

The Vibrant Intensity of Nigerian Music

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Abstract

Music is an integral part of human experience that enriches every stage of life, reflecting and shaping human lives from birth to death and this is accompanied by appropriate musical instruments. Music has a universal language that is often used to express some activities in religious, ritual, educational, political and social settings. However, Nigerian music reflects the country's traditions, customs, norms, language and this is rooted in diverse cultural traditions with the fusion of contemporary elements. This paper, therefore, seeks to express the concept of music in the Nigerian cultural system, exploring the interjection between music and dance, expressing the role of musical instruments as well as their exponents and how the music has sustained and preserved the rich cultural heritage of Nigerian music. The ethnographic method is employed to collect the data through a descriptive approach, and internet and library resources are also consulted. The research work, therefore, concludes that Nigerian musical instrument reflects social and cultural practices towards sustaining the growth and development of Nigerian music.

Keywords: culture, contemporary, Nigerian music, folk songs.

Introduction

Music is a significant part of cultural heritage in which individuals or communities express joy, strength, oneness and unity. Music is explored during festivals and ceremonies, which provides an excellent means of expression, interaction and community with one another. Nigerian music is proliferated by many music genres and musicians such as traditional folk music, invocations, chants, popular music, art music and theatre music. The Nigerian exponents include the performers, musicians, singers, composers, drummers, dirges, and town criers; they serve as heroes, having a viable, sustainable development of musical practice in Nigeria (Vidal 2008). Music as an integral part of Nigerian culture is performed in connection with different aspects of life such as birth, death, initiation, coronations, funerals and other social occasions. Music is seen as an arrangement of rhythmic patterns in a way that is pleasing to; therefore, the universality of music as a language is observed in every cultural practice and by different groups of people (Okafor, 2005).

The various people and cultures of Nigeria express the musical performance in different forms and methods, integrating with life at various stages of human existence. It is a connection line between cultural value and political life, a vital medium of communication that contributes to the maintenance and sustainability of enriching an experience through active engagement (listening, dancing and performing measures). Music, dance and drama have their origin in the activities of the earliest man, such as singing, dancing, imitation and re-enactment. In Nigerian music, creative arts are incomplete without music through the use of vocal or instrumental form. Nigeria is made up of different ethnic groups with a vast amount of cultural heritage that represents the total and the past, present and future.

The Concept of Music in Nigerian Culture

The tradition of music in Nigerian culture is often transmitted orally from one generation to another. Before the introduction of foreign music in Nigeria, there was an antecedent tradition of indigenous recreational music played by age grades, various guilds of drummers and singers, professional groups and association of singers who entertain community (Okafor, 2004) express that music is undoubtedly old and deeply rooted in the history of man, music radiates other forms and is more effective as a means of expression. Traditional Nigerian music is a vibrant and diverse expression of the country's rich cultural heritage, deeply tied to the traditions and values of its various ethnic groups. The music serves as an archival resource, evolving and rooted in its indigenous system by playing an essential role in storytelling, ceremonies, and spiritual practices. The creation of the world came with the accompaniment of motion and sound and that is why music fosters the satisfaction of life and death. Some professional itinerant musicians, entertainers and amusing members of communities use vocal and instrumental means to perform genres such as esa, ijala, iyere, waka apala, sekere, bata, dundun, agogo, dadakuada, igbin, and bembe.

Traditional music is a living culture that constitutes the staple idiom of the vast majority of Nigerians. There were age-grades, dance music bands, native blues, game songs, folk tales, moonlight plays, folk-opera bands, court musicians, dirges, before the advent of popular dance bands. There were musical instruments made with native materials and structures such as wooden drums, box-resonated guitar (agidigbo), kakaki (elongated metal trumpet), oja, alghita, kaho, goge, xylophones, calabashes, gourd-rattles and legendary drums. Music in Nigeria derives its origin and versatility from the oral traditional or folklore of the different ethnic groups and that is why indigenous musical notation is transmitted mainly through an oral process. Each ethnic group has unique musical traditions. For instance, the Yoruba are

celebrated for their intricate drumming, often accompanying religious or festive events. The Igbo incorporate folk tales and use instruments like the *udu*, a pot drum. The Hausa are known for their praise-singing and the iconic *kakaki*, a long metal trumpet.

Musical ceremonies are performed for the deities such as Sango (god of thunder and lightning), Ogun (god of iron), Obatala (god of creation), Oya, Ifa (god of oracle) and many other gods /goddesses. Various rituals, kinship activities and ceremonies associated with divinities require music for effective functioning. The advent of colonialism marked the emergence of writings and performance, theatrical plays, and archival structure of the instruments were researched by anthropologists, linguists, historians and ethnomusicologists. Different genres of Yoruba music have specific roles within the society, ranging from regulating, sustaining and preserving various institutions of the society. Through music, society can control certain groups as well as celebrate some festivals, which are either annual or monthly at an interval. Music prescribed ethical and moral standards, especially among young adults, through folk tales and game songs. They are constantly reminded of their moral obligations and duties through proverbial songs, occasional songs, festival songs and popular songs. The institution of kingship and various rituals and ceremonies are associated with divinities, which require music for their proper functioning. Contemporary Nigerian music has achieved global acclaim, showcasing a variety of genres such as Afrobeats, Afro-juju, Highlife, Fuji, and Afrobeat—the latter being pioneered by the iconic Fela Kuti. Today, artists like Burna Boy, Wizkid, and Tiwa Savage are at the forefront, driving Nigerian music to international prominence and captivating audiences worldwide as well as creating a platform for addressing social issues like corruption, inequality, oppression and criticism. Traditional Nigerian music goes beyond mere entertainment, serving as an essential part of rituals, royal ceremonies, weddings, and festivals. It acts as a powerful tool for preserving history, facilitating communication, and strengthening communal bonds.

Folk Song

Folk song is the musical expression of the people within a given culture, performed and accepted by the members of the society. The songs, ideas, melody and rhythms continue unchanged as it is highly connected with African culture and reflect the total habits of the ways of life of members of the community. Traditional norms and values, which are taught through the process of didactic tales, games, moral songs and games songs, contribute to the making of such a cultured individual at the adulthood stage. An average African man is fostered and raised in these acts of folk traditions of storytelling and cultural songs (Ajayi, 2020). Folk songs are the unknown authorship and ancient traditional songs that form part of our cultural system and

heritage within society by accepting their value, which is being transmitted from one generation to another (Okunade, 2010). Community folk songs, such as festival songs, coronation songs, are being performed in a community arena where every member will have easy access to participation.

The context of the song reflects the community's beliefs and practices. The composers of folk songs are not known, but are simply associated with African traditions through the process of oral transmission from one generation to another. It serves as a corporate communal experience supporting ritual, festival, cultural and recreational activities. Folk music is a communal property of a given culture in which the performers and the audience are active participants. The accompanying folk music making and other festivals are a communion in which the spirits and ancestors are involved participants. It is used as a festival, social commentator, therapy, and worship, used as a mirror of a culture having its cultural roots within the society it belongs. The forms of folk music include lullabies, folk tales. Folklores, oracular vessels, children's game songs, dirges, legends/myths, praise poetry, funeral songs/ritual chanting. Some types of folk music are *waka, apala, gelede, dundun, sakara, bembe, atilogwu* to mention but a few. The practitioners of this music include: *Odolaye Aremu, Aderonmu Kokoro* (the blind minstrel), Dan Maraya Jos, Ezigbo Oioigbo, Hassan Wayam, *Dauda Epoakara, Ayinla Omowura, Alabi Ogundepo, Aduke Anifowose*, among others.

Relevance of Folk Songs in Nigerian Culture

Folk songs are an integral and functional part of life in Nigerian society. The text of the songs reflects the culture of the people and serves as an effective means of communication. Folk songs reflect the total habits and ways of life of the members of a particular society. The songs are indigenous music of any community, which contextually makes use of the authentic native agents and concepts. Songs are composed on various subjects such as cultural, political, educational, philosophical, moral, historical, social control, religious beliefs, and entertainment. The symbolic expressions of these folksongs serve as a medium of joy, assurance, desire, gratitude, guidance, love, courage, delight, warning and prayers. Folk songs guide the behaviour of the members of the society and act as an agent of self-discipline and social control. Individuals who engaged in social vices or some malicious behaviours are corrected through folksongs. Traditional Yoruba music functions as a medium for cultural expression, social commentary and identity formation. Omojola (2012).

Folk Musical Instruments

There are rich folk and traditional musical instruments in different parts of Nigeria. The construction, distribution, tuning and playing techniques are largely influenced by the environment, occupation and natural resources. Folksongs enforce conformity to social norms and values, bringing a positive change in the moral activities of school children. It also plays a significant role in the education of school children. Folk musical instruments can be understood in the following ways:

1. Through identification
2. Through the classification/grouping
3. Through description

Through Identification

- By sight
- By sound
- By Feeling/Touching
- By Name

Through the Classification/Grouping

- Membranophone Instruments
- Aerophone Instruments
- Chordophone Instruments
- Idiophone Instruments

Through the Description

- **Membranophone Instruments:** (membrane means skin). They produce sound through the vibration of the membrane. They are known as skin vibrating instruments. They are made from solid logs of wood or the large gourd/calabash. Some are double-ended, portable and non-portable drums, pitched and non-pitched, low, middle and high pitch. Some drums are played with stick, straight and round sticks with or without knob at the end while some are played with hands or both. They are covered with animal skin and

made of materials ranging from wood, pot, calabash, metal, in different shapes and sizes.

Examples are; *Dundun Bata, Gangan, Omele-ako. Omele-abo, Gudugudu Akuba, Adamo, Tambari, Ipese, Igbin, etc*

- **Aerophone Instruments:** These are African wind instruments; vibration occurs when wind is blown into the hollow parts of the instruments. The instruments produce sound through the vibration of a column of air blown into them. They can be side/end blown (vertical/transverse position). They may be open-ended or stopped. Examples are: kakaki, udu, etc
- **Chordophone Instruments:** They produce sound through the vibration of the strings. They are string vibrating instruments. The vibration can occur when the strings are plucked or bowed. They are bows and lutes made from the stalks of millet. The strings are run over a resonator that is made up of calash or wood. They are accompanied instruments, suitable for use as solo instruments. They accompany solo singing or recitations of poetry, praise singing and narrative songs. Examples are: garaya, molo, gunmi, senufo, zither, goje, etc.
- **Idiophone Instruments:** These are self-sounding instruments. The body of the instrument is beaten, shaken, scraped or scrapped to produce sound, some are used as signals for attracting attention, assembling or creating an atmosphere (especially during religious rites and ceremonies). They are also used for transmitting messages or communication to emphasise the movements of a dancer or a character in traditional drama.

Examples are: rattles, bells, hand-piano/xylophone, etc, gourd rattles(*sekere*), shantu, thumb-piano(*agidigbo*)

Conclusion

There are various categories of songs in the Nigerian society that are functional, reflecting norms, customs and values such as rituals, festivals, occupational and social controls. Music gives the freedom to express ideas, thoughts, and morals within a particular cultural system. Music, dance and drama provide a means for sustaining the development of Nigerian cultural practices. Music has power for improving special-temporal reason, thus promoting the cognitive ability to observe in detail, pictorial identification and recognition of musical

potentiality. Traditional Nigerian music goes beyond mere entertainment, serving as an essential part of rituals, royal ceremonies, weddings, and festivals. It acts as a powerful tool for preserving history, facilitating communication, and strengthening communal bonds. Despite ethnicity, Nigerian music still fosters a sense of national identity by creating a cultural bond that resonates within Nigeria across backgrounds.

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