

MINSTRELSY IN IGBO CULTURE: A TRANSCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF SELECTED WORKS OF MIKE EJEAGHA

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Introduction

Several studies have been done on minstrelsy and a lot of literatures in existence have given the subject definition, clarification and analysis. Minstrelsy is a specialized vocal art and a vital musical expression for most societies. It is closely bound to folklore; hence it appears to be most predominant and common in rural areas and traditional societies where people share almost everything in common. Minstrelsy as a functional art, whose essence is verbally conveyed and easily realized, has been part of aristocratic life in some societies. As a specialized style of vocal singing, it is not only an elaborate activity in its own right but essential and effective agent for social engagements and other human activities. The protagonists of this art are the minstrels. Hence, the projection and sustenance of this ennobling art is actualized through their performance. Nzewi (2007:83) identified minstrelsy as a typical indigenous popular (pop) music style. He avers that:

That the emphasis is usually on a star performer who spins stories, anecdotes and commentaries about occurrences and experiences in her/his human society. She/he may have one or more accompanists who sing chorus answers, and may as well provide light instrumental accompaniment or textural background for solo compositions/extemporization.

Minstrelsy ensembles are normally envisioned for a concert audience. Minstrelsy was common to both European and African musical styles. In Europe, it was first mentioned in relation to the troubadours and jongleurs, traveling musicians who earned money and other gifts through performances. A minstrel was a medieval European bard who performed songs whose lyrics told stories of distant places or of existing or imaginary historical events. Minstrel is a

professional entertainer of any kind including juggler; acrobat and storytelling, more specifically, a secular musician and usually an instrumentalist.

Here in Nigeria (and indeed in Igboland), one most common and glaring phenomenon noted in Nigerian minstrelsy, is the persistent dominance of an individual singer in an ensemble. As Okafor (1980) observed that “what distinguishes minstrels from other types of Igbo vocal music is the soloist, a gifted one, who carries the singing. Not only is he a solo performer, but also his style and some of his compositions are personal to him” (p.52). Ubani (2004) asserted that “minstrelsy as creative art is indigenous to Igbo culture. Minstrel, music (*Egwu Ekpili*) is the traditional music of the Igbos. As members of their communities, their philosophies and conceptions are culturally, motivated and society based” (p. 115).

Okafor (2005) noted that:

Minstrelsy music was one of the earliest genres of vocal music known to the Igbo. The minstrel was a solo performer who entertained his audience with songs, storytelling and even buffoonery of a higher witty and sophisticated kind. (p.27)

Minstrels' music is widely acceptable because they deal with the themes of the moment with which people are familiar or in contact. Ubani (2004) revealed that they were held to a great esteem and their words receive the attention of the people. The songs of the minstrels have diverse messages which they put across to the people. Okafor (2005) opined that “because the minstrel can notify, stimulate and mobilize the community, he is useful to the chief men as a way of embellishing their own personalities and inflating their egos. “Ceremonies and formal occasions can be so successfully promoted by minstrelsy, that they outlive the actors and become a heritage to succeeding generations”.

The most outstanding characteristic of a minstrel art according to Okafor (2005) is “his/her ability to respond, within a given semi traditional musical frameworks of the exigencies of each social occasion and to create something new and challenging for audience”. (p.28) He went further quantify the minstrel as the conscience of the people: their judge of right and wrong. He sees him not only as a musician and singer, but a respected member of the society, a hero, a preacher, a voice of the people, a terror to those who deviate from accepted

norms. Mbanugo (1988) noted thus: “Minstrels are the society’s mouth-pieces and the society’s watchdogs. They comment on societal trends highlighting deviant behaviours from individuals or group of individuals” (p. 303)

The minstrels of our time have their poetic and music theme centered on the socio- poetical events, tales, joys and hopes, sorrows and problems of our modern society. However, the artistic and creative ingenuity of Michael Nwachukwu Ejeagha (Mike Ejeagha), for instance goes beyond musical or poetic considerations. Apart from being seen as a poet-musician, a public entertainer, an educator, a social informant and a molder of public opinion, he could conveniently and convincingly also act as a dancer and an instrumentalist. Beadle (2014) described Mike Ejeagha as one artiste that can be said to epitomize the soul of Ndi Igbo. Very much in the “deep” Igbo folk culture tradition of his native Enugu area, Ejeagha’s lyrics are full of the parables and shaded meanings that are the essence of Igbo culture. His arrangements and guitar work, in addition are sublime. Minstrels are revered and highly acknowledge in Nigeria. However, the degree of respect and recognition with their attendant remunerations and material wealth differs from one Nigerian society to another. Be that as it may, minstrelsy is a universal phenomenon, and minstrels have gained recognition, in all the part of the entire world.

Compositional Techniques of Michael Nwachukwu Ejeagha

The process in the art of composing new songs by Mike Ejeagha is mostly inspirational and partly spontaneous. Inspirationally, it springs from the innate talents of his artistic ingenuity. Musical idea comes as wave which is the creative imaginative ability to perceive sound in one’s mind and ear. He claimed that musical ideas come to him while alone, at work in the house, with friends, when surprising events take place within his environment, where they have farm-settlements, from hinter-lands, and also from friends whose stories he do re-arrange for musical compositions. Ejeagha’s ability to re-arrange, re-interpret and recapture these stories and events musically derives from his accumulated musical experiences and ideas over the years. As a onetime choir boy he sang in solfa notation and at the same time acquired a sound aural perception. Similarly as a good guitarist, he understands partly, the Western principles of chords and chord progressions. However, he cannot represent them on paper, but

he knows when a beautiful melody is produced on the guitar, all depending on the kind of impression and mood he wants to create.

According to Elom (1992) he goes on repeating a particular melodic movement or phrase he considers good, on the guitar, or using his voice, until he internalizes it, such that he can recite it with much ease. However, this may be subject to modifications after meeting with the other two of his members during rehearsals. This is because their suggestions are most of the time useful. More so, as he observed that, it would be boring to them, if he goes on telling them what to do without allowing them to contribute musical ideas. Mike Ejeagha's compositional techniques can equally be comprehended and appreciated when a close listening attention is given to the syntactic and semantic structure of his language of communication, the Igbo language. For instance, the first stanza of his song "Akuebube" (Wealth induces pride) which appears below shows a syntadigmatic relationship of words formation. This is because there is an element of sequence and complementarities in the words formation, such that the meaning of the first line of the stanza is realized in the second line; without the second line balancing the first line, the meaning of the entire musical sentence is lost. For example,

*Akuebube Akuebube
Akuebube Akuebube
Kedu ifem mere madu ji akpuru mu n'onu
Kedu ifem mere madu ji akpuru mu n'onu
Obum bu mbu n'enweghi ikwu?
Ka o bu m bu mbu n'enweghi ibe?
Anyam ko me ko me?
Anyam ko re ko me?
Ogbenye dibu mbu adii o*

Semantically, a sentence in Igbo language or a single word may have different interpretations and meanings, for instance, the musical sentence "*kedu ihe m mere madu ji akpuru m n'onu*" superficially means (what have I done that people always discuss me?)

But in its deep meaning it implies defamation and character assassination. This explains the complex nature of most African language, especially the Igbo

language: Linguistically, Igbo language is neither single in structure nor deficiency in vocabulary. It comprises series of derivations, affixes and prefixes, and makes complicated and subtle use of varying tones to express and differentiate deficiency lexical and grammatical forms. It is through these and many other figurative devices such as onomatopoeia, simile and proverbs among others, that Igbo as a language has come to fully establish its traditional and peculiar resources of structure and rich vocabulary on which a native and eloquent composer like Ejeagha carefully draws for musical expression after a thoughtful and logical reasoning with regards to his choice of words.

Some of the figurative devices mentioned earlier appeared mostly in his free recitative lines. For instance in his song “*Nnam Eze akpata m enyi*” (My Lord the king I have brought the Elephant) Ejeagha used the expression “*Gwogwon Gwongwon*” to recapture the size and ponderous movement of the elephant. Similarly in his song “*Ebuni Nwude*” Ejeagha used the proverb “*onye jide ihe nwata welie aka elu, aka jie ya nwata ewere ihe ya*” which means (whoever raises a child’s property up, hoping that he would not get at it, will definitely bring his hand down when he is tired and then the child will collect his belonging?)

Texts of Akuebube and Ebuni Nwude by Michael Ejeagha

Song 1: Akuebube

Igbo Text	English Translation
<i>Akuebube Akuebuibe</i>	Akuebube Akuebube
<i>Akuebube Akuebube</i>	Akuebube Akuebube
<i>Kedu ife melu madu jiapulu m n’onu</i>	What have I done that make people speak about me in such manner
<i>Kedu ife melu madu jiapulum n’onu</i>	What have I done that make people speak about me in such manner
<i>O bu m bu mbu n’enweghi ikwu</i>	Am I the first person without relatives?
<i>O bu m bu mbu n’enweghi ibe</i>	Am I the first people without friends
<i>Anyam kone kone</i>	I have said it times without number.
<i>Anyam kone kone</i>	I have said it times without numbers.
<i>Ogbenye dibu mbu adi</i>	The poor have been around since the

<p>Ayo – Ayo – Ayo Ayo – Ayo - Ayo (10x)</p>	<p>beginning of the time. Ayo – Ayo - Ayo Ayo Ayo (10x)</p>
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Song 2: Ebuni Nwude

Igbo Texts	English Translation
<i>Udeze nwanne m, Udeze Nwannem</i>	Udeze my brother, Udeze my brother
<i>Ife melu be anyi</i>	Mysterious events have happened in our land
<i>Nwoke atulu ime</i>	A man is pregnant
<i>Akwu chara n’omu</i>	Palm fruits have grown on palm leaves
<i>Ji esili n’iteepue ome</i>	A yam in a boiling pot has germinated.
<i>Udeze n’anyi araba anaba</i>	Udeze we are going home.
<i>Ekwu na ato sibe ite ya atu adaa</i>	A pot on a tripod stand hardly falls
<i>Agbu ekelu nwa ngwele elugo otuto</i>	It is time for the lizard to be disentangled.
<i>Udeze n’azi anyi anaba anaba.</i>	Udeze we are going.
<i>Ebuni nwude,</i>	Ebuni nwude
<i>Ochuwe oyeli ekwu</i>	<i>Ochuwe oyeli ekwu</i>
<i>Ebuni nwude.</i>	Ebuni nwude.

Basic Form of Ejeagha’s Compositions

The overall organization of musical ideas in time is regarded as form and understanding the form of music helps to make sense of what the composer, arranger or performer tries to express. Michael Ejeagha uses a form that has interplay between voice and instruments, especially the guitar in dialogue. A solo and chorus with punctuations of instrumental interlude which seems often times to

play a role of a second partner to the soloist in a display of a dialogue as shown in example 1

1. UDEZE NWA NNEM2 3

TI U-de-ze nwanem, U-de-ze nwan-nem.

TII

Gtr. 1

Gtr. 2

Mrcs.

W. Bl.

C. Dr.

Further examples can be seen in “Onye Ori Utaba.

TI A-kue - bu-be Akue - bu-be, ke-dui-femame-humana-du-jiakpu-humr'o-

TII

Gtr. 1

Gtr. 2

Mirb. Ubo Aka

Another aspect of form is his extensive employment of “Declamation” A musical identity as found in almost all his work as a characteristics. Ejeagha does a solo work usually interpreted with call and Response with occasionally instrumental interlude. Each time he returns to A, as he exposes the theme which is A, moves off to the story line which is B, comes back to the theme which is A, move off to another continuation of the story which is C, comes back to A. This is established in Onye Ori Utaba, and Udeze Nwanne m.

His Melodic Structures

Michael Ejeagha’s melody is repetitive and fragmentary, very typical of African melody. As a result of his use of conventional musical instruments, his music is tempered on definite pitch. His melody uses the scale which can sometimes be tonal. His melody is characteristically more of logogenic with some element of pathogenic consideration in the melodic invention.

Textual Analysis of Ejeagha’s Music

The texts of Ejeagha’s music is deep rooted in the Christian teaching of humility, generosity, decency, patience, endurance, hard work and above all love among other virtues. For instance, the song “Akuebube” (Wealth induces pride) cautions against excessive pride and egoism, for no condition is ever permanent be it pleasurable or dehumanizing. It equally emphasizes on perseverance and honesty even when life turns sore and unbearable. Ejeagha’s music is highly flexible both in context and content.

Contextually his music could be performed at such occasion like child-naming, marriage, installation of political office holder and funeral ceremony. In such contexts, the music could have as its subject matter such issues as morality, praise, consolation, social problems of life as poverty, wickedness and love among others.

Correlation between the Speech Tone and Melodic Contour

Melody determines the harmony just as the text determines the melody. Michael Ejeagha’s melodies grow out of speech since they trace the natural inflection of the text. Changes in text sometimes affect the melody of the songs.

This is because the language used in their songs is mainly tonal. A language is tonal when the meaning of a word is dependent upon the pattern of tones used in the pronunciation of the words. As Igbo language is tonal and in order not to destroy the meaning of words, the melodic contour is largely influenced by the way the words are pronounced.

Harmonic Structure of Ejeagha's Compositions

Looking at Michael Ejeagha's harmony we usually see that it often described involuntary harmony. It is not figured under the harmony of western conception and as a result, we often find the harmony running in third, fifth and sixth, harmonized under Strict Organum – moving in similar motion and mentioned although. Example

U-de-zen nwan-nem, U-de-ze nwan-nem.

The image shows a musical score for two staves in G major. The melody is written on a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are 'U-de-zen nwan-nem, U-de-ze nwan-nem.' The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with a repeat sign at the end of the second phrase.

Thirds can be seen from *Onye Ori Utaba*.

A-kue - bu-be A-kue-bu-be , A - kue - bu-be A - kue - bu - be ,

The image shows a musical score for two staves in G major. The melody is written on a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are 'A-kue - bu-be A-kue-bu-be , A - kue - bu-be A - kue - bu - be ,'. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with a repeat sign at the end of the second phrase.

Rhythmic Structure and Phrasing in Ejeagha's works

Michael Ejeagha's rhythm is complex, typical of African rhythm. He figures his rhythm which is more in an additive manner. There is also a trace of cross rhythm as shown in the instrumental part of *Onye Mkpesa* and like Africans, the use of the woodblock maintains the variations of popular rhythm in Africa which is called the bell rhythm, running in ostinato most often.

Examples are as follows:

1. ***Udeze Nwannem***



2. ***Onye Ori Utaba:***



Findings and Conclusion

“Minstrelsy music was found to be a highly participative art-form. It can easily be used for effective communication on members of the society.” (Mbanugo, 1988:303). The minstrelsy groups are educational agents to members of the society especially the Igbo. Ekwueme (1977:23) observed that “Music is sine quinoa in Igbo activated religion, dance, the purgative ritual’s aptly exposes the African even in the traditional context”. Nwuba (1976:3) stated in his address at the synod of the Anglican Diocese of Owerri on June 1976 that “in our Igbo context, music is the principal instrument for conveying all sorts of emotions, so whether it is for joy, sorrows, reflections or relaxation, music ideas to the heart of our people”.

Many others are in support of the same view that minstrelsy is in our blood. The over-riding influences of music to the Igbo are well pronounced during social functions. One thing is clear; music has played, and will continue to play a vital role in the life of the Igbo. Mike Ejeagha strongly prays that his children will follow his footsteps in music, unlike his fathers who made nothing out of it.

It is the hope of the researcher that other researchers will also embark on this type of research so that a large body of songs will be documented for educational purposes and for the enjoyment of posterity.

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Appendix

Excerpts of Transcriptions of *Udeze Nwannem* and *Onye Ori Utaba*

1. UDEZE NWA NNEM

Composer: Mike Ejeagha

$\bullet = 120$

The musical score is arranged in a grand staff format with seven staves. The top two staves are for Tenor I and Tenor II, both in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The next two staves are for Guitar 1 (Lead) and Guitar 2 (Rhythm), also in treble clef with the same key signature and time signature. The bottom three staves are for Maracas Rattle, Wood Blocks, and Conga Drums, each in a percussion clef (two vertical lines) with the same key signature and time signature. The score consists of three measures. The Tenor parts are mostly rests. The Guitar 1 part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The Guitar 2 part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with a steady eighth-note pattern. The percussion parts (Maracas Rattle, Wood Blocks, and Conga Drums) are represented by rests in each measure.

1. UDEZE NWA NNEM 2

TI
U-de-zenwannem, U-de-zenwannem.

TII

Gtr. 1

Gtr. 2

Mrs. Rattle

W. Bl.

C. Dr.

1. UDEZE NWA NNEM 2

TI
I - feme lub'a'nyi, nwok'a tu-1'i meakwu cha-lu n'omu, jie-si-li n'i-t'e-'

TII

Gtr. 1

Gtr. 2

Mrs. Rattle

W. Bl.

C. Dr.

1. UDEZE NWA NNEM 2

TI
pueome, Udezen'a-nyi a-nab'ana - ba. I-fe me-lu b'a-nyi,

TII

Gtr. 1

Gtr. 2

Mrs. Rattle

W. Bl.

C. Dr.

1. UDEZE NWA NNEM 2

TI
nwok'a-tu-4'i-me akwucha lu n'omu, jie-si-4i n'i't'epueome, Udezen'aanyi a-nab'anaba.

TII

Gtr. 1

Gtr. 2

Mrs. Rattle

W. Bl.

C. Dr.

1. UDEZE NWA NNEM 2

The musical score is arranged in a grand staff format. It includes the following parts:

- TI (Tenor I):** Treble clef, 8/8 time signature. Lyrics: E - kwun'a-to si-b'i-te ny'a-ka-ka. A - gbueke-lenwangwe!e-lu-g'o-ti-to.
- TII (Tenor II):** Treble clef, 8/8 time signature.
- Gtr. 1 (Guitar 1):** Treble clef, 8/8 time signature.
- Gtr. 2 (Guitar 2):** Treble clef, 8/8 time signature.
- Mrcs. Rattle:** Percussion staff with a rattle sound effect.
- W. Bl. (Whistle):** Percussion staff with a whistle sound effect.
- C. Dr. (Congo Drum):** Percussion staff with a drum sound effect.

.... and so on.....

ONYE ORI UTABA

Composer: Mike Ejeagha

$\text{♩} = 100$

The musical score is arranged in a grand staff with seven staves. Tenor I and Tenor II are in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. Guitar 1 and Guitar 2 are in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. Marimba Ubo Aka is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. Gong, Maracas Rattle, and Wood Blocks are in common time. The score shows three measures of music. The first measure has rests for all instruments. The second measure shows the guitar and marimba playing a rhythmic pattern, while the gong and maracas play specific rhythmic patterns. The third measure continues the patterns.

.... and so on.....