

## **African musical instruments pedagogy in tertiary institutions: A case study of the Department of Music, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka**

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### ***Abstract***

*The study of music in tertiary institutions embraces different aspects of musicology at both Undergraduate and Postgraduate levels. The effort is geared towards an overall musicality of the learner or better still, towards the enhancement and or development of musical arts education in the society. Taking a stance from the Undergraduate Programme of studies in the Department of Music Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, one wonders whether equal prominence are given to the practical application and study of both Western and African music in terms of musical instruments. The paper sets to investigate the level of attention given to the teaching and learning of African musical instruments against the Western musical instruments in the Department. The researcher adopts interview method as an instrument of investigation as well as other related sources with useful information. In the process, it was discovered that the development envisaged from the study and adequate application of African musical instruments in and outside the classroom performances suffer the greatest set back from both the teachers and the taught, whose attitudes towards the teaching and learning of indigenous musical instruments are that of negligence. The paper suggests that equal attention be given to the study of musical instruments in schools be it Western or African, and none should be preferred to the detriment of the other in student's practical assessment in order to ensure even*

*distribution of developmental abilities in musical arts education among students within the Department and Nigeria as a country.*

## **Introduction**

Music comprises three broad areas namely, vocal, dance and instrumentation, (or in combinations). Obviously, the aim of this paper does not include a comprehensive theory or discussion of the concepts but rather the practical application and mastery of the third group-the instrumentation in a classroom or academic situation. Judging from Western history, many masters are recorded who excelled in the act of playing one type of musical instrument or the other. Notable among them are Adolph Sax (a Belgian saxophonist), Nicolo Paganini (an Italian violinist), Buddy De Franco (An American Clarinetist), Louis Armstrong-a.k.a Satchmo (American trumpet player), to mention just a few. These people exhibited extraordinary abilities in their specific areas to become world acclaimed figures. All these achievements no doubt owed their successes to hard work, exposures, personal interest and or guided tutorials. In Africa such talents exist but with little or no recognition at all as the case in the Western world. For instance, there are the master instrumentalists such as master drummers, flutists, xylophonists, thumb pianist and experts in other minor instruments such as slit wooden drum, gongs and so on, most of which follow a genealogical foundation or tradition while others are as a result of self-effort and personal interest. For instance, Olaniyan (2008) reports that, '*dundun* musicians are traditionally known as skillful professionals who, most usually inherit aptitude from their ancestors'. (95) In the same direction, Ibekwe (2010) informs that, '*nkwa* music is not a borrowed genre. It was traditionally instituted and continues to

evolve from generation to generation within the same ancestral lineage. (2)

Obviously, the issue of generational transfer can never be over emphasized as its effect is always living among us. In a recent interview with an Associate Professor of Ethnomusicologist, Sam Chukwu K., a renowned master drummer of great repute, it was gathered that his act of drum playing has a primordial foundation. This inherited talent was later developed through hard work and professional ingenuity into a much desired academic material to meet up with the current pedagogical challenges in schools, most especially in the area of drumming. Recently a final year student of this Department won the 2015 award of excellence (as a flutist) organized by Christopher Kolade Foundations in Creativity and Leadership Ability which took place in Abuja / Lagos States of Nigeria early April this year. In an interaction with the award winner Master Gerald Eze, it was discovered that he belongs to a scion of a famous family of musicians in Umuchu of Igbo Culture. This developing genius has at various occasions made radical demonstration or proof of his imbued potentials in most of the Departmental activities. He is currently undertaking a project on *Oja* instrument - flute, possibly on how to improve its scope, functions and usability in an ensemble performance, a task that demands technical, acoustical and scientific knowhow.

Nevertheless, one cannot dismiss the impact of tutorials in the mastery and professional attainment in certain areas of human endeavour such as the one under discussion. In the past, parents teach their children the act of singing, dancing and playing instruments. Tracey in Ibekwe, (2010) observes among the Chopi musicians that, ‘ a father will take his seven or eight year old boy

and set him between his knees while he plays. The boy will hold the two beaters with his arms well flexed and pliant, while the father clips his hand over his sons and continues to play in the usual way.’ (3) In one of the writers field works, she was informed by one of her respondents, Nze Okwugbunem Udogu (2006) now late, that he ensured that the music which was inherited from his father did not stop in his own time. He affected the transfer by exposing the son to different musical situations where the boy can observe him play. He also taught him through guided participation. Under such tutelage the boy would be a formidable player of the *nkwa* music at his own time. If therefore traditional music should receive such protection and prominence in the past, why then has it suffered neglect among the academics who should carry it to the next level, that is to meet up with the challenges of this present time?

### **Music in the classroom: The practical experience**

The teaching or learning of music in the Department of Music, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka takes a two dimensional approach. These include theoretical and practical dimensions. Citing from the Departmental Hand Book, the philosophy implies that ‘practical courses are...conceived as complimentary to the theoretical ones. Thus, competencies, understanding and skills are expected in the theoretical as well as in the practical aspects of Music in Africa, Europe, America, Latin America and other world cultures...’ (2-3) Some of the objectives of the programme include

- To provide students with adequate knowledge, skills and understanding of Music and related functional disciplines

- To prepare students as professional music teachers for the country's educational system.
- To produce high caliber music graduates who can pursue further studies in Music
- To prepare students for varied music positions in private and public agencies of our present era of high technology and computerization... (13)

For the realization of the above, the following Courses are slated for study namely,

- 0- Acoustics and Music Technology
- 1- Music Rudiments and Theory, Harmony and Counterpoint
- 2- History, Form, Style and Literature of Western Music
- 3- Ethnomusicology, African, Nigeria, Regional, Cultural theoretical Studies
- 4- Practical Musicianship of Western, African, and other world Cultures
- 5- Specialization- stress area/elective courses
- 6- Other related courses (14)

All these courses are split to cover different levels of undergraduate programme, but as earlier specified, our primary concern here is on the practical aspect of the study precisely on the instrumentation. At every semester, each student is expected to present before the jury under Individual Performance Studies (IPS) the following exercises– Piano pieces, Voice pieces covering classical/contemporary, and folk pieces, and finally an Orchestral Instrument piece. But these orchestral instrument performances border specifically on western instruments, no

concession is given to African musical instruments. They are not slated for adjudication. The questions now are,

1. Why are the instruments not included in the IPS? Or, rather what are responsible for the non- inclusion?
2. What are the criteria for the selection of instruments for IPS?
3. What effect/s has this non-inclusion on the overall musicality of the students?
4. What are the possible solutions?

In an interaction with a cross section of some members of staff of the Department of Music Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, many reasons were given based on the questions above. In question no1, the reasons include

1. The curriculum is not comprehensive
2. The curriculum and its course contents are not planned to cover the challenging issues of the contemporary time.
3. African musical instruments are not equally tempered to make for equal judgment
4. There is lack of notational representation of African musical instruments
5. The orchestration of African musical instrument is not included in the curriculum
6. Cultural Impact: There is an over assumption that students should be at home with their indigenous instruments therefore learning them in school does not challenge the students

These are some of the plausible reasons offered as being responsible for the non-inclusion of African musical instruments

in the Departmental Individual Performance Studies. Reacting to the above reasons in relation to classroom practical experiences, one would attest to the incomprehensiveness of the curriculum. There is no provision for the practical teaching and learning of indigenous musical instruments. Students are assigned to different lecturers to learn various Western instruments of their choice, but no such arrangement is made available for indigenous instruments' teaching and learning. If the curriculum and its course contents are expansive enough to cover both areas, it would challenge the students' overall musicality. Secondly, the non-inclusion of instrumental technology as a course in the school curriculum has affected the production of indigenous musical instruments adversely, in that the production is left at the mercy of the commercial producers who do not know much about musical notes, and the crude processes which the instruments undergo during constructions do not give room for good sound production as a result; the issue of tuning in that crude state becomes unrealistic or rather impossible. It should also be noted that our traditional musical instruments have no sound sustenance ability; they are permanently tuned with no provision for flexibility. It is only when an instrument is capable of producing a melody in correct pitches that the issue of notation and tuning become more visible. Until the job of instruments' construction exchanges hand, which is shifting from local constructors to those who are knowledgeable in both sonic and acoustical principles of instrument construction, the problem of standardization would still remain unachievable.

Other Sources of Impediments include poor attitudes of the teachers and the learners. Teachers in the institutions have not seen the need to project our traditional musical instruments to

meet up with the Western; as a result they pay less attention to the study of the instruments and their technicalities. Students on their own part are not motivated to face the challenges of being masters and experts in our local musical instruments. Invariably, the study of indigenous instrument is likened to the study of indigenous languages where the learner is seen as a dunce or unintelligent. Many students would prefer being called a trumpet player, a saxophonist, and a clarinetist to a xylophonist, a drummer, a thumb pianist, a flutist, a metal gong player, a slit-wooden drummer and so on. Ordinarily, it is said that people do not always value what they have; they normally take pride in being associated with things that are classified as foreign or exotic rather than things that are local.

Again, in most cases students' backgrounds are contributive to nonchalant attitude towards the learning of indigenous instruments. It is a very common practice to see parents who employ the services of Western instrument teachers to teach keyboard instruments, violin, guitar, clarinet recorder, and so on to their children, thereby preparing the interest of these children towards the mastery of Western instruments instead of local.

Moreover, musical instruments from African perspective can never be divorced from their cultural values, rituals, beliefs, functions, usages and prohibitions. Little wonder then why some instruments are said to have gender connotations which are hardly the case with the Western instruments. As a result of this gender specifications, teaching and learning of some musical instruments are affected both within and outside the classroom. This specification was clearly brought to view in Uzoigwe's (1998) description of *okwukwu nwoke* and *okwukwu nwanyi* –funeral ceremony of men and women. He said, 'according to Igbo

custom, funeral ceremonies for men follow a well-defined mode of conduct different from those of women. Thus, there is *okwukwu nwoke* for adult men and *okwukwu nwanyi* for adult women'. (1) He continues, 'in order to emphasize this sexual, as well as status difference, two music types, *ese* for men and *ukom* for women, were created- each type possessing its own distinctive musical character and mode of performance'. (1) N.B. *ese* and *ukom* are both instrumental music, in other words men are concerned with their type of instruments and women have their own. In her discussion on the gender implications of women and music in Igbo culture, Ibekwe, (2012) infers that,

The complexities of gender issues and their effects on cultural domain of Igbo people have remained a worrisome phenomenon. Male dominance in most of the cultural activities has resulted in role denial or dereliction that is capable of projecting female's potentials in society. In Igbo culture, the separation of men and women as a result of gender differences has some profound implications on their musical thoughts and values. This dichotomy limits the musical roles and responsibilities expected of women and consequently undermine or narrow down the overall cultural enrichment of the people. (1)

In furtherance, she pictures women's exclusive role in ensemble performance in relation to instrumental applications as thus,

women ensembles are predominantly vocal and they employ few simple portable musical instruments in contradiction to the large orchestras associated with men. The choice of instruments in female ensemble depends on the limitations associated with the playing of (such) musical instruments. The commonest instruments used by women during performances include pot drums *udu* of various sizes, wood block *okpokoro*, *nkwo-nkwo*, *uko*, gourd and basket rattle - *ichaka*, *nsak*, oyo, small slit wooden drum- *obele-ekwe*, bamboo clapper – *mpachi* and so on. (109)

In some parts of the Igbo societies, women are not allowed to handle such instruments as *oja*-notched flute, *ikoro* -large slit drum, *opilopu*- ivory trumpet, *odu enyi*-elephant tusk, *ngelenge*-xylophone, *uboaka*-thumb piano and so on, for reasons connected with their belief system and ritual obligations. Ordinarily due to these seemingly artificial cum man-made barriers, it looks so abnormal if not odd to see functions being misplaced in event of traditional practices in Igbo culture. Based on those rituals and the consequent psychological attachments on most of these African musical instruments their accessibility for classroom tutorials and usages often become a problematic issue. Interestingly, it should be noted that while some people are still holding tenaciously to these gender driven barriers, others have started giving way to modernization, so that it is no more an abomination to see women playing men exclusive instruments in their performances.

### **Criteria for selection**

On the criteria for selection as part of IPS instruments, it was unanimously opinionated that the availability of notational representation has given the Western Musical Instruments an added advantage. Students can easily pick their choice pieces from a number of available notated pieces in Western instruments, which is not the same with the African musical instruments. Although, this argument is not exhaustive, it does not really imply total lack or absence in all areas of African instruments. Nzewi, (2007a) *Theory and Practice of Modern African Classical Drum music* volume 5, book 2 and 3 is a good beginning and good representation in the area of drums. Also Chukwu (2011) *African Membrane Drum and its Notation* is another in road into the problem of notation as it concerns drum music. Undoubtedly, African musical instruments are grouped into four major areas of Membranophones, Aerophones, Idiophones and Chordophones according to Eric von Hornbustle and Curt Sachs (1933) classification, and drums represent only membranophone family. As for other instruments they are yet to receive such attention in notational representation. Therefore the main reason for not selecting them borders on non-availability of notated works.

### **The possible effects**

Considering the effect/s the non – inclusion of African musical instruments in the Individual Performance Studies and Examinations has on the overall musicality of the students, it should be agreed that the overall musicality of the students is seriously hampered and jeopardized. The implication is that a student who may be an expert in a given Western musical instrument remains a daft in his or her own indigenous musical

instrument. Furthermore, the growth expected in the musical arts education and society as a whole remains unrealistic and elusive. This in essence does not justify the philosophy and objectives of music studies in Tertiary Institutions which the Department of Music, Nnamdi Azikiwe University is taken as a case.

### **Possible solutions**

- Music studies should not be theoretically based; attention should be spread equally to cover every aspect of music studies.
- Teachers of African music, composers and indeed all musicologists should endeavour to provide musical notations for African instruments to enable students select their choice pieces from them
- The curriculum and its course content should be reviewed and extended to cover the challenging issues of the contemporary time especially in the areas of instrument technology.
- The orchestration for African musical instruments should be of paramount importance and should be included in the curriculum
- Proper orientation should be given to the students to address or erase any cultural barriers and misinformation that must have taken its tolls in their subconscious domain.

### **Conclusion**

African musical instrument pedagogy in tertiary institution still needs much to be desired. From the foregoing appraisal, it should

be noted that the advantage the Western musical instruments has over African musical instruments in classroom applications is that of invention. New inventions are not always easy to achieve. It took a long time of experimentation, trial and error before Johann Sebastian Bach (in the 17<sup>th</sup> century) could get at 'His *Well-Tempered Clavier*'. In the process according to Kamien (1998) 'a collection of forty-eight preludes and fugues , two in each major key and each minor key, was composed to explore and demonstrate a system of tuning...The *Well-Tuned Keyboard Instrument*'. (126) The success of his experimentation then served as a spring board on which the tuning system of every other melodic instrument of Western origin took its course. In that direction, instruments that are tuned at equal density, intervals, frequencies, oscillations and vibrations exhibit the same characteristics, differences in sonorities notwithstanding.

Inversely, African instruments produce sounds in relation to their ascribed functions, for instance, an instrument associated with ritual or mystic disposition is expected to generate sounds capable of inducing psychological feelings on the hearer. Nzewi, (2007b) avers that, 'sounds of indigenous musical instruments are not always conceived and appreciated in terms of the sheer sonic essence ... (but) could be apportioned exclusive political or social significance ... extraordinary significance or potential in a culture' (77) Therefore, due to the peculiar nature of some African musical instruments, their sound limitations, cultural impacts and manipulations, their tuning system is often not guaranteed or standardized. Also the tonal implications of African languages have serious effects or challenges on the tone production of African musical instruments- in other words, they are culturally controlled. Instruments are played in the imitation

of the voice lest the meaning becomes distorted, and to achieve some measure of sensibility in performance, these cultural stipulations are considered. Nonetheless, this discussion does not condemn the efforts of some scholars who have contributed immensely to the provision of a working guide and solution to this aching problem, but the fact is that it may not be realistic to treat, adjudge or place the issue of notation, orchestration and tuning of African musical instrument on the same pedestal with the Western.

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