African Music and Human Experience in the 21st Century with Particular Reference to Nigeria

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Abstract

Music in Africa portrays the totality of its cultural product. It cannot be separated from culture because in culture there is music and in music there is culture. This paper titled "African Music and Human experience in the 21st century with particular reference to Nigeria" examined the traditional music of the continent as it is passed down orally from one generation to the other, it looked at it on the basis of regions and later zeroed down to the West and Central Africa where Nigeria is located. The problems of development of musical experience which include, socio-economic and technological problems, disunity, lack of recognition, education, politics, etc were examined. Also the relevance of music to human experiences presently were looked into with a view to salvaging the dilapidating image of the study/ and research into pure African music highlighted. A list of crusaders and scholars of African music were also enumerated in order to encourage others to join.

Introduction

Music in Africa portrays the totality of its cultural product and it cannot be separated from its culture. This is because in culture, Okafor (2005) defined music as "a cultural expression, determined, molded, interpreted and dressed or coloured by culture and the cultural environment of the people". This definition suggested that the life style experiences and all activities of the people are embedded in their music.

Music is also a means of preservation of culture, especially in Africa where the people depend solely on oral traditions. It is largely to sustain and preserve cultural values.

General Considerations

Africa is the world's second largest and second–most-populous continent. It has a land area of about 30.3 million kilometer2 including adjacent islands, covering about 6% of the earth's total surface area and 20.4%. it has an approximate population of 1,216 billion by 2016 data (Wikipedia). Africa has 54 sovereign countries.

Music of Africa

The traditional music of Africa given the vastness of the continent is historically ancient, rich and diverse with different regions and nations of Africa- having many distinct musical traditions. Music in Africa is very important when it comes to religion. Songs and music are used in rituals and religious ceremonies to pass down stories from one generation to the other as well as to sing and dance to.

Traditional music of the continent is passed down orally or aurally and is not written. In sub-Saharan Africa, music traditions frequently relies on percussion instruments of every variety including xylophones, drums, djembes and tone producing instruments such as mbira or thumb piano.

Africa by Regions

Africa by regions includes the following: North Africa, Horn of Africa, West, Central, Southeast, and South Africa.

West Africa comprises; Senegal, Gambia, Guinea and Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Cote d'ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroun, Gabon, Republic of the Congo as well as the islands of Saotome and Principe. (https://en.m.wikipedia.org.wiki>wiki>Africa).

African Music

African music is one of the cultural indices that make Africans what they are. It is a cultural identity that has to do with singing, playing of musical instruments, dancing and the use of various artifacts. Music, over the ages, "has proved to be one of the indispensable arts cultivated by man for growth, nurture and transfer of his institution and value to future generations" (Vidal, 2002).

In consonance with the above, Bikeway, (2009) said;

The growth and development of any nation depends to a large extent on the ability of its citizens to harness its naturally imbued resources as well as putting into good use other man-made features, skills, and talents. Indigenous music in Africa and Nigeria

in particular is a complete institution, which is based on the societal phenomenon of the people it represents. Its concept is based on societal fact and values through musical arts.

African music runs through the brain of an average African man like the blood runs through our veins. The pulsation disposition of an African man to music is as great as the man feels when blood runs through these veins. Traditional music has so much influence in the life of an African and everything we do; even in our traditional occupations like, farming, weaving, blacksmith, carpentry, dyeing, hunting, etc. Africans craftly form danceable rhythmical patterns with the tools, and often complement the beats evolving through deliberate manipulation of the tools, with indigenous tune.

Human Experience

Human experience is the ultimate source and justification for all knowledge. This is of the experience that has been accumulated in human memory and culture, gradually producing the methods of intelligence called "reason" and "service". This includes what human life is made up of and the things human beings experience in life. It includes the characteristics, key events, methods and situations that compose the essentials of human life. https://www.merriam=webster.com>exp...

African music therefore is one of such experiences which individuals within the African society must encounter.

Culture

Culture constitutes the totality of customs, rituals, norms and values that regulate the people's pattern of life. The Nigerian cultural policy (1998) defines culture as:

The totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic and aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours.

A society is distinguished from another as a result of culture. Culture is a factor for the wheel of development of any nation. The above definition is supported by Okafor and Emeka (2004) as they defined culture as, all the knowledge, belief, customs, values and skills available in a society and by which the society can be compared to or differentiated from others. It could also be added that culture can only be felt through societal expression of it and that is what portrays the nation's identity. Any nation that represents her culture normally, preserves, promotes and keeps it alive through social activities. This view according to (Folorunso, 2015) "automatically underscores the importance of music as a culture promoter". Music performed by every society carries the social cultural nuances and messages of the society. It is always said that development is a function of culture because people cannot be developed outside their cultural exhibitions which music is an integral part of, a nation achieves economic and social growth. This also encourages tourism, inter-ethnic relationship and provides avenues for exchange of ideas and economic benefits. Any nation that turns her back or looks down on the indigenous or traditional music and dances of her people is actually jeopardizing her economy. In other words, it applies that the non-recognition or

mere destruction of culture means a retardation and a threat to the nation's growth.

Concluding this aspect of the paper on culture, Akpabot (1994) has this to say;

Music culture is a way of life in a country, and in rural communities, the way the people feel, think and believe this culture influence their behavioural patterns and by this, the extension of political orientation.

The Nigerian Nation

Nigeria is an African country on the Gulf of Guinea, with many natural landmarks and wildlife reserves. She has protected areas such as Cross River National Park and Yankari National Park with waterfalls, dense rainforest, savanna and rare primate habitats. One of the most recognizable sites in Nigeria is the Zuma Rock, a 725m – tall monolith outside the capital Abuja that is pictured on the nation's currency. (https://en.m.wikipedia.org>wiki>Nigeria).

She is the most populous country in Africa with an estimated population of 192 million according to the United Nation's estimate of 2017 and the single largest economic entity in sub-Saharan African apart from the Republic of South Africa. No study of developments in Africa would be worthwhile and complete without the inclusion of Nigeria. Given this position therefore, Nigeria should serve as an example to other countries not only in the sub-region but in Africa as a whole.

The Nigerian culture is shaped by Nigerians multiple ethnic groups- with over 500 languages and over 250 dialects from the major ethnic groups. (Talbot, 1926).

The three largest ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani who are predominantly in the North, the Igbos who are predominantly in the Southeast and the Yorubas occupying the Southwestern part. Other minority ethnic groups are the Edos occupying the mid-west region sharing it with the Yoruba's and the Igbo's. It is recorded that 80% of the Edo people are Christians while the remaining 20% worship their deities called "Ogu". This group is followed by the Ibibio/Annang/Efik people of the coastal/South-south part of Nigeria and the Ijaws of the Niger Delta. The rest of the Nigeria's ethnic groups sometimes called the minority are found all over the country especially in the Middle Belt and in the North. Most of the Hausas are Muslims while the Igbo's are predominantly Christians. For the Yoruba, there is a balance of their members that are adherents to both Islam and Christianity. Indigenous religious practices also remain important in all of Nigeria's ethnic groups and these beliefs are often blended with christen belief in some areas.

Problems of Development of Musical Experience in the 21st Century

Various pertinent problems which have hindered effective music education in Africa need to be re-examined in order to progressively push music ahead. Some of these problems have been highlighted by scholars. The most significant of these problems is the heterogeneity of African ethnicity and cultural practices. Although the concept of unity in diversity has solved this to an extent, nevertheless, the dichotomy created by these areas of differences cannot be underestimated. Some of these factors which

we need to properly harness before they can yield good result are discussed hereunder.

(a) Socio – economic and technological problems
The socio-economic and technological problems that remain unsolved are largely responsible for the backwardness of Africa, a factor which is also responsible for the reason why African Scholars, music educators and researchers based at home are at a disadvantaged position when compared with their foreign counterparts. For instance, electricity in Nigeria is still hopeless, epileptic and retardation to the progress of musical development.

(b) Disunity
Egocentricity, acrimony and disunity constitute another barrier in moving music education in Africa forward.

Inter ethnic crisis borne out of selfish interests and self aggrandizements pervade the traditional Africa, while the academia is rendered impotent due to nonchalant attitudes, lack of commitment, pride and personal egos of some people. For instance, in Nigeria, music education is crawling due to the lip service paid to education in general by those in authority.

(c) Lack of Recognition
Music is one of the basic social services that need adequate consideration. No nation's social life is worth living without music. It sensitizes, criticizes, moulds character, entertains, communicates and heals just to mention but a few advantages. On the other hand, music is an ardent social mobilize because it awakens or lightens the society on the goings on in the country. (Agbidi, 2011). In line with that, Okafor (1989) state that, "Social mobilization programme has several directions – political direction, social direction and economic direction", which must be appropriately harnessed. Music, especially the African or traditional one has an answer to whichever direction the mobilization takes. Suffice it to say that music is one of the essential services needed if the nation were to grow or develop. However, in Nigeria, little or no attention has been given to Nigeria's indigenous music. This also applies at the various academic institutions where emphasis is usually given to western world's cultural activities and music at the expense of Nigerian music. Here the curriculum is largely titled to a greater extent to the various aspects of Western music.

(d) Education
Education is regarded as the key to a nation's building as it is ranked second out of the eight Millennium Development (MDG) Goals whose aim is to "achieve universal primary education" with the specific target which should ensure that "by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling" (p.12)(M.D.G. 2013).

As it stands in Nigeria today, education is not receiving the expected attention most especially in the areas of performing and creative arts which music is among. For the proper implementation of the Education Policy, no aspect of its objectives should be neglected. Music is the life wire of the nation's social life and therefore should be well accommodated in the nation's education policy.

Emenyonu (1994) unequivocally states that:

"education indeed is the biggest industry in Nigeria today, but it is also the most underfunded and the most under nourished industry… everyone knows what is good for education… but those

who matter and who have the capacity to bring about the rehabilitative process, either lack the will or zeal or the commitment to do so.

Inspite of the political promises by those in authority, the teaching aids that will develop education in our country is non-existent. Using music as an example, the teaching aids such as musical instruments both local and foreign are not available. These include, keyboard instruments, computers, music softwares, local instruments, electronic gadgets for recording and production of music.

(e) Cultural Music
Cultural music and the new technology have very much influenced these developments by enabling fast communication and creation of interial in the areas of music, literature, arts (sculpture, ceramics) and the ability to market them. The most important issue of cultural development is certainly the issue of creation of either a national or detribalized Nigerian or the affirmation of ethnic cultural identity. This is an important political issue as the Nigerian federation tried to put together the achievements of the modern democratic West European State and the local cultural traditions. The development of education, establishment and growth of cultural institutions and cultural industries all reflect the constant processes of change in Nigerian life and Nigerian culture. It is really impossible to quantify these processes, but it is evident even now that the cultural growth is reflected in the new type of Nigerian culture and identity.

(f) Politics
On the political sphere, many politicians/political parties have found it expedient to use traditional music as the medium for carrying their slogan and through the medium of traditional music, communicate to the entire nation. The lyrics carry the particular message of the common Nigeria, and as will, the politicians by which the electorate would know what their candidate would offer before casting their votes. But after all these experiments, the politicians tend to cater for themselves and their relatives rather than for the electorates that voted them in.

The Relevance of Music to Human Activities/Experiences

In traditional African societies, music making is generally organized as a social event. Public performances, therefore take place on social occasions-that is, on occasions when members of a group or a community come together for the enjoyment of leisure, for recreational activities, or for the performance of a rite, ceremony, festival or any kind of collective activity such as building bridges, clearing paths, going on a search party or putting out fires. Musical activity is an integral and functioning part of the societies in Africa. Music is very essential in all human activities in African traditional belief systems and practices. This section will examine the relevance of music and musical activities as believed and practiced by Africans.

1. Music at the Birth of an African Child
When a child is born, songs are rendered at his birth and during the naming ceremony to welcome the child to the world. Nketia (1979) observed that a lot of traditional recreational music is made to mark the naming ceremony of a newly born baby in some African societies, while some others sing appropriate songs to welcome

them and to mark the birth of twins. In Igbo traditional society, special songs are rendered from the local maternity home, during circumcision (Ibe Ugwu) and outing/naming ceremonies. Examples of such songs include O Nuru Ube Nwa (Whoever hears a child's cry), Anyi biara ile nwa (We have come to see the child), Egwu Nwa (Child-outing song).

2. Music in the events of the child's life cycle
Some activities in the life cycle of an African child such as circumcision of male and female are marked with special music. Cory (1962) observed that in Senegambia boys who were circumcised are taught special songs in the evening while they are waiting for their wounds to heal. There are also puberty rites and songs for the girls at that age. Among the Binis of Nigeria, special ceremony and songs mark the attainment of maturity by the males. In Nigeria, most communities mark their marriages with music making. In the Igbo area, it is called Igba-Nkwu (Uprooting the Palm Tree).

3. Music in ceremonial activities in Africa
Music plays a very prominent role in virtually all ceremonies in the African traditional system. Such include installation and coronation of Chiefs/Kings, home leaving/coming, rallies, initiation ceremonies, purifications, house-warming, war, graduation, victory, etc. all these are celebrated with music especially the traditional types. Music performs important roles in the ceremonial process as expression of emotions and deep-seated feelings such as funerals.

4. Music in Traditional Political/ Administrative Institutions
In many African societies, the traditional Chief/King assumes the role of the religious head, judicial head and military or political head. As a religious head, he performs some priestly functions or rites on behalf of the people. As judicial heads, they settle disputes among the people and as political/military heads, they maintain law and order. They also serve as the patrons of arts-music, poetry, dance, etc. In most palaces, drums and other musical instruments are kept in the King's palaces which are played during state occasions for the King. (Okafor, 2005).

5. Music in Times of War
The 'talking drum' concept is quiet popular in many African societies. In the event of commercial disputes, it is the drum boy that plays to call all the men of valour to assemble for war. This may also be achieved through the use of some ram's horns or trumpets to call out the men for war. Apart from this, music is used to communicate by signaling danger to the people in the community, to warn and summon people to the Chief/King's palace. An example is the communicative role which "Ikoro" (Giant wooden slit-drum) plays in traditional music of Arochukwu-Ohafia community of Abia state of Nigeria.

6. Music in Traditional African Worship
The African view of the universe makes the worship of the gods a vital concern. Music plays a sacred role in religious worship of the traditional African. It is used for the worship of the ancestors and the gods. Their aim is to obtain divine sanctions by communicating with the ancestors and gods/spirits. It is the prime agency through which the bond between man, the gods and the ancestors is reaffirmed (Adesokan, 1998). These gods love music and they are moved to be very effective when worshipped with music. Because the gods are localized, the music of worship similarly reflects local idioms and local usages.

7. Music in African Traditional Educational System
Music is vital in traditional educational system in the teaching of values and norms in regulating societal ills, in the teaching of respect for the elders, personal hygiene, discipline and moral attitudes to life. It is used for social control and correction of erring members of the society, just as music is used to criticize those in authority. It communicates the community taboos to the members of the society as well (Agbidi, 2011).

8. Music in everyday work
In Africa, there are work songs which not only deal with the labour but also accompanies the rhythmic work of the groups and makes it easier. Egonu(2009) emphasized that "songs are sung when doing tedious jobs, communal works such as road construction or house building and clearing of farm pathways are usually done in groups".

9. Music in the healing process
Music plays a therapeutic role for the sick, bereaved and troubled mind sustaining courage and creating psychological awareness and it is also used for emotional relaxation. According to Nnamani (2009);

Clinical music therapy is so widely applied in contemporary times that one is strongly reminded of the ubiquitous presence of music in African traditional healing interventions. One could imagine music to be an appropriate treatment or therapy for emotional ailments since it is the language of emotion. Schools, hospitals and churches especially the African Independent Churches have been identified as institutions where music therapy is applied in the healing process of children and adults mentally retarded (p. 108)

10. Music at Death of the Traditional African
Just as music welcomes the African child to this world, so does it herald the exit of the African from the world of the mortal to that of the living spirits or ancestors who are seen as being in continuous existence with the family members. In some African communities, when a member or a chief dies, some stages of the funeral are marked by music designed to be performed with various dramatic functions (Nketia, 1979). Except perhaps in the death of babies, children and young adults, the burial ceremonies in many African communities are marked with music. It is therefore widely proclaimed that for the African, music follows him from cradle to the grave.

Crusaders/scholars of African Music

Meki Nzewi, an African renowned scholar and crusader is determined to prove himself a true African at all cost, anytime, anywhere and as such desires that every true African should maintain such a patriotic legacy. It also bothers him very much when even literate Africans fail to live up to expectation but they are rather engulfed in Western models and scholarship at the expense of African traditional idioms. (Ibekwe, 2011)

Wondering why so many Africans cling to the Western traditions and the views they hold about African music, Nzewi 1997 said:

It is still difficult for many modern and literate Africans to accept that a fellow African should formulate original perspectives and theories different from Western models in scholarship. This overriding mental attitude has led to the resentment and marginalization of the few original African thinkers in research,

creativity and academia. Worse still, modern African musical 'scholars' are yet to be mentally re-orientated to accept even if only in principle, that African traditional music contain all that are needed in philosophy, the theoretical content and principles of practice for culturally meaningful and independent modern music education of any disciplinary specialization at any level in Africa and perhaps, elsewhere (p.11).

Meki remains undauritedly focused in advocating that the modern African music scholars should embrace original research, thinking and reasoning in order to question and redefine any erroneous established theories and perceptions about African music.

Lamenting about this, Meki (1997) further said;

Modern African has recklessly abandoned its human essence and cultural value while gobbling up the modern-publicity-hoisted, glamous allures of Western thoughts and life styles. The modern Africa and the individual modern Africans are suffering from unrelieved mental disequilibrium as well as identity submersion syndrome a pathological case of modern self-mental enslavement… unless enough thinkers wake up and become boldly articulate despite and in spite of any subtle or overt acts of resentment or repression, African will remain an increasingly disadvantaged provider of raw materials as well as a slavish consumer of finished products, mental or material (p.12)

There are some modern literate African musicologists who share similar opinions with Meki in their contributions towards reviving African traditional music. Such include, J.H.K. Nketia, S.E. Akpabot, D.C.C. Agu, Joshua Uzoigwe, R.C. Okafor, Christain Onyeji, just to mention but a few. These people and others not mentioned have constructively defended in varying capacities views of Africa in the field of ethnomusicology.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I wish to say that the elaborate study of African music will put our students and researchers in proper perspective to the overall culture of our land. This is because; it is an emblem, courier and carrier of our cultural practices and will hasten its propagation in an unadultered or original form.

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