

# A Discourse on the Creative Output of Contemporary Nigerian Musicians and their Place in the Global Community

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## **Abstract**

*This paper focuses on the contemporary Nigerian musicians as creative artistes. It discusses such issues as the musicians, the medium of communication, musical output of Nigerian musicians and Nigerian music in the context of meeting global standards and other important concepts. It also gives a comprehensive list of current music practitioners in Nigeria, covering the popular genres, art music and music associations. In conclusion, the paper offers suggestions on how the music industry can be effectively run and made economically viable to compete with global standards.*

**Key words:** Creativity, Contemporary, Musicians, Globalization

## **Introduction**

Music has been ascribed several artistic properties among the creative arts (visual arts, literary arts, theatre arts, etc) because of its power to affect, communicate, and effectively express human emotions (joy, anger, happiness, sadness, etc) in words and sounds as expressed in vocal and instrumental music which covers the whole gamut of human empathies and emotional behaviours.

Many philosophers, scientists, psychologists and religionists have written treatises on the role of music in the society, both in the primitive and advanced societies. Confucius, Plato, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Martin Luther king, Pythagoras and others have written on the effects of music on the society. Some of these philosophers view music as an adjunct to religion, important for cultivating proper

ethics aid character moulding, a tool of science, while others see it as "food of love".

From prehistoric times, the musician and his music occupies an enviable place in the annals of arts. From the Troubadours and the Trouveres, the wandering minstrels, the Minnesingers, the bushman and even the highly respected 'master musician' in African music, the role of music and the musicians in the society cannot be over-emphasized. In the course of history spanning many years and eras, several musicians have been associated with novelty in music, be it in serious music or the popular genre, their artistic and creative contributions to music have been appreciated over the years. The list includes masters, such as J. S. Bach, G. F. Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Wagner, Batok, Shoenberg, Fela-Sowande representing art music or classical music. In the popular genre musicians like Louis Armstrong, Elvis Presley, the Beatless, Abba, Bob Marley, Michael Jackson, Dolly Paton, Celine Dione, have made their marks and contributions to the development of popular music.

Some Nigerian musicians have also participated actively in the development of music worldwide; these will be mentioned in the course of this paper. It will suffice now to briefly highlight the historical background to this paper. The discussion will be centred on Nigerian music, musicians and their relevance to the society in the light of the two major musical practices that are probably in existence in the world: Art and popular music.

## **Background**

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country and this can be vividly observed in the diverse musical features practised by the various ethnic groups. For proper classification of music in Nigeria, it is important to discuss the major musical period in the life of the country.

## **Traditional Music**

Musical practice in the traditional society, are regarded as those musical practices done before the colonization and amalgamation of the Nigerian protectorates. This consists of music of the natives used solely for rituals, entertainment, recreation and other social purposes.

This traditional music covers a wide spectrum in the life of the people from the 'cradle to the grave'. Some of these musical practices are used during festivals, coronation, social-communal activities and in life cycles and celebrations (Omojola, 1999, Vidal, 2000, Ogisi, 2006).

### **Colonial (1900 – 1959), Post-Colonial (1960 - )**

In the colonial and postcolonial era, popular music and other musical genres had grown out of sources such as: the dance bands by brass band percussions, seamen and their bands, and regimental bands (Euba, 1968, Collins, 1977, Omibiyi, 1979, Akpabot, 1986). These were used for entertainment and recreational functions. Other indigenous popular and socio - religious music like Apala, Juju, Fuji, Waka and so on had cultural and religious roots especially the influences of Islam, Christianity and others.

Many musical typologies have also evolved in the postcolonial eras especially during the oil boom periods with its resultant economic buoyancy. Prominent creative geniuses of both periods include: Bobby Benson, Chris Ajilo, Rex Lawson, Bala Miller, Adeolu Akinsanya, Victor Olaiya, Eddie Okonta, Zeal Onyia, Ojoge Daniel, Tunde Nightinggale, Ayinde Bakare, I.K. Dairo, Sunny Ade, Ebenezer Obey, Prince Adegunle, Haruna Ishola, Ayinla Omowura, Yusuf Olatunji, Ayinde Barrister, Ayinla Kollington, Orlando Julius, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Victor Uwaifo, Sunny Okosun, Mamman Shata, Dan Maraya Jos. (Tosin *et.al*, 1992, Olusoji, 2010).

### **Art Music**

Art music and the art musicians which were seen more or less as an elitist and highbrow cannot be left out of this discussion. According to the New Harvard dictionary of music (2001, Randel ed.):

*An art song traditionally is a setting of a text of high literary quality and, unlike most folk and popular songs includes an accompaniment that is specified by the composer rather than improvised or arranged by or for the performer (Randel, 2001: 56).*

Its evolution in Nigeria has been traced to the advent of Christian missionaries, returnee slaves as well as other sources discussed by Omojola (1995). The major problems facing it are the over westernization of materials by art musicians which were largely due to their background and orientations. Some of the notable names in Nigerian art music will be highlighted under the next subheadings.

### **Contemporary Nigerian Music and Globalization**

Creativity is a subjective term as Akpabot (1986) argues while comparing, African traditional music with western classical music that:

*A band of African musicians listening to a European orchestra playing Waltz with its insistent triple meter, would tend to term the whole proceeding primitive in relation to their own more complex rhythms (Akpabot, 1986: 1).*

Despite subjectivity in defining creativity, Nigerian musicians have been very productive, artistic and creative within the context and scope of their music. The contemporary Nigerian musicians have brought artistic innovations to the profession and the music industry. Apart from sports (especially football), music has served as a unifying factor and rallying points for the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Just like in advanced economies of the world, the entertainment industry has been very active and an important boost to the culture and tourism sector of the Nigerian economy. The contemporary musicians have been able to sell their products to the Nigerian populace and world at large by repackaging, remixing, recreating and rearranging their music and medium of performance to suit current trends in music in Nigeria and the world. Musical creativity and globalization in contemporary Nigeria will now be discussed under popular and art music.

### **Popular Music**

The popular culture (Rap, Rhythm and Blues, Reggae, Rock, Hip-hop etc) found all over the world is visible and very active in the Nigerian music scene. It is without 'frontiers and boundaries' and had incorporated elements of traditional indigenous music with acculturated instruments and styles from the western world. Collins

(1992) had given an account of the origin of popular music and some of its practitioners, artistes and followers in contemporary time in Nigeria and West Africa. These consist of young artistes who crave for stage popularity and fast monetary gains that may accrue from ventures in music. Many of them can be found milling around studios to wax records often spiced with vulgarity, devoid of well-thought out musical properties, and perhaps, many did not have sound musical training (on playing of musical instruments and composition) either through informal musical training or apprenticeship under a reputable musician, this has seriously affected creativity in the works of these artistes and records sometimes churned out are of low-quality.

A predominant and common feature in the popular genre in Nigeria in contemporary times is the 'Naija hip-hop' (a genre that evolved in the United States of America in the '80s) and re-arranging of old tunes (tunes by I.K. Dairo, and Ebenezer Obey, etc. have been rearranged, remixed and reworked) by young artistes and at most times without due consent from the original owners of such artistic creations, thereby breaking copyright laws. However, some of these young artiste have been exceptionally brilliant and had followed pioneering efforts laid over the years by musical giants in the industry and have also brought their individual talents and style to bear on the entertainment industry. In contemporary times, some of these popular musicians especially the youngsters have taken their music to the world stage by participating in festivals, organizing tours and collaborating with well-known artiste from other countries. According to Omibiyi (2007):

*By far the Nigerian musical typology that has experienced the highest internationalism is popular music. Nigerian popular music and musicians are active participants in the international musical world.*  
(Omibiyi, 2007: 15)

Young artistes like Dagrín, P-square, Remedies, Olu maintain, Sunny Nneji, Paul Play Dairo, El-Zakky, Majek Fashek, Mandators, Pasuma Wonder, Tu Face, D' Banj, Obesere, Kwam I, Saridon P, Shefiu Alao, Atawewe, Raskimono, Alex O., Lagbaja, Femi Kuti, Alariwo, Baba

Fryo, Daddy Showkey, Daddy Fresh, Kenny St. Ogungbe, Broda Martins, Telemi, Funmi Aragbaiye, Dupe Olulana and others in their group have in one way or the other charted new roadmaps for the globalization of Nigerian music and also infused new ideas into contemporary popular music in recent times in Nigeria. They have also exported their music to other countries.

### **Art Music**

Though the contemporary art musician has in a way incorporated nationalistic elements into his compositions. Omibiyi (2001) sees this as mere borrowing of tunes, which does not actually reflect true indigenous compositions and just using European medium to treat an African tune. This is aptly so because of the training and background of the art musician which is western in orientation. An extensive study and a comprehensive list of art music practitioners and musicians in Nigeria through the ages have been done by Omojola (1995). These includes Robert .A. Coker, T.K.E. Philips, Fela Sowande, Echezona, Sam Akpabot, Laz. Ekwueme, Adam Fiberesima, Akin Euba, Ayo Bankole, Sam Akpabot, Tunji Vidal, Mosun Omibiyi-Obidike, Ade Adegbite, Dan Agu, Joshua Uzoigwe, Ekemezie Mereni, Achinivu Kanu, Femi Fasheun, Onye Nwakpa, Yemi Olaniyan, Olubobokun and others that include: Ndubuisi Nnamani, Olusoji Stephen. Christian Onyeji, Ranti Adeogun, Femi-Adedeji, Udulor E., A. A. Ogisi, Olatunji Michael, Ade Okunade, Albert Oikelome and so on.

A major boost to art music in Nigeria was the establishment of the musical society of Nigeria and the construction of its centre, an important edifice for the propagation and performance of serious music and an ideal environment for its practice and also offering collaborations between Nigerian artistes and foreign ones. It is also worthy of note that its Diploma programme accredited by the Federal Ministry of Education has been boosted through sponsorship by M.T.N, a telecommunication company. Aside from academic institutions where art music thrives, most religious organizations have incorporated sacred art music into their regular and seasonal programmes. The list include: Apostolic Faith Mission, Mountain of Fire and Miracles, Deeper Christian Life, Christ Apostolic Church, Christ Foundation Gospel Church and so on. Music being an

important adjunct to religion, it is common to hear of sacred cantatas, presentation of oratorio and other musical forms, although in contemporary times this is fast losing ground to modern Pentecostalism (the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria have highly promoted dance music) where the pop cultures have been brought into churches to entice and lure the youths to stay in their organizations.

In contemporary times, Creativity in art music has gone beyond purely tonal music, but its practitioners have also practised some purely avant garde form such as atonal music (independence of tonal centre) that could be understood and appreciated by only a few of even the art-music practitioners and its followers. A leading practitioner of this is Late Joshua Uzoigwe, a keen follower of the school propounded by the German musician and theorist, Schoenberg. Uzoigwe (2001) had made a case for an African identity exploring the atonal mode and had utilized these in his compositions. Most of the works of Nigerian art composers are found in libraries all over the world and some have been performed by reputable choirs and orchestral groups. Such works like 'African suite' by Fela Sowande and others mentioned in the paragraph below have stood the test of time. Most of these works make use of traditional tunes and structures, which are well appreciated especially by people with musical backgrounds and training.

The art musician with his toga of elitism has had a running battle with acceptability due to his western training, orientation and background of its practitioners. Times without number the uninitiated local audience have been left groping in the dark about the nature, message, and more importantly the form of the music, which is structured after western forms as practised by the masters over the years. Though references have been made to borrowing of themes, motifs and tunes from local sources in compositions such as Olurombi by Akin Euba, Rhapsody Nigeriana by Laz Ekwueme, Ofala Festival by Sam Akpabot, Opu Jaja by Adam Fiberesima, and so on, such elements of form, mode, rhythm and other characteristic features of African music though present and utilized in western style may not bring out the right musical flavour as desired by the local audience that will make them appreciate these art compositions. According to Nketia (1982):

*An African composer must therefore master the fundamentals of African melody and rhythm so that he can create typical African tunes based on any of the varieties of heptatonic, hexatonic and pentatonic scales used in African societies... for he can create tunes that would be true to the traditional idiom. (Nketia, 1982: 89).*

The summation of the above simply implies that, for the contemporary Nigerian art musician to recreate music as practised in his tradition and that would be relevant within the context of 'what is regarded as music in his society, there is the need for him to attune himself to the culture, artistic and creative practices in his tradition. The end product of this would be a refined music that is a true reflection of his culture and that can be taken to the world stage.

### **Conclusion**

Although, a lot of improvement has been witnessed in the Nigerian popular and art music scenes in contemporary times, it is yet to reach the Promised Land. Certain important factors and aspects of the art must be brought to the required level for it to meet global standards- for music is regarded as a 'universal phenomenon'.

Popular musicians are to be encouraged to learn music formally (especially the rudimentary basis of theory, form and basic orchestration) to be able to document, preserve and to increase the musical packaging and artistic output, of their music. Higher institutions offering music should be well equipped and instruction geared towards practical musicianship. Research into ethnic/indigenous music should be given the utmost importance to give the country a unique music and national cultural identity.

Nigerian art music composers should make their music and compositions more relevant to societal needs (their trainings should lead them back to their roots), aspirations and yearnings. Such regulatory bodies and societies the Performing Musician Associations of Nigeria (PMAN), Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON) and so on should be made more active and relevant in the affairs and charting a



direction for music in Nigeria, for it to compete favourably with other professional bodies in the country and the world at large, so that music can be regarded as a serious profession, rather than mere hobby for any unserious fellow.

Also, Nigerian copyright law is to be made more stringent. Finally, with all the aforementioned, music in Nigeria is a vibrant art, an important sector of the Nigerian economy and should be made a force to reckon with in world music.

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