

# The Concept of Chromaticism in African Art Music: An Analysis of Selected Works of Lazarus Ekwueme

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## **Abstract**

*Chromaticism can be defined in different ways. The definition of chromatics provides a standard characterization: “In melodic and harmonic analysis the term ‘chromatic’ is generally applied to notes marked with accidentals foreign to the scale of the key in which the passage is written” (Dyson & Drabkin, 2006). Most music theorists would use this as a point of departure for an extended discussion of the importance of chromaticism in relation to musical organization – including both vertical (harmonic) and horizontal (melodic) processes. It is possible that a passage modulates to a different key without a commensurate change of key signature. Consequently, an accidental may render a note consistent with this prevailing (modulated) key yet be construed as “chromatic” in light of the key signature. One difficulty with this operational definition is that it fails to distinguish “degrees” of chromaticism. For example, a chromatic passing tone might be viewed as less indicative of “chromaticism” than a structural chromatic tone. Although our operational definition of “chromatic” fails to capture all of the nuances of chromatic theory, it may nevertheless provide a practical index that characterizes the broad trends (D.Perttu,2007). The main focus of this study is to delineate the conceptual view of chromatic application in the works of Lazarus Ekwueme in African Arts context. Moreover, this study sieves out the symbolic meanings of chromatics as applied in Ekwueme’s Missa-Africana.*

## **Introduction**

Diverse cultural values influence the usage of chromatics by composers from different sociological and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, this study subsumes analysis of musical pieces composed

by a selected African art composer. The concepts of chromaticism as applied by the composer are vividly analysed in order to reveal the chromatic contents of his works. Although music education in Africa was greatly influenced by colonial masters, this did not change or eradicate completely the cultural influence on the application of musical elements which includes chromatic employment.

Theodor Adorno in his opinion derived a theory which states that “A truly outstanding work is a reaction to the horror of history” (Adorno, 1996). The theorist drew inspiration from what Wilhelm Dilthey (1910) expressed, who asserted that every meaningful work is rooted in a meaningful experience.

However, this study focuses on the ideology of the selected works of the composer whose sociological background is from Africa and their usages of chromatic forms – in melodic and harmonic forms. The theoretical view and interpretation of the works in the context of chromaticism are the main aspects of this paper.

According to Dixon Ogbechi in her Research Methods & Elementary Book:

The world of theory describes how the world that develops the hypothesis that lead to the discovery of the world of reality. (Ogbechi, 2002:7)

A theory is not as it stands, testable, as it is too imprecise. In order to test, it has to be transposed into the form of a hypothesis. Theory according to Wartofsky(1983) is a higher level law because apart from being a statement of variant relationship between variables of a phenomenon, it also explains and predicts the properties of the phenomenon.

### **Methodology**

This is a qualitative research which requires formalistic approach in executing its analysis. This study therefore presents the systematic procedure that is adopted for the analysis of data. The section highlights the methodology of study in terms of the criteria for the selection of data, sources of data and method of data collection.

Generally, the selected works are mainly compositions that are structured so that the objective of the research will not be ambiguous or biased. Musical pieces from African music culture that are selected from the archives of Art music in Nigeria are selected to revalidate the African concept of chromaticism. The secondary data used for the analysis of musical pieces for this research were extracted from the following representative research materials and textbooks from the disciplines of arts (music inclusive) education, sciences and social sciences; They were mainly sourced from the library – musical pieces (scores) inclusive.

### **Chromatic Concepts in African Art Music**

The reappraisal and analysis of works that are chromatically structured by some African art composers will be executed in this section of the research. An instance is drawn from Nigerian art composers' chromatic usages who compose with the consciousness of western idioms. The introduction of Christian missionary activities and the British colonial administration of Nigeria in the middle of the nineteenth century both contributed to the evolution of a structured chromatic music in Nigeria.

The application of chromatic forms by Nigerian art composers is as a result of a historical process which assumed greater momentum in the nineteenth century following the establishment of the colonial government in Lagos in 1861. Omojola (1987) in separate studies, provided elements of that historical process as well as the factors which contributed to the emergence of these new musical idioms.

Moreover, the development of music education in Nigeria has produced distinguished music scholars who have been able to apply the so-called western chromatic forms in Nigeria or African cultural context. Among the distinguished composers in Nigeria are Fela Sowande, Laz Ekweme, A.V.E Mereni, T.K Philips and more.

Fela Sowande composed with some chromatic idioms for voices and piano/organ accompaniment, organ, and orchestra. Among these works are four sketches for full orchestra (1953), African suite for string Orchestra (1955) and the folk symphony for full orchestra (1960). The three works have some chromatic inflections with the

utilization of western conventional chromatic harmony, tonality, form and instrumentation but with some African elements (compositional materials). Such as indigenous folksongs, ostinati and selected Yoruba mythic patterns. Mereni (an African art composer) composed several pieces of music among them in which the researcher has performed before is a trio titled, 'OKTOPHONUS' which is highly chromatic. He composed it partly in the style of serialism and it is partly modal which reflects the kind of melody one hears in a traditional Igbo flute-lire instrument called 'Oja'. This gives a recall of the old signature tune arranged for NTA (Nigerian Television Authority) that is always played at the beginning and intervals for the NTA Network news. The melody is partly modal with a reflection of some typical traditional Nigerian melodic tunes. Like Fela Sowande, Laz Ekwueme employed Western chromatic harmonic concept with a trace of African idioms to compose 'Missa Africana' which means 'Mass for Africans' or 'African Mass'.

Missa Africana has five movements. – see Appendix. The kryie, Sanctus, Credo, Benedictus and Agnus dei. For the sake of the concept of chromatics, two of the movements are analyzed. The two movements selected give the summation of analysis of the five movements. However, the chromatic analysis is achieved by considering the aggregate of notes which are fused into chord for chordal interpretation.

### **Analysis of Missa Africana**

#### **Kyrie**

Bar 3& 4 – Enharmonics or E double-flat and B double-flat



Bar 7 – Isharp4

Bar 9 – major 6<sup>th</sup> chord built on sub-mediant

Bar 10&11 – Modulation from D-flat major key to A major: Minor 6<sup>th</sup> above the former key through the major 6<sup>th</sup> chord

built on sub-mediant.

Bar 12 – A non-harmonic chord but on F natural (on A major key) having F-natural, A, F-double sharp and D-sharp. Other chromatics on the new key are repetition of those on D-flat major.

Bar 15 – Returned to D-flat major

Piano

Bar 19 – an aggregate of VminSus4 built on the dominant

Piano

Bar 20 – An aggregate of V is an alternate chord of III9 followed by I7 on the fourth.

Piano

Bar 21 – An unessential note in a chromatic chord which consists (A-flat, C-flat, F-flat, B-flat) and on the 3rd beat, first inversion of chord I<sub>6</sub>9.

Piano

Bar 23 – An extended chord I<sub>6</sub>11

followed by VI min 6 (submediant 6<sup>th</sup> chord) as a link to the former.

Bar 26 – Same as in Bar 25

Bar 27 – II7 built on the tonic minor of the D-flat major key.

Bars 32 to 35 – Consist of some mellismatic notes with chromatic inflections that run simultaneously through different parts of the piece.

## Benedictus Analysis

Bar 7 → A Chromatic note (C-flat) used as a passing note between sub-mediante and octave in form of chromatic melodic line.

Bar 14 → An aggregate of notes that formed minor chord V/9/11 built on the D-flat major scale.

Bar 15 → Non-functional chord formed as a result of African tone system. The notes that make up of the chord are G-flat, C-flat, D, f, E-flat & B-flat; followed by another non-functional chord (C-flat B-flat, F, A-flat).

Bar 17 → Major chord built on flattened leading note followed by an aggregate of VII chord in bar 18.

Bar 19 → Minor chord built on the tonic with added 11<sup>th</sup> (i/11) followed by a V-minor chord (borrowed chord) built on D-flat major scale.

Bar 20 → Chord IV as a pivot for modulating to D major key.



Piano

Bar 21 → Chord Modulation to D-major key.

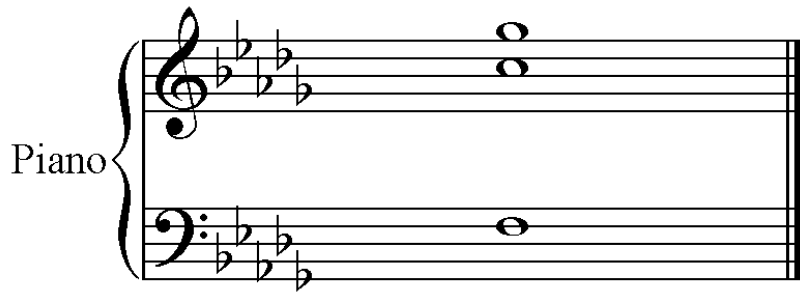
Bar 24 → Mediant major chord (borrowed chord) built on D-major scale. Also using a G-sharp as a passing chromatic note to A.

Piano

Bar 26 → Non-functional chord (F, E, G-sharp, D) with passing notes (C-natural & B-flat) built on D-major scale.

Bar 27 → Borrowed minor chord (I) built on D-major scale.





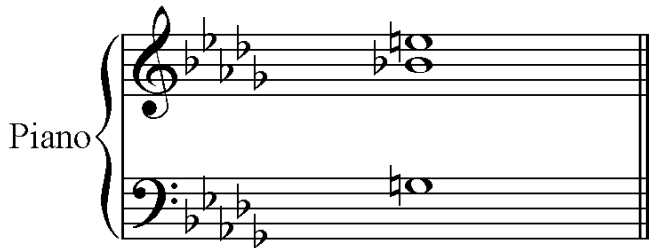
Bar 34 → Non-functional chord (B-flat, C-sharp, C-natural, D-sharp) followed by a half-diminished chord that is built on A.



Bar 36 → Second inversion of chord Imin11 followed by a dissonant chord (D, E-sharp, A, B) built on the tonic of a pentatonic scale.



Bar 37 → Non-functional chord of (A, B-flat, D, B, E, G) followed by minor harmonic interval built on flattened mediant.



Bars 39 to 44 → Are made of passing chromatic notes which are used in form of embellishments.



In his compositions he considered the Igbo tonal inflections in harmonic processes such as chromatic harmony, dissonant intervals and non-functional chromatic chords/harmony.

The chromatic appraisal and analysis of *Missa Africana* are based on Femi Adedeji's theory of Harmonic analysis of African music.

“Two of the harmonic concepts that should be discussed in African music are chordal nomenclature and cadence ..... Although western chordal nomenclature may be adopted, the interpretation and application are never the same as Western” (F. Adedeji, 2006).

The above statements reflect the mind of the author who may put into consideration African art composers that use western idioms.

### **Findings**

Ekweme's use of chromatics in *Missa-Africana* reflected artistic instinct, cultural diversity and organized political or social revolt.

There was a sign of non-conformity through artistic expression he exhibited in his work. See the aggregate of chromatic chords in bars 3,4,7,12 & 21 of Kyrie and bars 15, 34 37 & 39 of Benedictus.

Ekweme's concept of chromaticism as reflected in *Missa-Africana* shows that he was thoroughly committed intellectually and emotionally to the idea of music being composed to register the feelings, thoughts and impressions garnered by a sensitive spirit on its journey through life as expressed in the bar by bar analysis.

His delayed resolution of chromatically altered, borrowed, diminished and augmented chords as seen in bars 28 and 32 of Benedictus is a reflection of his expressionistic perception about life through his thoughts and feelings.

Ekweme alters traditional chords (or harmony) by a semitone as shown in bars 9 and 12 of Kyrie and bars 36 and 38 of Benedictus and thereby breaking down the whole traditional system of harmonic movement or progression.

His concept of chromaticism led to ultra-chromaticism and ultimately, non-functional harmony-chords that have no familiar, ordered or traditional chord progressions or associations.

There were some repetitive chromatic inflections in Kyrie (3&4, 10&11, 25&26) and Benedictus (bars 20&21) music as shown in the analysis of *Missa-Africana* to give affirmative statements or an impressionistic art form in a particular movement.

The concept of chromaticism in the music analysed tends to fall into four categories; momentary chromaticism, delayed Resolution, pan-tonal chromaticism, chromatic arpeggiation.

Moreover, whenever momentary Chromaticism occurs in Ekweme's selected works, a chromatic note is considered a "non – harmonic" tension and is often times quickly resolved (usually by step) to a consonance (usually a note in the chord). This is the simplest approach to applying chromaticism as an element of "spice" or embellishments in an otherwise tonally-predictable passage of music. The chromatic note is being justified as a non-harmonic tension or passing note, which points towards and places importance upon the note to which it resolves. In so doing, momentum or forward motion is created. The "inside – outside – inside" paradigm, where the composer weaves in and out of a tonal progression, is a common application by him. He shows his mastery over the rules that govern conventional chord – scales, cadences in some parts of his works.

Ekweme shows in some sections of his works that chromatic note can be "elongated" or prolonged in time before eventual resolution. This concept increases the importance of the "wrong" note. The opposition of chromaticism against tonality as opposing forces takes the role of dissonance to the next level. Though chromaticism is enjoyed somewhat for its own sand, it still relies on the relativity of consonance. It is anchored in tonality. Such chromatic passages are enlongated beyond normal expectation so that the resolution of tension is delayed.

This study has fostered useful information on the use and concept of chromaticism and theoretical structure of chromaticism in Lazarus Ekweme's selected works.

Musicologists such as theorists, composers and performers will appreciate the link between the composers of the different eras, as shown in the presentation of data in chromatic elements and all its applications.

The analysis of the works will enhance the appreciation and acceptance of chromatically influenced compositions in order to bring about a change of musical idea from the widely or popularly known diatonic compositions to the chromatically structured compositions.

The emphasis on the concepts of chromaticism as employed by the selected composer from African art music from musicological, psychological and sociological point of view has aided in formalizing, and revalidating the chromatic theories of theorists for the utilization of musicologists, especially those from African region.

The formal repetitive chromatic forms in Ekweme's work has revalidated the repetitive motives in African music culture.

Appreciation of chromatic music in African and Western regions will be enhanced by this research and thereby giving African and Western musicologists, composers and performers tools for improving and diversifying their compositional techniques (chromatic usages) in all styles and forms.

### **Conclusion**

It is certainly possible, if not essential, to discuss chromatic techniques in terms directly derived from subject theories in music. But chromatic music has the best chance of success when initial planning stimulates the composer to think afresh about the most fundamental of all creative enterprises, the tension and interaction between, and possible eventual intersection of, things which are (relatively) fixed and things which are (substantially) free.

Art, is not just about convincing mass population but a medium of expressing one's high-level of creativity, intelligence, innovative ideas and craftsmanship through the disconnected, cultural-elite music of Lazarus Ekwueme.

The argument could be made that art must be for the people and comprehensible to them, and not solely for trained experts who seem so far out of touch with the general population they are supposed to be writing for and who ought to have been listening to their music.

The analysis of this work could serve as a catalyst for bridging the gap between Western concept of chromaticism and African concept of chromaticism.

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