

MUSIC COMPOSITION BASED ON NIGERIAN/AFRICAN TRADITIONAL MUSICAL IDIOMS: A PANACEA FOR CRIMINALITY AND VIOLENCE

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Abstract

Music composition – whether folk, art or popular – has inestimably enhanced knowledge and immensely contributed positively to society building throughout the ages in scores of ways. It transfers history from generation to generation and has been a unifying element, a means of disseminating information and a medium of correcting bad conduct in the society. Ruminations over the conflict situation in Nigeria reveal the necessity of the continuum of music composition (and performance) as a medium of talking to a wide audience to enhance correction of mistakes and oversights in the nation. Composers such as Akin Euba, Christian Onyeji, Daniel Agu, Joshua Uzoigwe, Meki Nzewi, and the like have established compositional styles and genres (e.g. African vocalism, African pianism, drummatic piano styles, native-air styles, etc.) that project the continuum of African/Nigerian musical traditions. The researcher, through historical and descriptive approaches, seeks to discuss the strength and importance of art music compositions which draw from Nigerian/African traditional musical idioms, as alternative ways to the sustenance of history, good communication and correction of societal vices.

Keywords: Music composition, Nigeria/Africa, Traditional Musical Idioms, Criminality and Violence

Introduction

Composition is the art of creating music. It implies making a unique musical event that may or may not be based on original material. Idolor (2002) sees a composer as one who emotionally conceives an idea (musical or extra-musical) and reorganizes it creatively through fragments of tones, dynamics,

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timbre, tempo, lyrics and texture for listeners to understand. Onyeji (2003:145) clarifies composition as the substance/fact of music. It also signifies structuring, re-structuring, and unearthing of finished music or part of it. In composition, a composer conceives an idea, and expresses freely his/her inner and personal musical affections through creative methodologies. That is why Onyeji (2012:65) states that "music is distinguished as one of the creative arts of indigenous African societies by which the people express themselves and their cultures through sound." In a similar vein, Agu (2012) asserts:

As a composer sets out to compose a new song, he involves himself in two mental exercises which are based on two main lines of independent thought. One is creative, which is aroused by fantasy, imagination and inspiration. The second is method which is shaped and determined by the musical system of the society. Methodological thought is influenced by folk musical thought and rules. Therefore, it somehow appears to have some control over inspiration and fantasy (p. 34).

The meaning of composition therefore cannot be complete without the word, creativity, which Nwankpa (2012:55) defines as "a way of producing or inventing something new through a combination of skills and imagination. He went further to state that it involves vision, originality, ingenuity, imagination, inspiration, inventiveness, resourcefulness, creativeness and individuality".

Music is closely connected with African custom and practice – agriculture, naming ceremony, initiation to manhood, war, marriage, burial, etc. As the saying goes, "music accompanies man from the womb to the tomb", thus, music-making in Africa functions as music of daily-life experience as well as ritual celebration. Onyeji (2012) states that:

Nigerian indigenous music may be described as the specific musical arts creations of indigenous Nigerian societies with which they celebrate and conduct their social and cultural events and in which various aspects of their cultural lives are woven, documented and exhibited when needed (p. 48).

In the same manner, Adedeji & Omosilade (2012) write:

Music in the African society is multi-dimensional in its roles. It is an essential ingredient in the day-to-day life of the community. Music-

making is tied to various events or activities of human existence, which range from birth through to death. This is evident in the various ceremonies that accompany such occasions and the concurrent use of music (p. 68).

That is why Adeogun (2006) clarifies:

Africa is distinguishable musically. Anytime African music is heard, seen, felt, and danced, it reflects a community's needs, fears, sources of stress and ideal norms of behaviour as well as the creative development of the community. Being dynamic, it is kept alive through the efforts of creative human personalities who are formed and informed by it (p. 38).

Onyeji (2012) concludes:

Music is a social outlet that plays a positive role in facilitating social and cultural integrity building in different cultures. Music presents a basic platform for social integration, re-orientation, identity search and formation as well as means to social realignment and transformation. It provides an avenue for emotional networking that enhances social interaction and adaptation at the same time as it enables construction of new social identities and structures leading to better personality construction and integrity... In recognition of music as a catalyst for social change, African societies have employed it in different social and human rites that entail physical, mental and social change or orientation. Thus, music is recognized as a serious art capable of serious influence on human senses in African cultures (p. 76).

That is why Nwankpa (2012) states that "music so created is a harvest of sounds combined with quality and beauty to form a deeper realism, a realm of inner design which gives integrity" (p. 63). In the same vein, Adeogun (2013) explains:

...every human group generates her own music with which she views the self, the world and beyond. It (music) expresses a group's personal-social beliefs, desires, and values. It is a medium for reflecting individual as well as collective hopes, wishes, aspirations, dilemmas and predicaments. As a social fact, it remains a doable resource for entertaining, educating and raising the conscience of the

masses. It is a mode of jolting humankind into a new consciousness necessary to attain better living standards... (p. 180).

This is to say that African music is functional in the sense that it is connected to other activities; though its functionalities vary from culture to culture, it goes far beyond entertainment and/or sound to depict extra-musical (non-musical) ideas that preserve social integrity and moral norms of the society. "Although a significant aspect of music practice in Africa, entertainment seems to be ranked the lowest in the hierarchy of value. This is because while all African music types implicate some form of entertainment, they address other issues more than they dwell on mere entertainment" Onyeji (2016:27).

African/Nigerian Traditional Musical Idioms

African music is tied to its functionalities (musical, extra-musical and non-musical). It plays major roles in society building, socio-cultural integrity and daily life activities of African people. There is no distinct indigenous African music that has nothing to add to preserve the moral norms of the society. In Africa, music is used to give signals, to get people ready for communal work, to teach, to correct, etc. Music, just like language, is a medium of communication; it is used to address issues, and its communicating strength becomes very effective and developed when cultural tools such as indigenous musical instruments, rhythmic patterns, melodic styles, harmonic structures, dance modes, speech modes (language), proverbs, etc. are regularly used in music composition and performance within the social environment of the audience.

Therefore, African/Nigerian composers need to be writing music that is relevant to Africans/Nigerians and persons of African/Nigerian descent who constitute their primary audience (Euba, 2001). In Africa, texts, for example, appear to be one of the major idiomatic media of expression and it is for this reason that, in some African cultures (especially Nigerian cultures), texts are used in practically all types of music, vocal and instrumental. On this note, the necessity of moral texts in music composition cannot be over-emphasized in maintaining peace and solidarity, correcting mistakes and keeping moral norms of the society (See Olalusi, 2013). "A composer of modern African music should enable a listener to appreciate the quintessential African harmonic, developmental and textural structural idioms; otherwise, the composition is of no consequence to a continuum of African creative integrity." Nzewi (1997: 72). Verbal and idiomatic

expressions, storytelling and figurative expressions are used in indigenous African traditional music to arouse interest and sustain the message in the listener's memory, "to achieve retention of the lyrics, brevity and beauty, at times through metaphorical level".(Agu,2012).In the same manner, most indigenous vocal music in Africa comprises songs that are "based on the use of allusions and poetic images conceived in the style of proverbs, or songs which exploit the evocative power of names and by-names. They may be reflective or philosophical, sentimental or satirical, humorous or comic". (Nketia, 1974). Therefore, composers in the 21st century Nigeria/Africa should wake up to making much use of these traditional musical idioms in their compositions to curb the increasing criminality and violence in the society. Only few among many composers of art and popular music have made a mark on using African/Nigerian traditional musical idioms to address issues in the society (See Onwuegbuna, 2012). In popular music, Gozie Okeke, Chinyere Udoma, Patty Obasi, etc. (gospel music composers/performers) Oliver De Coque, Oriental Brothers, Osita Osadebe, E. C. Arinze etc. (highlife music composers/performers) and so on have contributed enormously to society building via drawing from the traditional musical idioms in their compositions/performances. And in art music, the works of composers such as Akin Euba, Austinmary Ifunanya Eze, Christian Onyeji, Joshua Uzoigwe, Meki Nzewi, etc. really "demonstrate authentic African idiomatic authority". (Nzewi, 1999:5 in Onyeji,2013). Though the composers made use of some western music structures and models in their compositions, African/Nigerian musical elements and idioms are dominant in their works.

Table 1

COMPOSER	WORK(S)
Christian Onyeji	<i>Ufie</i> (Igbo dance) for piano, 1995. <i>Afro trombone</i> 1-4, 1995-1996. Twenty songs (for solo voice and piano), 1993-2000. <i>Abigbo</i> for orchestra (a symphony), 2002. <i>Hi Yom</i> , (a quartet), 2003. Etc.
Joshua Uzoigwe	Nigerian dance (for piano). Sketch for Trombone. Etc.

Meki Nzewi	<i>Omaledo</i> (Children's folklore opera), 1983. Poetic dances (8 movements of dances for chamber orchestra and African instrumental section), 2001. <i>Iram</i> (a quartet), 2002. Etc.
Akin Euba	Abiku no 1. Two Yoruba folk songs unaccompanied choir, 1959. Scenes from traditional Life for piano, 1977. Six Yoruba songs for voice and piano, 1995. Etc.
Austinmary Ifunanya Eze	<i>Egbe belu, Ugo belu</i> (Kite perch, Eagle perch) for solo & chorus (SATB), 2011. <i>Mma na-esi n'ulo</i> (Charity begins at home) for solo & chorus(SATB), 2013. <i>Obodo Umuanumanu</i> (Animal kingdom – folklore) for solo, Chorus& African instrumental ensembles, 2015. <i>Igwe bu Ike Mba</i> for solos, chorus& African instrumental ensembles, 2015. <i>Ononuzo gba</i> for solo, piano & <i>osha</i> (twin rattles), 2015. <i>Gidigidi bu ugwu Eze</i> for solo & chorus, 2015. <i>Udoka</i> for duet, chorus & African instrumental ensembles, 2015. <i>Njikoka</i> for solo, chorus& African instrumental ensembles, 2015. Etc.

Excerpt 1. Obodo Umuanumanu (Animal kingdom – folklore)

The following is a folklore made up of solo, chorus and African instrumental ensembles, structured in call-and-response and solo-and-chorused-refrain patterns, storytelling in demonstrative, informative and lively moods.

2

15

The musical score is written for a vocal ensemble and piano. It consists of two systems of music. The first system (measures 1-12) features four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts have the following lyrics:
Vocal 1: I he me-re, i he me-re
Vocal 2: m'o di njo. — Tu ru zam zam i - he me-re tu ru zam
Vocal 3: m'o di njo. — Tu ru zam zam i - he me-re tu ru zam
Vocal 4: m'o di njo. — Tu ru zam zam i - he me-re tu ru zam
Piano: m'o di njo. — Tu ru zam zam mh tu ru zam
The piano accompaniment includes a right-hand part with a melodic line and a left-hand part with a rhythmic accompaniment. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 12/8. The second system (measures 13-24) features four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts have the following lyrics:
Vocal 1: i he i he i he me-re
Vocal 2: zam Tu ru zam zam i - he me-re tu ru zam
Vocal 3: zam Tu ru zam zam i - he me-re tu ru zam
Vocal 4: zam Tu ru zam zam i - he me-re tu ru zam
Piano: zam Tu ru zam zam mh tu ru zam
The piano accompaniment continues with the same melodic and rhythmic patterns. The key signature and time signature remain the same. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ad lib.* and *mf*.

Textual Exposition of Obodo Umuanumanu (Animal kingdom – folklore)

The above excerpt is epitomized in form of call-response and solo-chorused refrain patterns. Bars 1 – 16 serve as a prelude to a storyline of the folklore and have no instrumental accompaniment. Its function is to catch the attention of the listeners towards the tale. Similarly, bars 67 – 80 are the climax which contains contrapuntal dialogue among the parts; there is no instrumental accompaniment in the measures so as to depict concentration which is evident when a vital issue is raised in a traditional setting. There are dialogues of the instruments (bars 18-37, 43-64, and 84-102) with the *Igba* (local drum) playing the role of the master instrument. The player is to extemporize on the given rhythmic pattern. The text in bars 1– 49 and 70 – 74 is set to music unaccompanied in order to portray an informative mood or emphasis required by the texts.

Igbo: *Elu, iya.*

English: Tale.

Igbo: *Onwere akuko m ga-akoro unu,*

English: I have a story to tell you;

Igbo: *Koo ma o di mma ma o di njo.*

English: Whether it is a good or bad story, tell us.

Igbo: *Ihe mere n'obodo umu anumanu*

English: Once upon a time, something great happened in animal kingdom;

Igbo: *Turuzamzam.*

English: Onomatopoeia

Igbo: *Ugani wee bia, tigbue zogbue, ekworo na anya ufu wee bia n'obodo umu anumanu;*

English: It happened that there was severe famine which resulted in fights, disharmony, and envy in animal kingdom.

Igbo: *Umu anumanu gbaba katakata katakata. Ha wee too izu, zuzugbe zuzugbe. Umu anumanu agbakoba n'ikem n'ikem n'ututu Eke ka ha mara ihe mere na obodo agaghi aga. Umu anumanu agbakoba n'ikem n'ikem n'ututu Eke ka ha mara ihe mere na obodo agaghi aga.*

English: Animals started seeking solutions to their problems, and fixed a meeting on Eke market day to find out the cause of the problems.

Igbo: *Ezue ka aha eri udele, atotue ngiga; Mbe ajua, onye mere ihe na ese? Ewu, onye mere ihe na ese? Usu, Enwe Agu, anu obula ajua ibe ya. Ori ututu Eke, Ori Ututu Afor, Okwa, Kerikedede, Tunzeleke mbe o. Ha wee choputa na adighi n'otu mere na obodo agaghi aga.*

English: Tortoise, Goat, Bat, Monkey, Lion, dove and other animals gathered and found out that disunity and laziness are the cause of their problems.

Igbo: *Agbisi gba otule o muru ako; umu anumanu ekwekorita si, ka anyi werenu ofu obi o, ka anyi luba olu.*

English: The animals learnt lessons from their ugly experiences and now recognized the necessity of unity, and agreed to work together with one mind and spirit.

Igbo: *Onye diri, ibe ya diri; Egbe belu, Ugo belu o, Ise.*

English: Live and let live; Kite perch, Eagle perch... Amen. (Igbo proverb – Achebe, 1958, described proverb as palm oil with which words are eaten).

Igbo: *Obere azu kpata obere nku, nnukwu azu kpata nnukwu nku.*

English: Small Fish fetch small firewood, big Fish fetch big firewood. (Igbo proverb)

Igbo: *Umu anumanu were ofu obi tinye aka n'olu ugani wee laa, ekworo, iwe na onuma laa.*

English: Animals did as they agreed and their problems were solved.

Igbo: *K'anyi were nu ofu obi ka anyi luba olu.*

English: Let us work with one mind and one spirit.

Conclusion

African/Nigerian music is functional in the sense that it goes beyond sound to depict extra-musical ideas which play positive roles in enabling socio-cultural integrity formation, transformation, social interactions, and in preserving moral norms of the society. It is our responsibility to guard this endowment very jealously via engaging in continual efforts that shall lead to investigation, documentation, preservation and propagation of distinct Nigerian/African musical traditions before they are completely lost under the standards of this ever-changing global contemporaneity. To achieve this, contemporary Nigerian/African art music composers should embark and continue to compose works that totally project the continuum of Nigerian/African music by drawing musical elements and idioms from different indigenous musical traditions of Nigeria/Africa.

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