

TRANSITING FROM ANECDOTES TO PRACTICE: ADOPTING AFRICAN TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS FOR APPLIED MUSIC IN NIGERIAN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION

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Introduction

Communication is valued by people globally and, the Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria uses verbal and non-verbal means to communicate among themselves. In the olden days, if the neighboring communities (enemies) are coming to fight war, the 'Iya Ilu - Dundun' can be used to inform the villagers to get ready. Also, if a visitor arrives at the king's palace, drummers may use drums to inform king of the happening just to mention a few. Okunade, (2010.73) noted that, "...when the researcher arrived at the palace. Immediately he will be cited as a stranger, the musicians (drummers) led by the leader (Iya - Ilu drummer), played the phrase 'Tenu e ni o wo, te nu e ni o gbo, ko to mo hun ti o fe so' (Meaning: Observe his / her utterances, listen to his / her message, before considering your response). The mother drum (Iya-Ilu) would lead an ensemble drums in music performances of the traditional Yoruba people in Nigeria.

Nowadays, drumming of Iya Ilu Dundun is complex and has become one of the most important elements of Nigerian traditional and popular music. Author (Jame Flint 2021) opined that, "the hourglass shaped instruments ensemble is one of the oldest ensembles used by West African 'griots' and their origins can be traced back to the; - Bono people, Yoruba people, the Ghana Empire and the Hausa people. Durojaye (2019), opined that "it is not uncommon to have Dündún drummers identify the lead drum of a Dündún ensemble, iyá ilù (literally: 'mother drum') as Dündún (Durojaye, 2019). Over the years, the Yoruba people of south western Nigeria have

B. Sunday & A. T. Olugbemiga: *Transiting from Anecdotes to Praxis: Adopting Afr...* developed a highly sophisticated genre of griot music centering on the Iya-Ilu. There are variants of the hourglass shaped drums in Africa, with most of them having relatively similar method of construction. This paper is needful because, the world is fast changing with innovation strides innovative and modification in every aspect of human life. Obviously, days of analog is fading away for technological advancement. So, if African scholars fail to embrace this paradigm shift, there is the possibility that, they would be left behind. At the music Department Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education (AOCOED) *Oto / Ijanikin* have encouraged many students who possess the ability to play the *Dundun* drum (popularly referred to as the Talking drum owing to their ability to mimic human voice and songs correctly). Also, this study is an added or sophisticated method of playing the drum which is not a development to bringing an end to the traditional way of playing it.

Theoretical Framework

The adopted theory for this study is the Functionality Theory by Merriam (1964). He emphasized role of music in propagating positive change in the society. The theory also argued that, the aesthetics of any musical form is rooted in its relevance through roles it plays within the society and it had been advanced that 'no music is or should be without a purpose'. Music and culture have reciprocal influences, which make them indispensable in many aspects of human endeavour. As such, Mariam (1964) concluded that;

'Therefore on this note, music is clearly indispensable to the proper promulgation of the activities that constitute a society; it is a universal human behaviour— without it, it is questionable that man could truly be called man, with all that implies'.

The theory is appropriate for this study because, the Dundun drumming is functional among the Yoruba people and plays a number of roles in the society. So, contextual functions of this study in the society are listed as follows;

1. To make traditional drummers interested in notated music and understand the importance of studying music in a formal school,
2. To sell the idea to non-Yoruba societies; which could bring economic benefits to the ethnic group through production and teaching of the instruments.

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3. To instill consciousness towards technological advancement; this will prompt the native, scholars / technologists among the constructors to be mindful of thickness, size and length of the needed wood. As such, we can have the Dundun drums in keys and pitch ranges in the nearest future.

Brief History of Dundun Drum

The origin of hourglass shaped membranous instruments is not specified as different versions in the form of oral narratives exist. Also varying in their accounts are the limited existing written sources on the Dùndún. Some sources have it that the dùndún originated from the town of Sàwòró in Ibàribá, from where it migrated to Òyó and eventually to other parts of the Yorùbá region. Another version holds it that the dùndún was brought from Mecca to Ilé-Ife, and went from there to Òyó (Euba, 1990, p. 38–44 for a detailed account of the various versions of the origins of dùndún). The narrative that appears to be the most common, however, is that the dùndún originates from Òyó, an ancient city of the Yorùbá. The belief in a common Òyó origin could explain why, despite different dialects spoken among the Yorùbá, dùndún only imitates the Òyó dialect (see also, Akpabot, 1986; Euba, 1990). Ibisankale (2007) records that a man called Kunsanri Àyàn invented dùndún in the old Òyó empire. Dùndún drummers that are interviewed in the process of this study agreed that Dundun drumming was originated from Òyó before dispersing to their various destinations. And for this reason, they always refer to themselves as ọmọ Àyàn (Descendants of Àyàn). The belief could also explain why it is a tradition for the family of drummers (be it dùndún or bàtá) to prefix their names with 'Àyàn', for example, Àyànlere, Àyàntunde, Àyàndiran, Ayansola and so on, tracing their lineage to the origin.

ALAYAN (Compound Family name of Dundun drummers')

It is believed among the natives that Ayangalu is the first Yoruba drummer. Upon his death he was deified, and so now he is counted among the ranks of the Orishas or deity. It is very rarely to see a Iya-Illu drummer dropping his drums on the floor because, such deed disrespect the deity and negates their belief in ancestors. It is also believed by followers of the Yoruba religion that Ayangalu is the patron spirit of all drummers, and that in the guise of a muse he inspires the drummers to perform well. So, members in the family of drummers prefixed their

B. Sunday & A. T. Olugbemiga: *Transiting from Anecdotes to Praxis: Adopting Afr...* names with 'Ayan'. Examples of such names are Ayanbisi, Ayangbade, Ayantunde, Ayanwande etc. This "Ayan" marks its bearers out as hereditary custodians of the mysteries of Ayangalu.

In the 20th century the talking drum became a part of popular music in West Africa. It is used in playing Fuji and Jùjú music of Nigeria (where it is known as a dùndún). The talking drum is also used in ceremonial functions and events like weddings, burial ceremonies, private functions and most importantly it is commonly used by African bands as part of their musical instruments. Below are music students during the rehearsal of African musical ensemble. Feb. 2022.



Figure 1. Ifesowapo ensemble in Ede: L–R, iyá ilù, gúdúgúdú, iyá ilù, kẹrìkẹrì, omele, and omele. Cited in Journal of Arts and humanity vol.9 Durojaye (2020).

Uses of Talking Drum

The use of talking drums as a form of communication was noticed by Europeans in the first half of the 18th century. Detailed messages could be sent from one village to the next faster than could be carried by a person riding a horse. In the 19th century Roger T. Clarke, a missionary, realised that "the signals represent the tones of the syllables of conventional phrases of a traditional and highly poetic character." Many African languages are tonal; that is, the pitch is important in determining the meaning of a particular word. The Yoruba language, for instance, is mostly defined by the tri-tonic scale, consisting only of the tonic sol-fa notes, do, re, mi, different inflections of which are then used to convey different messages, the same principle also applies to how the drum talks in all of the Yoruba's music and culture. However, the Serer language and its relative Senegambian languages are not tonal, unlike almost all other Niger-Congo languages.

The problem was how to communicate complex messages without the use of vowels or consonants but simply using tone. An English emigrant to Africa, John Carington, in his 1949 book *The Talking Drums of Africa*, explained how African drummers were able to communicate complex messages over vast distances. Using low tones referred to as male and higher female tones, the drummer communicates through the phrases and pauses, which can travel upwards of 4–5 miles. The process may take eight times longer than communicating a normal sentence but was effective for telling neighboring villages of possible attacks or ceremonies. He found that to each short word that was beaten on the drums, an extra phrase was added, which would be redundant in speech but provided context to the core drum signal.

Style of Playing Iya-Ilu

The playing style of the talking drum is centered on producing long and sustained notes by hitting the drum head (membranous surface) with the stick-holding hand and the accompanying free hand used to dampen and change tones immediately after being hit. This produces a rubbery sounding texture to its playing, which mimics the heavy and complex tones used in languages from Yoruba area. This characteristic style can be clearly heard in the popular music of this area, particularly in those bands where the talking drum is the lead instrument, such as Fuji, Juju and Apala music.

Pitches on the Iya Ilu - Dundun Drums

Many scholars have written on talking drums about its production, history, acoustic and its usage from different perspectives. However, this study focuses on pitch, its ranges and other aspects that qualify the drums for usage as an Applied Instrument in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The pitch of the drum varied to mimic the tone patterns of speech. In the olden days, people used Yoruba tone mark in playing the drums and pronouncing words, which are three that is; D R M. But, diatonic scales can be run on the Iya-Illu because, whenever there is tone shifts, higher tones are being heard in conformity with the new pitch which could be repeated again and again. This is achieved by varying the tension weaved round the wood of the drum: the opposing drum heads are connected by a leather tension cord. The waist of the drum is held between the player's ribs and arm, so that when squeezed the membranous head is tightened, producing a higher pitch than when it's in relaxed state; the pitch can be changed during a single beat, producing a warbling note. The drum can thus capture the pitch, volume, and rhythm of human speech, though not the qualities of vowels or consonants.

Stressing further on Durojaiye, et al (2021) view (limiting the drums' pitch to the three speech tones of the Yoruba people) that "The Yoruba language which the drum imitates, uses relative three speech tones: Low, Mid and High". This study observed that both '*Gangan* and *Iya Ilu Dundun*' drums has more than an octave range of tones / pitches. The lengthy intervals made it possible for a Dundun player to play some melodies of songs and rhythms consist of more than the three tones on the instrument.

Also, findings show that, two '*Gangan*' drums or '*Iya Ilu Dundun*' drums may not have same lowest pitch which could also result to different highest pitches. Meanwhile, the heights and depth in terms of sound of the drums is being determined by the acoustic of the drum which is made up of; the type of wood, size, thickness, length and resonance quality of the wood. It has been observed that some of these drums have intervals of fifteen semitones or more (between lowest pitch to the highest pitch). The data for the three Iya – Ilu Dundun and three *Gangan*'s pitch range as collected are as follows:

1. Dundun A



Figure 2: Iya – Ilu Dundun A with Saworoide

Length; - 18.8" (inches)

Diameter of the drum; - 8" (Inches)

Highest pitch: D

Lowest pitch: A

Relative Pitch Range: A – A - D



2. Dundun B



Figure 3: Iya – Ilu Dundun B

Length; - 17", Diameter of the drum; - 7.8"

Highest pitch: C, Lowest pitch: G

Relative Pitch Range: G - G – C



3. Dundun C

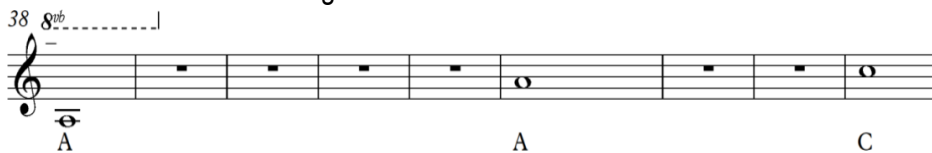


Figure 4: Iya – Ilu Dundun C

Length; - 19.5", Diameter of the drum; - 8.5"

Highest pitch: `C, Lowest pitch:A

Relative Pitch Range: A - A - C



4. Gangan A



Figure 5: Gangan A

Length ; - 10.5", Diameter of the drum ; - 5.6"

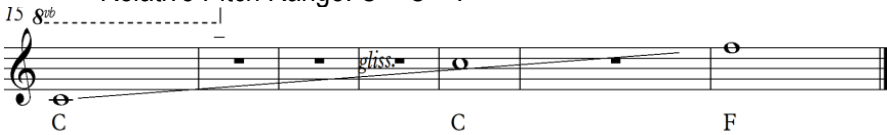
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 Highest pitch: A, Lowest pitch: F
 Relative Pitch Range: F – F – A



5. Gangan B



Figure 6: Gangan B, Length; - 11.4"
 Diameter of the drum; - 6", Highest pitch: F, Lowest pitch: C
 Relative Pitch Range: C – C – F



6. Gangan C



Figure 7: Gangan C
 Length; - 10.6", Diameter of the drum; -5.8"

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Highest pitch: G, Lowest pitch: E

Relative Pitch Range: E – E – G



All drums examined have a tendency of producing more semitones in a more favourable weather condition and lesser semitones in unfavorable weather conditions. And, the drums may sound differently during harmatan season. Also, the accuracy of scale pitches played from the lowest to the highest pitch of each drum is determined by the player's level of expertise on the drum. Drum expertise can be achieved through appropriate teaching and learning with adequate practice or rehearsals. Its Key tuning accuracy in this context relies on keyboard instruments as applicable to string instruments. A good talking drum player would be able to produce all pitches of sound achievable on the drums if the playing is done mindfully. Perhaps, the native talking drum players of old would have played these musical scales on the drum if trained in the rudiments and theory of Western music. Laoye, (1973) cited in Samuel (2010) submitted that, "Of all the Yoruba drums, the Dundun is the most popular and has a diversified use. It can be used to play all the rhythms played in the worship of all Yoruba deities without much inhibition". This assertion is relevant till date considering the usage and involvement of the drum in daily activities of the people.

Traditionally, it was believed that native talking drummers were unable to play more than three pitches as noted by music scholars because, they were specific to the basic Yoruba language tones which does not recognize Western musical scales or rules. Also, Ajiboye and Laoye (2019), added that,

"Dundun drum from I'm not going to do that I'm for somebody to be found out hypotensive South - Western part of Nigeria is one of the most popular indigenous musical instruments; it has witness various transformation in its construction process and design. Nigerian traditional musical instruments certainly need improvement in terms of sound [acoustic], appearance [aesthetic], and technique in its construction process".

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Other hourglass shaped membranous instruments like Djembe, Kalangu or Agba among others may not be inclusive in the scoring and playing of musical pieces written for Dundun drum due to technological factors surrounding the construction of the Dundun drums. Also, Durojaye (2020), cited in Durojaye et al (2021) noted that, "The Dundun of the Yoruba is played by people of all ages, though mostly men, and in a variety of sacred and secular cultural context". Many female talking drummers have emerged which erased the early gender discrimination on Dundun drum playing among the Yoruba people. Relatively, Samuel, (2010) 'examined female involvement in Dundun drumming as an indication of changing nuances of gender in Yoruba music'.

Consequently, Dundun drums have improved through competitive playing of the drum among the players for supremacy in the area of mimicking the Yoruba language, song tunes of the ethnic group and usage in modern popular music like; High Life, Juju, Fuji and Apala among others. This factor prompted Dundun drum technologists to be mindful of the technicality of production, choice of wood and other materials needed in producing the drums so as to meet the drummers' demand. Ajiboye and Laoye (2019) stressed further that,

"The property of material selected for construction of Dundun drums influences its sound production in which the wood from which the log is carved out is carefully selected for the construction of the instrument. The wood must be such that poses good resonance quality and durability since Dundun is a talking drum by nature, and it is believed in the traditional circle that trees very close to the path near villages where human voices are frequently heard are always considered the best choice for making the drum shell otherwise the drum will not sound well".

All hourglass shaped drums constructed from different cultures has different purpose and expectation to meet, this made them functions differently among the producing ethnic groups.

Playing Musical Pieces on Dundun Drums

The following are the important factors to be considered before attempting musical pieces on Dundun drums, Technical knowhow: Basically, any instrument player ought to have learnt and understand the art of playing the instrument before

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coming to sight play its musical piece. So, Iya Ilu Dundun performer must have acquired the skills of playing the drum before attempting the sight playing. However beginners can also learn the art of drumming and improve on it within a period of time depending on the learning ability and commitment to the goal.

The pitch range: Considering the fact that, the drum has not been classified according to pitch range, the player ought to be familiar with Pitch range of the Iya – Ilu Dundun or Gangan to be used before playing the drum to avoid embarrassment of making a wrong choice. Playing to keys required a player with good ears. The identification of the keys is defined mentally unlike the string instruments which has visible frets and bars. The frets and bars are not found on the tension drum for identification of pitches. Samuel, (2010) emphasized the significance of mental alertness and possession of good ear as one of the attributes of a Yoruba Dundun specialist.

The current condition of the drum: The Dundun drum needs daily maintenance and acquaintance to avoid disappointment that could be occurring due to putting excessive pressure on the tension while playing it. A drum in a compromised condition will always fail the player in performance.

The environmental / climatic condition: The understanding of this factor is necessary because, it will always affect the tension of the drum which influences its acoustic. Ajiboye and Laoye (2019) noted that,

“In consideration of acoustic as it borders on traditional African instruments, African instruments makers makes use of available materials or resources and technically manipulate it to achieve the necessary acoustic sound that is associated with such instrument. Unlike the Western world who make use of scientific calculations in the construction of instruments”.

The sound texture of Dundun drums differs during harmatan season and can-not be compared with raining or dry season.

Materials needed: Materials used in making Dundun drum are; wood (*Odo - Ilu* – Drum shell) and varieties of leather materials (*Awo - membrane, Egi - leather band, Kason or ogan* – Thread and *Osan* – Leather Tension thongs) which can easily respond to different weather conditions differently.

The language: Talking drum is being used for communication; so, the performer ought to understand the chosen language of the musical piece for better performance expression, especially in a tonal language. Sotunsa (2009), cited in Durojaye, et al (2021) noted that, “It is used to play musical rhythms without semantic information but also to communicate announcements, warning, prayers, jokes, proverbs or poetry”. As such, linguistic understanding of the piece will enable perfection in performance and befitting demonstration to the drums’ message where necessary.

Examples of musical pieces was played with Dundun drum are; ‘Ara E dide E Bami Jo’ and the Nigerian National Anthem:

Ara Edide E Bami Jo

Adagio ♩ = 100

Iya Ilu
Dundun



Adagio ♩ = 100

Piano



First system of musical notation. The bass staff contains a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes. The piano accompaniment (Pno.) is shown in grand staff with block chords and some eighth notes in the bass line.

Second system of musical notation. The bass staff continues the melodic line with some rests and eighth notes. The piano accompaniment (Pno.) features block chords and eighth notes in the bass line.

Third system of musical notation. The bass staff has a more active melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The piano accompaniment (Pno.) consists of block chords and eighth notes in the bass line.

Fourth system of musical notation, ending with double bar lines. The bass staff has a melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The piano accompaniment (Pno.) features block chords and eighth notes in the bass line.

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In an attempt to play the above musical piece, Timothy Adeyemo was accompanied by Tolulope Oje on upright piano and a video recording was made for documentation purpose. See picture below:



Conclusion and Recommendation

It has been clarified that, Diatonic scales can be run on the Iya-Illu Dundun through conscious manipulation and technique of playing the drum. So, Dundun drums can be added to the curriculum and stand as an applied instrument in tertiary institutions. Also, consciousness of the technological application of woods (Igi), leathers (Awo) being used has significant influence on the acoustic of the instrument. However, those producing Dundun drums need to acquire technological knowledge in order to bridge the gap and begin to produce drums in specific key ranges. Many people from Europe have been coming to Nigeria to learn how to play talking drum but we have to spear head the movement of using Dundun drums as an applied instrument in the curriculum.

Government is advised to provide fund for scholars to work on a thorough research of which the Dundun drums will be standardized into key range instruments. In doing this, there could be job opportunity for the people involved in the project and export benefits to the nation when the mission is accomplished.

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