

Traditional Music and Dance: An Appreciation

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Introduction

Music as a human artistic expression has diverse categories. Traditional music is one of the categories. Others are school, popular, pop, religious, and art music. We can also categorize music on the basis of nationality which results into African, Indian, Arabic, Western, Nigerian, Kenyan, Malay music etc. Music also has related arts such as dance, drama and visual arts, all of which are interrelated. Of all of them, dance is the closest to music. In this study, our attention will be focused on traditional music and dance; especially as conceived and practiced in Africa.

What then is traditional music and dance?

Traditional music is the indigenous musical practice of a given society while traditional dance is a rhythmic movement of the body in indigenous styles as an artistic expression. In traditional African societies, music and dance are inseparable. Sometimes, dance serves as accompaniment to music and vice versa. In some ethnic groups, music and dance are synonymous. Traditional music and dance, especially in Africa, may be divided into five categories – traditional ‘classical’, traditional ethnic, traditional religious, traditional folk and neo-traditional. Traditional ‘classical’ includes the undiluted musical expressions used at the courts of traditional rulers. This category makes use of chants, speech-music and instrumental forms at their purest forms. Traditional ethnic encompasses various musical and dance genres that are ethnic bound. Purely indigenous, they are associated with special socio-cultural occasions of various ethnic groups. The traditional religious are the musical expressions used in the worship of gods(esses) during regular liturgies and special occasions. Traditional folk constitutes musical expressions identified with the day-to-day activities of the African people: the music that people grow up with; including folktale songs. The neo-traditional

music and dance are traditional forms taken and performed out of their original contexts for contemporary needs such as concerts and art festivals.

Characteristics

Most traditional music and dance forms share common elements or characteristic traits, which distinguish them from non traditional brands. The following are the general characteristics of traditional music and dance:

- a. The music or dance is composed, arranged, performed and preserved or transmitted from generation to generation through oral tradition. This implies that the music or dance is unwritten.
- b. Traditional music and dance make use of the indigenous verbal and non-verbal language and symbols of the owner-society. Where there are multiple ethnic groups, the local language or dialect of each ethnic group is the medium of expression.
- c. Traditional music and dance reflects the socio-cultural life of a particular people; including their belief-systems and religions.
- d. Traditional music and dance are highly functional, i.e. they serve specific functions and perform some special tasks among the people.
- e. Although based on specific forms and patterns, traditional music and dance are to a large extent, improvisatory and repetitive. Both have their values rooted in the aesthetics and philosophies of the people.

Organization and Forms

According to Nketia (1974), traditional music and dance are organized around two types of usage – as a concurrent activity or terminal event. As a concurrent activity, the music and dance are used to accompany or compliment certain religious, cultural or socio-political activities; while as a terminal event, they form the exclusive focus of an event. These patterns of organization determine the genuine nomenclatures and typologies of traditional music and dance. For instance, among the Yoruba, genres are named by the owner – gods(esses), events or the respective musical instrumental ensemble. We then have among others, *Ilu Ogun*, *Ilu Ifa*, *Apepe* music, *Agere* music, *Ekun iyawo*,

Iyere Ifa, Ijala are Ode, Bata music, Esa/Iwi Egungun, Gbedu music etc.

Traditional music and dance also maintain internal structural patterns or divisions that determine their structural forms. Instrumental forms include: *ostinato*, variation and improvisation. *Ostinato* employs a continuous repetition of short melodic or rhythmic phrases upon which melodies flow. Variation form is the music that develops a particular musical theme through the varying or changing some aspects of the melodies, rhythm, tempo etc. The improvisation form is a spontaneous creation of music based on extemporization principles.

Vocal forms in traditional music are built around Solo, Chorus and ‘Solo and Chorus’ forms. Some of the vocal forms are strophic (verse) forms, through-composed (long) forms, responsorial form and the multipart form. While strophic is the singing of several verses of texts to the same melody, the through-composed sings several textual lines to different texts. Responsorial form is the alternation of a musical phrase or phrases between solo and chorus. It is usually known as ‘call and response’ form. The antiphonal alternates between a group of cantors and the full chorus, while the multipart form features several voices singing autonomous melodies.

There are different modes of performing traditional vocal music in Africa that also determine its typologies. The four verbal modes of musical communication include speech, poetic, chanting and singing; resulting in speech-form, poetic-form, chant-form and song-form.

Functions

As mentioned earlier, traditional music and dance are highly functional. In Africa, music performs diverse functions and plays prominent role in every aspect of the peoples’ life. For instance, music permeates the life-cycle of the people from birth to death. All the rites of passage are accompanied by music and dance. Also, traditional music and dance are employed in religious worship, rituals and festivals, in socio-political activities such as coronation, war, house warming etc, in the courts of traditional rulers, in traditional theatre, in recreation activities such as traditional wrestling, moonlight plays and

children games, in occupations and associations and in eulogizing people and ancestors. The panegyric function of music among the Yoruba is best demonstrated in Oriki.

Traditional music and dance in all the above settings, enhance unity, harmony and foster peace among peoples of heterogeneous backgrounds. Traditional music also performs economic functions by serving as means of livelihood for professional musicians. Among the Yoruba for instance, professional musicians are called ‘Ayan’.

Traditional Dance

Traditional dance shares the same functions and role with music when combined, but as mentioned earlier, there are occasions where the dance assumes independence as an art form even while still interactively engaging singing and instrumentation. In addition, traditional dance when considered as a separate art form, is used to praise the gods(esses), communicate messages to them, express the message and the rhythms of the music and to enhance the visual interpretation of the music.

There are instances where the singers also do the dancing at the same time and at other instances the dancers are separate from the singers. All over Africa, there are to be found different dances. In a study carried out by Vidal on Lagos State music and dance (1976), it was discovered that 50% of the presentations belonged to the religious ritual category, 21.6% was entertainment, 10% was ceremonial, 9.5% belonged to life cycle rites, while 8.9% was adaptation from foreign music and dance. From the above statistics, we can conclude that religious dances form the bulk of Nigerian traditional dances. Some of the sacred dances are *Korogun Oloosa* from Lagos, *Ogongo/Elekura* masquerade dance from Badagry and the *Agbo* dance from Epe, *Kilajolu* and *Igodo* masquerade dances from Epe and Lekki. The ones associated with the court and royalty are *Bembe Gunbe*, *Gbedu Oba* and *Igbe Oba*. *Elegusi* and *Afeyingbodo* are entertainment dances from Lagos which have been transformed into the Brazilian *Bumba-Meu-Boi*. Other entertainment dances are *Eyo* from Lagos, *Sato* and *Akoto* from Badagry, *Ijo oge*, *Gbamu*, *Eja bata* (bata dances), *Ijo obitun*, *Ijo olobirin ile* and *Ijo agba* of the Yoruba. Some masquerades that

entertain are known as *eegun alare* or *elewe*. They also dance to entertain the public. From the East we have *Mpokiti*, *Nmuagboho*, *Egwu amala* and *Atilogwu* dances. The *bori* cult dance is popular in the North.

Today, many of these dances have been recontextualized to meet various contemporary needs such as, concerts, competitions and international art festivals. This started in the colonial era when school pupils demonstrated their traditional dances as *ijo ibile* on special occasions. Although the recontextualized dances might feature some adulterations, obviously their traditional characteristics are intact.

Role

One of the roles played by traditional music is that it serves as a means and medium of educating the community people. The educative role of music is more pronounced in a non-literate or semi literate society where Western formal education has not replaced their traditional educational system. In such communities, didactic songs are used to teach the children about discipline, respect for elders, health care, traditional ethics and moral values (Vidal, 1987). Among the Yoruba for instance, folktale songs are used to reiterate explanations to riddles of life and vital lessons of life.

In the religious contexts (both Liturgical and non-liturgical), traditional music plays diverse roles, such as worship, invocative, stimulant, admonition, invitational and accompaniment. In terms of worship, music serves as a tool of praise and worship of the traditional gods(esses). Songs that contained the attributes of the divinities are rendered during their weekly, monthly or annual rituals of veneration and propitiation. Music also serves as an instrument of invoking the spirits of gods(esses) for specific purposes. When such a music is played, the spirits of the gods(esses) come upon the devotees. This leads to spirit possession which in turn leads to predictions, visions and other spiritual cleansing activities. As a stimulant, music is used to stimulate actions from the devotees. For instance, during offerings, songs which motivate devotees to give their best are rendered. As for admonition, music is employed as a vehicle of admonition, to encourage, guide and give diverse spiritual instructions to the

devotees. Music in traditional religious functions also serves as a means of expressing one's confidence or commitment to a particular religion; thereby playing the invitational role. The Yoruba Ifa song text below illustrates this:

<i>Mo n'ifa, mo l'oba</i>	I have Ifa, I have a king
<i>Mo n'ifa, mo l'oba a</i>	I have Ifa, I have a king
<i>Aya mi ba le mo n'ifa n le</i>	I am confident, I have Ifa at home
<i>Eeh Ifa n le o</i>	Yes, I have Ifa at home

Finally, during religious programmes, traditional music plays accompanimental role by merely accompanying a particular activity or item in the liturgy. In such instances, the music is at the background, meant to keep the devotees waiting while the activity lasts.

Traditional music also plays vital communicative role. Before the advent of modern information technology and even now in villages and ancient towns, royal criers use musical chants or melodic formulae to communicate important messages to the community members; sometimes to summon meetings or to alert people of an impending danger or war. The communicative role of traditional music extends to a means of business advertisement. For instance a particular hawker announces her goods as follows:

<i>E ra 'yo, e se 'be</i>	Buy salt to cook your soup
<i>E ra omo e fo 'so o</i>	Buy soap detergent to wash your clothes
<i>E ra sugar e po tea o</i>	Buy sugar to sweeten your tea.

Another important role of traditional music in Africa is in the area of social control. Traditional music serves as an instrument of discipline and social control among the people. In this case, music serves as the medium through which evil deeds and vices are condemned. For instance, among the Yoruba, satirical music is employed to ridicule recalcitrant and conceited people. Some songs also warn of impending judgement or repercussions of wickedness or evil doing. Examples of such songs among the Yoruba are:

<i>Ifa o gb'eyele</i>	Ifa does not accept pigeon
<i>Ifa o gba'die</i>	Ifa does not accept fowl
<i>Atari alaseju ni'fa n wa</i>	He only demands the head of a conceited person.
<i>E ma s'ika laye</i>	Avoid evil deeds while on earth
<i>Nitori a n r'orun</i>	Because we going to heaven
<i>B'a a ba de' bode</i>	When we reach the heavenly gate
<i>A o ro'jo</i>	we will give account.

Traditional music apart from serving as a culture indicator also plays preservative or historical roles. Here, the historical accounts of important events in a particular society are recorded in chants or songs for posterity purposes. Apart from the panegyric functions, court musicians such as griots specialize in this kind of role. It is a common thing in Africa to find the history of a kingdom, king, lineage, wars etc. preserved in form of traditional music.

Among several African communities, traditional music helps in healing processes. The therapeutic role of music has been established among the primitive and ancient cultures and its efficacy in healing some psychosomatic and evil spirit-induced diseases has been proved times without number among the traditional African societies. Today, Music Therapy, a branch of music scholarship, continues to explore the application of traditional music in healing.

Finally, traditional music and dance assume the role of an entertainer or serve as a medium of entertainment. In this case, the music amuses, relaxes, and enhances happiness or joy among the people; both in the everyday life and during special occasions. All over Nigeria, there are traditional itinerant musicians and dancers. They go about the streets to entertain the public with their music and dance. Besides, during special ceremonies such as wedding, naming, burial/funeral, anniversaries and carnivals, traditional music and dance are used to entertain both the celebrants and the guests. It can be concluded from the above insights that the roles of traditional music and dance in our societies are indispensable.

Instruments

Traditional musical instruments of the World are generally classified under four categories, namely idiophones, aerophones, membranophones, and chordphones. The taxonomic system on which the instruments are classified is based on their source of sound production.

Idiophones are self – sounding instruments and they consist of about five sub types. Shaken idiophones are the ones that produce sounds when shaken. The *agbe* and *sekere* of the Yoruba, *ukuse* from Benin and *usogo* of the Egun are examples.

Struck idiophones include wooden slit drums such as *ikoro* of the Igbo, *ekwe* or *ufie* among the Ibibio, Ijaw, Efik and Igbo, and the *agidigbo* of the Yoruba. Similar instruments are also found among the Ebirha, Igede and Tiv. Wooden clappers such as *a pepe* of the Ijebu and *aja* of the Igbo also belong to the struck idiophones' category. Iron bells (with or without clappers) include *ewo* from Ife, *alo* of the Igbo, *agogo* of the Yoruba, *ogene* of the Igbo and *kuge* of the Hausa. The *udu* of the Igbo is a clay pot drum that is struck. Other types are the rock and stone clappers of the Hausa and Yoruba respectively.

Tuned idiophones are melodic instruments that are tuned to specific pitches. These keyboard instruments which are commonly called xylophones include the *ngedegwu* or *ngelenge* of the Igbo, *kundung* of the Birom, *tsindza* of the Bura of Borno, *sara* of the Bachama and the *ubo* used by the Igbo, Efik, Kalabari and the Ijaw.

Other sub types of idiophones include scrapped ones such as friction tubes, scrapped bottles and crackers, and stamped ones such as stamping sticks, stamping tubes and the *shantu* of the Hausa.

Aerophones are instruments that produce sound when air is blown into them. They include various flutes, panpipes, reed pipes, horns and trumpets that are made from woods, animal horns, elephant tusks, bamboo, brass, copper etc. The *alghaita*, *kakaki*, *farai*, *sharawa* (all from the North), *fami-fami*, *tiyako* and the bull-roarer of the Yoruba, the

odo, opi and *oja* of the Igbo, the *orokuta* of the ibiobio and the *kaho* of the Verre and the Chamba are examples of aerophones in Nigeria.

Membranophones are instruments that bring out sound from membranes. They constitute the largest category of traditional instruments and they appear in different shapes and sizes. Upright drums with single membrane include the *igbin, gbedu, aran/ipese* of the Yoruba, *igba, nkwa* and *egwu ota* of the Igbo and the *nting* and *ekomo* of the Ibiobio. Double membrane drums played on both sides include *gangan alghaita* in the North, *bembe* of the Yoruba and the *bata* ensemble. *Koso* of the Yoruba and the *kotso* of the Hausa are similar to *bata* but with single membrane. Hourglass tension drums include the *dundun* ensemble of the Yoruba, the *kalangu* in the North and the *Jauje* of the Hausa. Tuned membranophones include kettledrums and bowl-shaped drums such as the *tambura, kuntuku, banga, tallabe* and *kwairama*; all found in the North. Calabash or gourd drums include the *bata-koto* and the *kete* drums found among the Yoruba.

Chordophones are stringed instruments that produce sounds when the strings are strummed. They include various lutes, lyres, zithers and harps. They are more to be found in the North. Chief among them are *goje, goga, kukuma, komo, gormi, bourma*, in the North, *nwolima* of the Igbo and *molo* which is widely distributed among the Hausa, Tiv, Angas, Yoruba, Jukun, Ebira etc.

Musical instruments in Traditional music and dance perform various functions such as musical, socio-linguistic and symbolic. They are so vital in the music and dance but more importantly, they must have something to 'say'.

Conclusions and Recommendations

One is not only amazed by the quality and quantity of traditional music and dance in our societies, but would also conclude that Africa and especially Nigeria possesses a very rich culture of traditional music and dance. Unfortunately, the arts are dying out today as a result of many factors. The influences of Western education, foreign religions and western civilization and culture are grave. In addition, sequel to the influences, the institutions that host the traditional music and dance such

as traditional religions, rituals and festivals are also dying out on a daily basis. Many youths do not see the sensibility in carrying masquerade masks or visiting shrines in an age of global technological advancement.

It is important to stress that the greatness and leadership chances of Nigeria and Africa in the World lie in their culture and arts; which are beyond compare throughout the world. It is in the light of this that the governments at various levels should take bold steps to revive our traditional music and dance. More research should be carried out to dig out and document traditional music and dance forms that have almost gone into extinction but which could still be remembered. In the same vein, traditional music and dance should be made compulsory in all primary and secondary schools' education.

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Appendix I

(Some Traditional Yoruba Musical Instruments)

Isaaju Dundun (Membranophone)



Atele Dundun (Membranophone)



Gudugudu Dundun (Membranophone)



Iya Ilu Dundun (Membranophone)



Omele Bata (Membranophone)



Iya Ilu Bata (Membranophone)



Sakara Drums (Membranophones)



Agogo (Idiophone)



Sekere (Idiophone)



Appendix II

(Traditional Dancers from Delta State)

