role in music. The average African child reveals a natural aptitude for music at a very early age. He is already making his own musical instruments at three or four; an empty tin becomes a rattle, an old window-frame and a piece of animal hide make a drum... (p. 6).

From the statement above, it is clear that African music should not be relegated to the background. African music is not 'primitive' as claimed by early Westerners as Bebey (1975) observed. It is as important as any other music of the world. Bebey (1975:2) in his words declare, 'African music is not the reserve of the intellectual; it is universal enough to be enjoyed by music lovers anywhere' (p. 2). In other words, prominence should be given to African music.

One may ask, 'why this argument?' It is to prove a point that since African music and African musical instruments are important, it is worthy to use African musical instruments in composition to avoid extinction. African music must be propagated and one of such ways is through composition in African idiom. Again it should be pointed out that it is not all African music that has no known composers. Some have both in the traditional setting and in African art music compositions. This work, therefore, seeks to discuss the method of such composition and how to analyze such work(s). The medium is African musical instruments.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework for this research work is on composition. It is not just any composition, but that which makes use of African musical instruments. Again, it has to do with the issue of analysis, for every composition is subject to analysis. Musical composition is a term that describes the creation of a piece of music. Udoh (2012), discussing the meaning/concept of composition discloses:

Composition is both an art and an act. The word composition has been variously defined and also viewed at different angles. Basically, composition is an art of combining variously structural elements of music: sound, harmony, melody, rhythm, and form in a logical form to produce a vocal or instrumental piece. In fact, it is music creation (p. 24).

The *Wikipedia* adds, "Musical composition has three meanings in music: an original piece of music, the musical structure of a musical piece, and the process of creating a new piece of music". The concern of this research is to show the method and how to create new music for African musical instruments. Scholes (1977) discloses that composition, etymologically, is the 'putting together' of words to make a poem or piece of prose, or notes to make a waltz or symphony, or details of a picture. In this context, it is simply "putting together" of musical notes. A renowned scholar in the field of music, Uzoigwe (1994), is not left out in the definition and meaning of composition. He submits, "Composition, therefore, is an art that is highly structured, highly planned, very intellectual, mathematical, even cold blooded" (p. 157). Pratt (1995) has his own view of composition. In his words, he states: "Composition refers to three levels of activity: spontaneous musical creation through improvising; refining original ideas to a finished state; altering and

adapting existing music by arranging it' (p. 11). This work has to do with refining original ideas to a finished state.

From the above definitions, it seems composition is defined to suit Western works. A careful look shows that there is composition in African music as well. Udoh (2012) earlier observed:

The study of composition has traditionally been dominated by examination of methods and practice of Western classical music, but the definition of composition is broad enough to include spontaneously improvised works like those of free jazz performers and African drummers (p. 24-25).

On the above strength, this research has a lot to do with the use of African musical instruments in composition. In other words, the medium of this composition is African musical instruments.

As earlier pointed out above, composition in African music can be analyzed as that of the Western counterpart. The Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia, defines Musical analysis as the attempt to answer the question, 'how does this music work?' The method employed to answer this question differs from analyst to analyst and according to the purpose of analysis. Analysis, as applied to this work, is to view analysis entirely from a compositional viewpoint in order to bring out the meaning of the music (interpret) as intended by the composer. The researcher is in total agreement with Chailley (1951) who views analysis entirely from a compositional viewpoint, arguing that:

Since analysis consists of 'putting oneself in the composer's shoes', and explaining what he was experiencing as he was writing, it is obvious that we should not think of studying a work in terms of criteria foreign to the author's own preoccupations... (p. 104).

This work, therefore, intends to point out how a composition for African music, using African musical instruments, can be analyzed.

African Musical Instruments

African musical instruments are many and they vary in sizes and shapes from one culture to another. The type of instruments used by a particular society in Africa is mostly affected by the geographical location and weather which favour the growth of certain trees (or materials that can be used in the production of some musical instruments) and availability of some animals whose skin can be used for the making of drums. For example, Akwa Ibom State (which is a society in Africa) falls within the tropical zone. Its dominant vegetation is green foliage of trees cum shrubs and the oil palm tree belt which holds the highest density in the world (Udoh, 2012). Akwa Ibom State has basically two main seasons - rainy and dry season. These geographical location and weather favour the production of some musical instruments, for example, drums made of wood and animals skins.

Organization of instrumental ensembles in African music is not left to chance. Nketia (1992) points out:

The structures used in African music represent usages which are learned through participation in musical events, passed on aurally from generation to generation, and applied, modified, and expanded by succeeding generations. They include melodic and rhythmic elements, both linear and multilinear, which permit limited improvisations to be made where applicable (p. 111).

In any African music ensemble, instruments are selected in relation to their effectiveness in performing certain established musical roles or for fulfilling specific musical purposes. The researcher is in total agreement with Nketia (1992) who has pointed out that some instruments are designed for use as solo instruments; others are intended for use in ensembles. Some instruments may play lead functions while some may play subordinate roles. In African music composition, the choice of instrument is very much taken into consideration. For example, 'do you want it to be all solo instruments or solo instrument(s) with other rhythmic instruments? Or 'do you want to combine instruments of definite pitches alone or instruments with indefinite pitches or both? More so, one may ask, 'are the instruments chosen readily available either in the context of the geographical area or in the context of availability? These and many more questions affect the choice of instruments in composition.

Method and Analysis

Method is a way of doing something. It is a careful or organized plan that controls the way something is done. It is also a procedure or process for attaining an objective. In this context, it is the procedure or process for the use of African musical instruments in composition. The objective to be attained is composition. In fact, methods of composition vary. Udoh (2012) observes:

Methods of composition vary widely; however in analyzing music, all forms - spontaneous, trained, or untrained - are built from elements comprising a musical piece. Music can be composed for repeated performance or it can be improvised; composed on the spot. The music can be performed entirely from memory, from a written system of musical notation, or a combination of both (p. 24).

Though methods vary, the researcher wants to apply this method (as shown below) in creating new music with the use of African musical instruments. A clear method to use that will also aid in analysis is 'composition outline'. Composition outline tells or reveals how to do it and what is done from one measure (bar) to another in a composition. It is a clear guide. The composer or analyst seeks to answer the following questions in 'Composition Outline': Title, Medium, Style, Motif (motive), Sketch, Form, Meter / Time Signature, Tempo, Texture, Length, Mood, Audience, etc. The contents of the outline are not fixed. It varies from one composer to another, but there must be a guide. This guide helps in the analysis of the work. Let us now consider 'composition outline' one by one.

Title: Every composition must always have a title that will reflect what is in the composer's mind and in the language so desired that explains the music. The title differentiates one composition from another.

Medium: This simply refers to the means, that is, the instruments/voice used in expressing the creative work. It can be Western instruments or African instruments.

Style: Style in music is a term used for the composer's manner of treating the various elements that make up a composition – the overall form, melody, rhythm, harmony, instrumentation, etc. Style also means the features; external and internal of the musical composition.

Motif or Motive: The motif takes the central position in composition. It is a musical seed from which a long composition might grow. Motif or motive is the principal smallest structural unit which gives rise to themes and the whole composition.

Sketch: This is, simply, a breakdown of the motif into fragments.

Form: A musical form is the structural outline – comparable to an architect's ground plan – in the composer's mind when he sets out to write. It is simply the design or shape into which musical materials are moulded.

Meter / Time Signature: This simply refers to how the music moves in relation to the number of beats in the bar and the note that forms the unit beat.

Tempo: This refers to the speed of the music. It could be moderate, slow or fast.

Texture: The composer equally decides on the texture – polyphonic, homophonic, contrapuntal, poly-rhythmic, homo-rhythmic, etc.

Length: This has to do with the length of the piece, or how many bars (measures) are there.

Mood: The mood of the song should reflect the title of the composition.


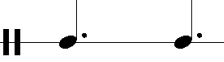

Audience: The targeted audience determines the language of such composition. The intending audience should understand the music meant for them.

With the given 'Composition outline', it is easy to analyze the piece or the composition in question with the given sub-headings and even going beyond that. Let us use a simple 'Composition outline' and show example of how to compose and how to analyze.

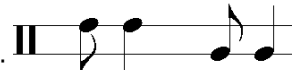
A Composition with African Musical Instruments and its Analysis Compositional Procedures and Analysis of *Idara*

Title: *Idara* (Joy)

Medium: African musical instruments. Here the researcher chooses both melodic and rhythmic (percussive) instruments. He equally chooses instruments that are readily available in his 'society' – Akwa Ibom State. The instruments can be used in performing this work because they are available. They include:

1. *Ntakorok* (woodblock), with one pitch thus: 
2. *Nsak* (rattle), with one pitch thus: 
3. *Ibit iba* (twin drums), with two pitches thus: 

4. *Obodom* (slit-wooden drum), with two pitches thus:



5. *Nkwong* (big gong), with one pitch thus:

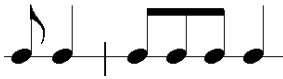


6. *Ikono eto* (xylophone), with pentatonic scale thus:



Style: Use of solo instrument with other rhythmic instruments to create variety.

Motif 1:



Motif 2:



Form: A B A

Time Signature(s): A- 6/8, B- 4/4, A- 6/8

Tempo: A - slow, B – fast, C - slow

Texture: Thick texture

Length: 50 measures

A = 18 measures

B = 14 measures

A = 18 measures

Mood: Dancelike and joyful

Audience: Concert hall

Analysis of *Idara*

A (Measures 1- 18)

Ntakorok (woodblock) starts the music in measure 1 with the use of fragments of the first motif up to measure 4. *Ikono eto* (xylophone) comes in in measure 5 while other instruments remain silent. In measure 7, all other instruments come in with their rhythms which combine to form a perfect whole up to measure 16. In all these measures, *ikon eto* (xylophone) plays both melodic and rhythmic function. In measures 17 -18, all the instruments use homo-rhythm and that marks the end of Section A.

B (Measures 19 – 32)

Section B uses the second motif. This starts with a call from *ikon eto* (xylophone) in measures 19 – 20 with harmony in 4ths. Other instruments come in from measure 21 -24 in poly-rhythms. In measure 25-26, every other instrument is silent except *ikon eto* (xylophone). All instruments come in again from measure 27 – 30. Measures 31 – 32 make use of homo-rhythm. Measure 32 marks the end of Section B.

A (Measures 33 – 50)

Measures 33 – 50 are a repetition of measures 1- 18. Measure 50 marks the end of the entire composition.

Conclusion

The use of African musical instruments in composition is very possible if it is known how to go about it. The discussions above have pointed out a method that can be used in the composition of this sort. It is not just the composition, but its analysis. From the example shown on how to use African musical instruments in composition (see appendix), there is also a clear analysis of the piece. It is, therefore, possible to use this method and analysis in the use of African musical instruments in composition. Researchers can expand more on this. We can from now compose more music with the use of African musical instruments to showcase our culture; I mean African culture to the entire world. The world is waiting for our manifestation – more music compositions from Africa using our indigenous instruments.

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Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopaedia

APPENDIX IDARA

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The first system of the musical score for 'IDARA' features six staves. The top staff, labeled 'Ntakorok', contains a melodic line in 2/4 time with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 100$. The other five staves, labeled 'Nsak', 'Ibit Iba', 'Obodom', 'Nkwong', and 'Ikon Eto', are currently silent, indicated by horizontal lines with bar lines. The key signature is one flat (B-flat).

The second system of the musical score continues with six staves. The 'Ntakorok' staff begins with a measure rest followed by a melodic line starting at measure 5. The 'Nsak' staff has a measure rest followed by a melodic line. The 'Ibit Iba' staff has a measure rest followed by a melodic line. The 'Ob' staff has a measure rest followed by a melodic line. The 'Nk' staff has a measure rest followed by a melodic line. The 'Ik. Eto' staff has a measure rest followed by a melodic line. The tempo marking $\text{♩} = 100$ is repeated above the 'Ikon Eto' staff. The key signature remains one flat.

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2

Musical score for measures 2-5. The score is written for six parts: Nk (top), Ns, Ib. Iba, Ob, Nk, and Ik. Eto (bottom). The top five parts use a double bar line with two vertical strokes (||) to indicate a specific rhythmic pattern. The bottom part, Ik. Eto, is written on a grand staff with a treble clef. The music consists of four measures. The Nk parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Ns part plays a pattern of dotted notes. The Ib. Iba part plays a pattern of eighth notes with a slur. The Ob part plays a pattern of eighth notes. The bottom Nk part plays a pattern of eighth notes. The Ik. Eto part plays a pattern of eighth notes.

13

Musical score for measures 13-16. The score is written for six parts: Nk (top), Ns, Ib. Iba, Ob, Nk, and Ik. Eto (bottom). The top five parts use a double bar line with two vertical strokes (||) to indicate a specific rhythmic pattern. The bottom part, Ik. Eto, is written on a grand staff with a treble clef. The music consists of four measures. The Nk parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Ns part plays a pattern of dotted notes. The Ib. Iba part plays a pattern of eighth notes with a slur. The Ob part plays a pattern of eighth notes. The bottom Nk part plays a pattern of eighth notes. The Ik. Eto part plays a pattern of eighth notes.

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17

Nk

Ns

Ib. Iba

Ob

Nk

Ik. Eto

21

Nk

Ns

Ib. Iba

Ob

Nk

Ik. Eto

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25

Nk

Ns

Ib. Iba

Ob

Nk

Ik. Eto

29

Nk

Ns

Ib. Iba

Ob

Nk

Ik. Eto

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33

Nk

Ns

Ib. Iba

Ob

Nk

Ik. Eto

37

Nk

Ns

Ib. Iba

Ob

Nk

Ik. Eto

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41

Nk
Ns
Ib. Iba
Ob
Nk
I.k. Eto

46

Nk
Ns
Ib. Iba
Ob
Nk
I.k. Eto