

MUSIC COMPOSERS' CHALLENGES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY NIGERIA: THE RETRIEVAL RESEARCH STRATEGY (R.R.S.) AS A LEEWAY

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Introduction

Nigerian music/composition, Nigerian musicologists/musicians/composers or Nigerian musicology and so on, are not new terminologies in any part of the globe in recent times. Much has been said and documented on these terminologies and most Nigerians who have been deeply committed to each of the terms have so far done Africa proud in various capacities in their various chosen fields. This paper seeks to enumerate the challenges facing Nigerian composers in modern times and further present the Retrieval Research Strategy (RRS) which Nwamara and Chukwu (2011) present as the systematic retrieval of all research works on Nigerian/Nigerian musicology from institutions, libraries, shelves etc., and looking into them in order to utilize and implement the observations, suggestions and recommendations thereof.

By the term composer, the writers consider a music creator without any restriction to the kind of music or genre. This cuts across all music types including; art, pop, traditional, etc. A composer may be trained, semi-trained or untrained. When a composer is said to be trained, it does not necessarily suggest that such a composer must have got his training from a music institution where training of a composer is organized, systematic and formal. It is possible for such a person to have learnt by apprenticeship. Although areas of music composition fall within three broad areas;

1. Art music composition
2. Popular music composition and

3. Traditional music composition

These broad areas fall within Okafor's (2004) classification of Nigerian music as the traditional Music, the Popular Music, and the Classical Music; which Nwamara (2009) added Art Music to the Classical Music, converting the third category to the Classical and Art Music.

Traditional Music: Includes all traditional and/or folk music in Nigeria which serve as media for the expression of the people's culture; transmitted orally from one generation to another with allowances for each generation to make selections and variations from the original without destroying its tone of continuity.

Popular Music: This is most times is referred to as 'Pop' music. It is a "contemporaneous music, which appeals to a mass audience... it does not require guided listening because people are familiar with its idioms and are, therefore, quite receptive to it... it is music with broad immediate and implicitly transient appeal. It is also social-entertainment and dance oriented, draws its core clientele from urban dwellers, and finds its expression mostly in pubs and nightclubs. It is more popular with the youths than the adults" (Okafor, 2009:5)."

Classical and Art Music: Classical and Art music in this context, includes all written or scored music, composed in accordance with certain universally accepted conventions and rules. In line with Okafor (2009);

it is generally absolute music but may be derived from or used as popular styles for dance or for entertainment (suite, dance, ballet, divertissement, gavotte, minuet, polka, rhumba). It also includes the accepted national music of some countries like rhapsody, which is Swedish; polka, which is Czech; reel, which is Celtic.

Nwamara (2009a) includes music of the church, their liturgy and scriptures (cantatas, oratorios, mass, litany, canticles, anthems, motets, plainsongs etc.). In Nigeria, classical and art music are mainly performed in the concert halls and churches for mainly the elites, the Christian congregation, and the academia.

Each of these classes of music discussed above can be either instrumental or vocal and have so many variations and kinds. With these numerous aspects of

composition in existence, one has to expect that there would definitely be as much problems facing their actualization as their number.

Theory of Retrieval Research

The Retrieval Research Strategy (RRS) as propounded by Nwamara and Chukwu, (2010), basically designed to bring back to the scene, most (if not all that are still in existence) of the past research findings which have been neglected over the years as a result of either misplacement of priorities or lack of direction and proper guidance. Much useful and well-researched works have been lost over time as resultant effects of this fact. Some others are hidden in archives and some kept in unpopular libraries, while the very few that are still in circulation are not being explored, utilized and implemented.

Most problems that music scholarship and composition are facing today are as a result of the fact that Africa is blessed with very talented and well trained composers whose works are known and respected globally. Yet in Africa, the works of these very respectable scholars and composers, though recognized to an extent in certain secluded quarters; are not being put into meaningful uses as to better the state of Nigerian music both locally and internationally. Conferences, symposia, workshops, summits etc., are actually held in various parts of the world on Nigerian music, but the big question remains; what are the outcomes of these meetings over years? For how long shall we continue to recycle ideas without implementations?

The Problems/Challenges and Issues

The challenges of the Nigerian music composer are so numerous and have been viewed from several perspectives by various Nigerian scholars. Effort is being made here to bring to focus, a few of these scholars' views covering the three main areas of art music, pop music and traditional music be it vocal or instrumental music. Issues of identity, acceptability and attitude are also addressed.

Problems associated with 21st century Nigerian vocal music: Ekwueme (2004) in his work entitled "Composing contemporary Nigerian choral music: Problems and prospects," looks at problems facing music making/composition for

Nigerians and the world at large from the perspective of language, form, style, idiom, content, structure, theory, purpose, audience and aesthetics. Although it is basically on art music, reasonable aspect can be likened to what is applicable to both modern Nigerian pop and traditional music. The paper which dwells on contemporary Nigerian vocal music observes that in spite of these numerous problems associated with composition of these songs, some good composers have exploited some of the features of traditional Nigerian music to create choral works for international consumption. Antiphony, tonality, ostinato, harmony, augmentation and diminution, maximization of the use of exclamations and "untranslatables" Nwamara (2009b), are techniques and features of traditional Nigerian music used by these good composers as enumerated in the paper. The paper notes that many so-called Nigerian composers are not even aware of the existence of the problems earlier stated; few are aware and know what the problems are while a few others who know the problem do not know how to tackle them. Ekwueme (2004) goes further to suggest that the ideal twenty-first century composer of Nigerian choral music needs to be;

a multi-talented composer, competent at languages and linguistics, with a sound knowledge of theory of music, and vast, competent experience in harmony and counterpoint have an impeccable ear; capable of hearing and distinguishing (between) micro tones have a thorough understanding of the human voice, and a more than superficial knowledge of the state of affairs in Nigerian and international choral techniques. (p. 296)

Problems associated with 21st century Nigerian instrumental music: The major problem here remains dearth of well trained and accomplished instrumentalists caused majorly by indiscipline and lack of commitment. The advancements in technology have worsened the issue as most composers now resort to the help of computers and synthesizers for the realization of their creative works. No one wants to be patient anymore to learn the art since robots can help out in difficult situations. This affects the traditional instrumental music composers worse than the art and pop. Traditional instrumental music composers are sometimes collaborative composers, therefore, when there is lack of reliable instrumentalists, there may be no or low quality compositions. As matter of fact, the average twenty-first century Nigerian composer, composes what is readily

marketable in the music market as decided by the consumers. This is symbiotic in nature.

Issue of Nigerian identity/"Nigerianism": There is no doubt that the West has contributed so much to the betterment of musicology in Africa. But care is being taken by Nigerians to alienate those that according to Nzewi (1997), are not always "mentally, culturally and humanly adequate" for Nigerian societies because their contents most often result to "a systematic mental subversion and cultural alienation for modern Nigerians in music." This is important as Nketia (2004) asserts that "many factors influence a composer's perspectives and approach to his work, in particular his nurture, training, cultural background, personal philosophy, response to the colonial encounter, and musical experiences (page 16).

Searching for an Nigerian Identity in the composition of Nigerian works, Uzoigwe (2001) in his "Tonality Versus Atonality: The Case for an Nigerian Identity," illustrated two basic points using one of his piano solo compositions entitled "The Talking Drum." The two points are as follows:

1. *The need for Nigerian composers to consider the possibility of musical thought that derives basically from Nigerian social-musical creativity, and find ways of examining it as far as possible in order to concretize those factors that may contribute in giving Nigerian art music real Nigerian identity. Western technology may be utilized to reproduce musical tones, but Western tonal and rhythmic perceptions may not be adopted to conceive and order musical patterns.*

2. *The need to relate this musical thought to the concept of duality – that is a duality that comprises a synthesis of Nigerian and Western musical traditions – which is at the core of understanding the unique aesthetic qualities that inform the creative output of the Nigerian composer.*

He notes that "these are but steps towards a general theory of Nigerian art music." (Pg. 173)

Omibiyi-Obidike (2001), in her own opinion presents the issue of a Nigerian identity in contemporary Nigerian Art Music as a central issue of concern to observers, foreign enthusiasts, Nigerian musicians and the composers themselves. This, according to Omibiyi-Obidike (2001), being as a result of the fact that most of these compositions by academically trained Nigerian composers; are not directly related to or embedded in the music of their cultural background. She notes having said elsewhere that:

Although they (Nigerian composers) make use of traditional themes by incorporating Nigerian rhythmic and melodic structures, texts, traditional songs in both vocal and orchestral works and combine Western and traditional Nigerian instruments, their compositions are still completely embedded in the Western classical tradition... (Omibiyi-Obidike, 1992, p. 38).

As at year 2001, her views on contemporary Nigerian Art music included as follows;

- (a) Contemporary Nigerian Art Music has not made an impact on its local audience as they are totally negative and unreceptive to it.
- (b) It has not expressed a personality or an identity of its own vis-a-vis Western classical or even Art Music of other world cultures.

In her view, Nigerian Art Music can become acceptable to and appreciated by Nigerians the same way Western classical music is received worldwide by those who have been exposed to it, if;

- (c) Nigerian Art Music is rooted in Nigerian traditional music or a direct derivation from the indigenous rather than Western tradition.
- (d) Music education in schools at all levels includes education based on Nigerian traditional music as well as the use of traditional musical resources.

There exists some level of enslavement in the global musicological setting. Why must a non-English composer be requested to translate his work originally written in his native language to English before it would be accepted for publication in most reputable journals and books globally? The problem here is not just to translate the language for easy understanding of what the composition says; but

requested to translate syllable by syllable or word for word in the body of the composition. This destroys the "Nigerianity" in our compositions.

Issue of acceptability: On the issue of acceptability of Nigerian compositions by Nigerian audience, Ogunnaike (1986) posits that the relationship between the composer and his audience is further complicated by the reluctance of audiences to accept music written in a twentieth/twenty-first century idiom. Atonal music, for instance, is not usually well received by Nigerian audience that are used to tonal music.

The poor reception of atonal music notwithstanding, Uzoigwe (2001), still maintains that atonality should not be perceived or interpreted in same way Western society does since it can be traced to exist in Nigerian musical tradition where tonal centres often fluctuate even within a given musical composition, depending on the fluctuations in performance-situation and other non-musical factors. He cites the part singing in parallel seconds among the Ekiti of Nigeria which they perceive and accept as pleasant and satisfies a social-musical need.

An important component of traditional resources has been variously referred to as "musical bias" Washmann (1956); "artistic values" Nketia (1966) and "inner significance" Adelugba (1983).

These constitute the inner core of Nigerian music and serve as means of identity, differentiating it from the music of other world cultures. They are manifested in performance techniques and individual styles – vocal and instrumental – voice texture, choice and use of traditional repertoire, internal structure, vocal intonation, aesthetics of musical performance and so forth. For instance, it is easy to differentiate between "the strained and heavily masked voice of a Japanese ritual singer" and the Italian "belcanto" performer. In the same manner, Nigerian style of voice production is quite different. In this regard, mention must be made of yodelling, ululation among others. The level of authenticity displayed by the Nigerian performer makes him popular. Therefore, these artistic norms must be identified, isolated and organized for educational use so that they can form part of the

training of professional Nigerian composers and performers.
(Omibiyi-Obidike, 2001, p. 155)

These are areas that are yet to be fully exploited by Nigerian composers if we must make our work more acceptable to our Nigerian audience.

Misplacement of priority: It has been observed that most Nigerian composers only compose for some sort of selfish gains. Be it in form of financial or position. When the composer is supposed to influence and positively affect his society through his creativity. What are the contents of our works? This is where it becomes imperative to adopt some of our new theories like Adedeji's (2010) 'transformative musicology', which postulates that "music could be used as a vehicle of the transformative processes needed in our society and that composition constitutes its major tool". In addition, Adedeji (2010) suggests various ways and models to redirect art music composition in order to meet contemporary social challenges and concludes on the urgent need to compose music that prognosticates into the future by focusing on transformative themes.

The popular music (mainly gospel) composers have made some remarkable progress in this aspect of musicology. The traditional music composers have as well made some remarkable impact but the art music composers are yet to follow suit in effort to transform using the musical art. We seem to be more concerned with level of complexity and the contrapuntal nature of art compositions than the resultant effect of these songs. These are good and necessary in our compositions but we need to take a step further to accommodate other non-musical aspects of composition as we compose.

The Nigerian child is important to Africa since he will grow to replace the adults of today. What legacy are we leaving for them? Who cares for their tomorrow musically? How many of us consider Nigerian children's rhymes and theatre important? We are training most (if not all) Nigerian children that live in cities with European songs because they are those available in both audio and video formats. This calls for a re-think.

Attitude ("Professional jealousy"/backwardness): It has remained extremely difficult for many trained Nigerian composers and music scholars to

accept whole-heartedly theories and creative works by fellow Nigerians as original and authentic. Instead these formulated Nigerian theories and creative works by Nigerians, constantly face destructive criticism and neglect, while the few original thinkers in musical research, creativity and academia are tactically made to face resentment and marginalization. This is rather unfortunate even as one observes that in this 21st century, many music scholars are yet to be:

mentally re-oriented to accept even if only in principle, that Nigerian traditional music(s) contain all that are needed in philosophy, theoretical content and principles of practice for culturally meaningful and independent modern music education. (Nzewi, 1997 pg vii.).

Many supposedly creative Nigerians in our institutions have become petition writers/composers than music writers/composers. This is waste of creative resources. Little wonder why Nwamara (2012) refers to it as “misallocation of resources that could be channeled to productive uses” page 225. He cited instances where musicologists spend time ganging up (cliques), gossiping against colleagues and writing lengthy petitions (as long as seventy six pages) rather than researching and publishing original works. This is backwardness and has remained a great challenge even to many young and up-coming musicologists and composers.

The Way Forward

Having stated all these problems and challenges facing the Nigerian composer, what is therefore the way forward? And to this, the writer recommends the retrieval research strategy (RRS). And what is this RRS? The Retrieval Research Strategy (RRS) calls for a recap on as many as possible music studies researches done in various parts of Africa and beyond and implementing the outcome of the researches, as long as they are beneficial and have Nigerian basis. It basically seeks to recall what has been done, scrutinize the research findings and sieve out what are needed from what do not necessarily seem to be very beneficial and afterwards prescribe the methodology of utilizing them for better results in the field of Nigerian musicology.

Retrieval Research Strategic Steps

Nigerian musicology finds itself in a situation of scarcity in the midst of plenty. The solution therefore remains the RRS – which sets out to bring to the know, all that need to be explored, utilized and implemented for the restoration and preservation of our most cherished and valued Nigerian music. How do we go about this? The following shows in a nutshell, a step to step approach to the four-step strategy to salvage the music of our land.

RRS Step I - Data discovery and retrieval: This involves searching for and recovering Nigerian music related/based research works previously carried out by researchers and scholars in various institutions of higher learning both in Nigeria and overseas. These may be in form of seminar papers, conference papers, workshops, symposiums, essays, thesis and dissertations, as well as other academic papers. Data discovery and retrieval here definitely require the use of information and communication technology (ICT) gadgets for easier accessibility.

RRS Step II - Data collation, compilation and packaging: In collation, compilation and packaging, the works recovered from step I are required to be re-worked into some sort of readable and easily understandable wholes (both in soft and hard copy formats). Things are easier with the help of the internet. The internet enables one to have a global network of research assistants. Therefore this step can easily be completed without the stress of moving from one part of the world to another. A coordinator sits down on a computer system, downloads, collates, compiles and packages the submissions of all the contributors and his research assistants. He afterwards turns these into a whole package, set for the next step.

RRS Step III - Advertising, popularizing and marketing: In order to sell a commodity or product, one needs to create awareness through advertisements and well calculated and organized marketing strategies. This can be achieved by showcasing one's musicality and importance at every slightest opportunity, such that the discipline would eventually assume a better status in Nigerian societies of modern times (especially now that drama is drastically taking over the entertainment industry). This step will as well help to make these works available for constructive criticism by a larger number of critics.

RRS Step IV - Implementation: Implementation demands using all the proposed ideas and solutions to solve the problems for which they are created. This involves the practical aspects of the theories propounded in the research works already carried out and have gone through the RRS steps I – III. Akin Euba's concept of Nigerian Pianism and Onyeji's Nigerian Vocalism and so on are worthy of this implementation to see how far these Nigerian based concepts can go in the global music world. Let our meetings, workshops, symposia, summits, conferences focus more on implementation of already researched works. When this becomes the primary aim in all academic meetings, only then will there be significant improvement in Nigerian composition in particular and musicology in general.

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