

PRESERVATION OF EBIRA MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS FOR POSTERITY

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Introduction

Music making in Ebira culture of Kogi state, Nigeria, is a communal event like many other African societies. Music features in their day-to-day social and religious lives. No festival in Ebira culture could be imagined without music accompaniment. Response to traditional music in Ebira culture is so amazing. Religious dichotomy is ignored when traditional music is performed. Both young and old cherish their traditional music immensely. Ebira people are rich in culture and the community is one of the communities that modernity has little impact on their musical culture. One's first contact with Ebira music performance may not give a clear understanding of what the people cherish so much in their traditional music. The reasons are not far-fetched; as they can be attributed to the polyrhythmic nature of Ebira music coupled with Ebira language as a medium through which songs are rendered and the modal scale of the melody make the first comer to be at loss.

On the contrary, it will not take long time before the new person begins to appreciate musical content of their performance. Although, it takes intelligent listening to be able to decipher the instrumental accompaniment of Ebira music, yet when one actually accomplishes this task, he will understand and appreciate the complexity of instrumental performance or accompaniment of Ebira music.

Vidal (2002) observes that musical expressions in Nigeria reflect social functions, occasions and activities with the day to day life of the average Nigerian. He opined that such activities are connected with rituals, ceremonies, occupation, recreation and entertainment. Through music, the social way of life of Ebira people are regulated and transmitted orally from one generation to another as a means of ensuring the preservation and survival of their society like any other African community. Adeogun (2005) opined that "the quality or the effectiveness of

indigenous African musical work, as an oral art, is dependent on the musical-interpretive skills of the music makers.” (pg.3) He explained that the creative music makers use their skills to vary the syntactical and non-synthetic musical patterns to suit the occasion. Every effort geared towards preservation of the knowledge of African music and African musical instruments is preservation of the culture.

Some traditional musical instruments are tilting towards extinction. This could happen as a result of death of the last member of such genre in case of living thing or destruction of the last member of such non-living thing i.e. musical instruments. Guarava (2014) decries the musical instruments of folk music going into extinction. His reasons are non-availability of true talents and a fading audience for authentic folk music

Musical instruments abound in Ebira culture. They range from membranophones (musical instruments that produce sound through the membrane (animal skin)), aerophone (instruments that produce their sound through air columns) to idiophones (the instruments that produce their sound through the vibration of their bodies). Most of these instruments feature together as an ensemble in Ebira music performance during festivals, social engagements or religious activities. The high level of participation of Ebira people in Ekuechi festival exhibits their aesthetic enjoyment of this festival and this could not be unconnected with the role music and musical instruments play in the celebration of the festival. Most sons and daughters of Ebiraland who live beyond the shores of their homeland have devoted the festival period as the time for visit their communities even if it is for that once a year. They enjoy every musical aspect of the festival. The technology of the musical instruments during these festivals rests still in the hand of the makers who are becoming old and most of their children are not showing interest in their father’s or family trade. The likelihood of some of these instruments going into extinction is glaring. This paper therefore investigates how these musical instruments could be rescued from going into extinction.

Why the Study?

Preservation of these African musical instruments will be a boost to music education which suffers dearth of instructional materials. Music education is a field

of study associated with the teaching and learning of music. It is all encompassing in all domains of learning, including the psychomotor domain (the development of skills), the cognitive domain (the acquisition of knowledge), and in particular and significant ways, the affective domain, including music appreciation and sensitivity (Wikipedia, 2017). Music is a very important aspect of most human cultures; therefore, every society has music instruction in its type of educational system. The incorporation of music training from pre-school to post-secondary education is common in most nations because involvement in music is considered a fundamental component of human culture and behaviour. Many scholars agree that music education is not new in Nigeria. It came with general education package as delivered by the missionaries (Okafor, 1992, Adesokan, 2002, Omotoso, 2004, Omotosho, 2007, Olorunsogo, 2014). In Nigeria today, music as a course of study exists in primary, secondary and tertiary levels of educational system. Music education also takes place in individualized, lifelong learning, and community contexts.

However, music education in Nigeria has been faced with many challenges. Adesokan (2002) observed that music education as an intellectual subject has been faced with a lot of problems. He noted that music education was regarded as an essential component of evangelism by the missionaries in the early history of formal education in Nigeria so the missionaries fashioned out a sort of education with the regard to both form and content that would suit their evangelical objectives. Since Nigeria has more expectation for her music education programme it is expected that Nigerian philosophy of music education, curriculum contents and music teacher education programme will be fashioned towards achieving just that. Omotoso (2007) observed that the questions of what should be taught (knowledge object); how to teach what should be taught, how to organize the things to be taught (methodology), etc. are all answered in curriculum content which is developed, financed and supervised by society. Therefore, the society's cultural value system, beliefs, aspirations, its worldview and other cultural elements form the content of the curriculum. As he argued, the inherited music curriculum from the missionaries or colonial masters had little or nothing to offer African music since African music emphasizes performance and would feel at home with a curriculum that satisfies that.

Adeyera and Oyeleke (2011) opined that there are three factors that determine good learning environment for music instruction. These are the teacher, the physical environment and the curriculum. Physical environment here includes the musical instruments. These serve as materials to be studied or as instructional materials. The dearth of instructional materials has endangered our educational system as many teachers teach their lessons in abstract. Ogli (2007) placed lack of instructional materials among those issues he referred to as the real obstacle to music education in Nigeria. Indigenous musical instruments are supposed to be readily available if the music teachers are equipped to produce them. It will be a disservice to Nigeria if her music could not be learned with the aid of her traditional instruments examples unless western musical instrument. As Nzewi (2007) noted, the African indigenous musical arts foster viable models of philosophical, creative and scientific concepts as well as principles of musical arts creativity and profession practice. Ogli, (2004) has earlier bemoaned the current system of music education when he said that;

The practice of using local instruments for dance accompaniment while other western musical instruments are used for instruction, and made compulsory for students to learn and be assessed upon is self-defeating.

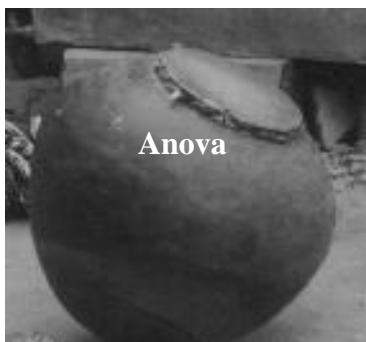
Why do students/pupils not perform on local instruments for assessment? The development and preservation of these instruments lie in their usage for instruction and assessment. The western instruments being used today did not just come to be, but evolved through time; therefore, African musical instruments should also be encouraged. In the light of this we look at the musical instrument of Nigeria drawing examples from Ebira musical culture.

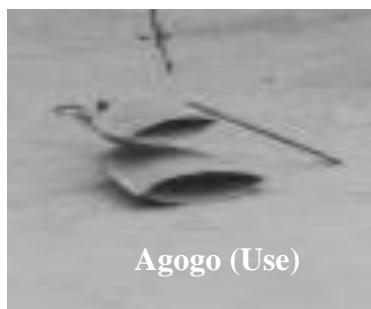
Traditional Musical Instruments in Ebiraland

The Ebira as an ethnic group occupies five local government areas of Kogi State. These are Adavi, Ajaokuta, Okehi and Okene local government areas. These areas fall within what is politically referred to as Kogi Central Senatorial district. All these local government areas celebrate common festivals and ceremonies which are bonds of unity to the Ebira people. They feature lots of their music and musical instruments during such occasions. African musical instruments could be classified into four basic categories. According to Hornbostel

and Sach's (1961) these have been earlier represented as aerophones, membranophones, idiophones, and chordophones. The Ebira people have instruments representing each of these groups except chordophone. These are in various shapes, sizes, made of different materials, different tones production, and their origins, methods making, and turning them. Examples of the idiophonic type of instruments that can be found in *Ebiraland* are: *use owe yi* (small gong) and *use obayin*, (big gong, like Yoruba's agogo) *oha*, *izeyin obayin*. The instruments under membranophonic instruments in Ebiraland include: *Anuva* (a medium size leather covered pot), *Ugogoyin* (talking drum), *Okanga Obayin* (big drum), and *Okanga Oweyi* (small drum). These are double headed cylindrical drums of about one foot radius, covered with animal skin, *Ijabana* (single headed bowl drum) and *Anuva* (a skin-covered pot drum with earthenware base, (Ikibe, 2000; Ojo, 2012). These instruments are made of stretched membranes that vibrate to produce the sound. Their wooden bodies are about 60cm long and 30cm diameter and are decorated with the hand woven Ebira cloth which is also used as handle for carrying the drum. The aerophonic instruments have column for air to be blown into for sound production. These include *okokoro* (horn trumpet), *opayin* (wooden flute) and *ifere* (Ododo, 2004). The chordophone instruments do not exist in Ebira land. Ebira people would not introduce any foreign instrument in their traditional musical performance; no modernization has changed that till date.

Here are some of the Ebira musical instruments:





It is disturbing that the makers of these instruments are gradually decreasing as a result of old age and death while their young ones take no interest in the trade of their fathers. The contemporary Ebira youths find it difficult to follow the traditional norms reserved for some of these instruments. For instance, the custodian of some of the instruments is expected to perform certain rites or rituals before the instruments are taken out for use. Hence, children are not allowed to play with those instruments before rehearsals. As the young ones who are supposed to take over from the outgoing age are not showing interest the future of these instruments is not guaranteed.

Approaches to the Preservation of Music Instruments from Extinction

Introduction of music technology in schools: Music technology as a course of study gives ample opportunity to students to learn to manufacture or maintain both local and foreign musical instruments. The course should be made a compulsory course running for two years in Colleges of Education in Nigeria. It

behooves the department of music to ensure that the course is handled by a qualified hand. The handler of the course should make the students research into African musical instruments more than any other instrument.

In colleges of education with music department where music technology is one of the courses offered, construction of African musical instrument should be considered above any other. This is of course very important because the materials used in making them are readily available. Some materials such as wood may be gotten within the school or college environment. Those to be purchased may not be expensive. It would be a surprise that many of the parents may have interest in such endeavour thereby supplying their wards with the necessary support.

Under the immediate past 6-3-3-4 system of education, equipment for technology were supplied which sadly have been lying fallow in the beneficiary schools. The intention of the curriculum then was to introduce technology both in theory and practice to students of Junior of Secondary School. Students who show proficiency in technology could proceed to technical school or college after the completion of three years in junior secondary while those that do well in other academic work proceed to senior secondary school. This philosophy takes into account, the ability of the children to learn anything presented to them at this age. An introduction to music technology at that particular time will be a right step in the right direction. The African instruments that students are familiar with could be used to teach them construction of instruments.

Introduction of master craftsmen in school: Learning from the craft master should be encouraged either as a project work or the department getting the craft-master to come and demonstrate how the instruments are made and the technicality of its playing. It is better to employ these master musicians in the department of music to give direct teaching on the instruments to the students. Some students who could not do better in music theory and applied music may find their footing in the craft of musical instrument making.

Continual usage: Continual usage of this category of musical instruments will prevent them from going into extinction. In Ebira culture, local or traditional

performance is always introduced in most of their social events. This makes some of these instruments constantly in use and readily available. On the other hand, if these instruments are kept for annual festivals as in the case of some of them, they may not be in good condition any longer. This is because most of them are affected by weather. To avoid this, they must be constantly in use.

Recommendations

Music education in Nigeria is blessed with a department of music technology in Ibadan Polytechnics. While this one is saddled with the responsibility of training music technologists, it is expected that they would find it rewarding researching into the vast musical instruments of different ethnic groups in Nigeria. This may look like herculean task because of the vastness of the ethnic groups that there are in the country. It is not an unachievable task as no one would expect Rome to be built in a day.

Also, there is need for more of such departments (music technology department) to be established in various regions of the country. The existence of music technology as a course in the syllabus of general music education is not sufficient to make the student become a music technologist. The establishment of more departments of music technology will go a long way to facilitate this kind of research mentioned above. Although, some of these instruments perform better when made with the original materials, yet there are some of them that could be made with synthetic materials which will make them more durable. This is another area of research which is believed to be rewarding. Some African musical instruments have lost their history of origin in foreign lands because they have been improved upon. Technological advancement in terms of preservation of these instruments should as well be looked into.

Conclusion

The paper has looked at ways by which African traditional musical instruments could be prevented from going into extinction. Using Ebira cultural area of Kogi state as a case study, the paper raised fear of extinction of many of the traditional musical instruments as their manufacturers are declining as a result of age, retirement or death without replacement. The paper also raised hope since there are things that could still be done before things get out of hand. The study

suggests that effort be made towards establishing a system of formal training of our students in music technology; in addition to establishing more departments of music technology in our institutions, both private and government owned. This will go a long way in solving unemployment problem and the challenge of losing our cherished African/Nigerian traditional musical instruments.

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