

Aspects of “interculturalism” in contemporary Nigerian music compositions for national unity

Alvan-Ikoku O. Nwamara

Abstract

Music remains an integral part of every Nigerian’s life, irrespective of culture, ethnicity or religiosity. Every aspect of life-stages in Nigeria has some level of music-making attached to it from cradle to grave. As a result, music is believed to play significant role in early character moulding and inculcation of cultural and moral values and ideals in Nigerians through its various kinds and types that are in existence. Since music has been proven over time to be this influential, especially in children, it might not be out of place for one to suggest using music to promote national unity in a seemingly troubled Nigerian nation. This paper sets out to encourage contemporary Nigerian musicians and composers to explore some aspects of “interculturalism” (especially in form of combining diverse ethnic languages, musical instruments, costume and so on) in their music compositions and performances. This would help bring their messages closer to the doorsteps of various ethnic groups whose languages are made manifest in such music compositions.

Introduction

Music is globally referred to as a universal language. This is because most people understand and enjoy music to a certain extent at various times. In Nigeria (Africa), music is an integral part of the peoples’ life; as a system of expression,

communication, communality, entertainment, passage of rites etc. Referring to Nigerians, Ajiboye (2013) observes that “music is the language of the soul, and our natural instinct responds to it. The dynamism of this language is best exhibited in its ability to transcend the understanding to the realm of the soul...”

In games, election campaign rallies, church worship and other meeting points for Nigerians of diverse ethnicity and culture, music is performed and enjoyed irrespective of cultural background or ethnic and even religious affinity of the parties involved. This has become even more appreciated in this era of “interculturalism” in music composition, where musical genres and especially languages are fused and integrated culturally into a hybrid that sounds relevant to the end-users and attends to their various musical needs at various levels and times. This fusion and integration is what we have termed “interculturalism” in music composition. This transcends all genres of music in Nigeria in recent times and so the writer feels it is time to use same as a means of promoting national unity in the country.

The primacy of music in diverse Nigerian cultures

We have stated elsewhere that music as an integral part of Nigerian culture, accompanies every average Nigerian in one way or the other from womb to tomb. Nwamara (2011) informs that music lives in and with the people, which implies that Nigerian culture cannot be discussed without mentioning the music of the Nigerian people. He opines that music in Nigeria and its practice are ethnic bound; such that each society practises its own variant. Hence one can speak of the Igbo, Hausa or Yoruba varieties of Nigerian music, in addition to those of other minor ethnic groups like the Tiv, the Efik, the Nupe and the Ijaw ethnic groups. The diverse musical traditions in different parts of Nigeria are due to

several factors which include un-uniformed environmental conditions and different historical backgrounds which affect their choice of music and musical instruments.

Nwamara (2011) went further to inform that there can hardly be any function in Nigeria without music; which usually serves entertainment purposes. Aside entertainment, music-making in Nigerian functions/occasions also educates, informs, addresses issues, corrects impressions, directs people, heals, inspires, encourages, energizes, and criticizes and so on. Nzewi (1980) holds that music is an ubiquitous social organiser as it supervises the operation of established government; asserts in the maintenance of the laws of the land; safeguards and perpetuates tradition, discourages the degeneration of personal corporate morals; promotes social equity and fights injustice; crowns rulers, welcomes births, buries the dead, enforces public health programmes, generally organizes and enlivens all purposes of communal get together.

In his paper, Nwamara (2011) clearly x-rayed different stages of the life of the average Nigerian and came up with three main musical life stages represented with THE THREE Es, which stands for the following: E1. Entrance and Early Life Stage, E2. Existence and Adulthood Stage, and E3. Exit and Funeral Rites Stage.

In E1= Entrance and Early Life Stage, are sub-stages like;

- a. Birth Announcement
- b. Songs for Circumcision
- c. Songs for Child Naming/Outing Ceremony
- d. Lullabies
- e. Plaintive Songs
- f. Cradle Songs

- g. Games/Play Songs and Folktale songs
- h. Children Peer Groups Songs and Dances
- i. Work Songs

E2 = Existence and Adulthood Stage:

- a. Initiation Songs
- b. War Songs
- c. Age-Grade Songs
- d. Festival and Feast Songs
- e. Marriage songs
- f. Title-taking Songs

E3 = Exit and Funeral Rites Stage

- a. Death

The enumeration above is just one of the ways the writer feels the goings-on in the musical lives of Nigerians can be summarized. It shows how music accompanies every Nigerian from birth till death; as obtainable in most Nigerian cultures; especially the Igbo-Nigerian culture. Note that with the heavy presence of Christianity in most Nigerian societies and its influence in contemporary times, Christian music features prominently in some of these sub-stages enumerated above.

Music types in Nigeria

Many music types abound in Nigeria, with each being identifiable by certain main characteristic features which make it different from others. According to Nwamara (2009), these characteristic features include form (art music and classical music generally, jazz), rhythm (reggae, raga, hip-hop), text (sacred or secular, highlife), instrumental style (Congo music generally) combination of rhythm and instrumental style (Rhythm and Blues

{R&B}), combination of text and rhythm (Rhythm Accented Poetry {Rap}), combination of rhythm, text plus instrumental accompaniment (juju, Afrobeats etc). Note that within these characteristic features there exist some noticeable cross currents in some cases. Okafor (2004) identifies three classes of music, namely; the traditional Music, the Popular Music, and the Classical Music which Nwamara (2009) preferred to represent as Classical and Art Music. Each music/song in existence in Nigeria, can directly or indirectly find its way into being a member of one of these three families.

Traditional Music includes all traditional and/or folk music in Nigeria which serve as media for the expression of the people's culture. They are orally transmitted from one generation to another with allowances created unconsciously by each generation for the up-coming generations to make selections and variations from the original without destroying its tone of continuity. Popular Music, which is generally referred to as 'Pop' music, is a "contemporaneous music, which appeals to a mass audience" (Okafor, 2009:5). He points out that "it does not require guided listening because people are familiar with its idioms and are, therefore, quite receptive to it," while Smith (1962:11) points out that popular music is more subject to change than any other genre of music,

for it is not ceremonially or socially bound to tribal institutions. Innovation and alterations in this music are generally not prohibited by tradition. Thus, it has been changed by outside influences, individuals within the society, and integration with other societies.

Okafor (2009) further explains that popular music is music with broad immediate and implicitly transient appeal. It is also social-entertainment and dance oriented, draws its core clientele from urban dwellers, and finds its expression mostly in pubs and nightclubs. It is more popular with the youths than the adults. The popular music found in Nigeria is indigenous, Western, African (Diasporan or neo-traditional). It is of various categories which include:

- (i) The Derivatives of Traditional music e.g *apala*, *sakara*, *akuko n'egwu*, and *dadakuada*.
- (ii) Those that Reflect Interaction between Local and Western/Arabic musical Cultures: highlife, *juju*, *fuji*, *afrojuju* and *ajasco*.
- (iii) The Western Popular Mainstream and Those that Result from Interaction between African and New World Cultures: the Afro-rock, soul, highlife, Afrobeats, Congo music (*makossa*), disco, electronic and jazz-rock, Zigima and ozzidi.

Classical and Art Music: Classical and Art music here comprises of all written or scored music, composed in accordance with certain universally accepted conventions and rules. In line with Okafor (2009);

it is generally absolute music but may be derived from or used as popular styles for dance or for entertainment (suite, dance, ballet, divertissement, gavotte, minuet, polka, rhumba). It also includes the accepted national music of some countries like rhapsody, which is Swedish; polka, which is Czech; reel, which is Celtic.

Classical and Art music, here, also includes those of the church, their liturgy and scriptures (cantatas, oratorios, mass, litany, canticles, anthems, motets, plainsongs etc.). In Nigeria, classical and art music are mainly performed in the concert halls and churches for mainly the elites, the Christian congregation, and the academia.

Nigerian musical instruments

Chukwu (2007: xxv) defines musical instruments as:

Humanly designed and constructed mechanisms which when struck, bowed, plucked, blown or touched (depending on the pressure exerted on such instrument), produce certain sounds that are generally accepted by the makers and users of such instrument(s).

There exists a wide variety of musical instruments in Nigeria. There are many organological classifications of these musical instruments by many scholars but the most acceptable classification is that of two German ethnomusicologists, Curt Sachs and Erich Von Hornbostel (1933). This classification studied the physical properties of various musical instruments in relation to the scientific properties governing their sources of sound production. It is in four classes namely:

1. Idiophones

These are instruments that depend on the vibration of their entire bodies for musical sound production. They are further classified into three categories (Struck idiophones, Shaken idiophones and Plucked idiophones). Examples include;

rattles (shaken), xylophones (struck), wooden gong (struck), thumb-piano (plucked) etc.

2. **Aerophones**

These are musical instruments that depend on the vibration of the air column inside for sound production. Examples include all indigenous flutes (*oja*), reed pipes, horns (*opi*) and trumpets (*kaakaki*).

3. **Chordophones**

Chordophones depend on the vibration of their stretched strings for the production of musical sound. They are played by plucking, striking, bowing, or rubbing. Examples include zithers, musical bows (*une*), lutes, traditional guitars (*Grumi and Molo*) etc.

4. **Membranophones**

They are instruments that depend on the vibration of the stretched membrane or animal skin for the production of musical sound. They are generally drums.

Intercultural approach to Nigerian music composition

The church has been and has remained in the fore-front of music - making and promotion of the musical arts in Nigeria. No wonder all musical genres in Nigeria have been so influenced by Christian musical ideologies and principles (especially in the lyrical contents). Archaeological evidence suggests that religious beliefs have existed since the first human communities. These beliefs are generally shared by a community, and they express communal culture and values through myth, doctrine and ritual (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010). This is not far from the

situation in Nigerian musical culture of the twenty first century but has in addition become intercultural in essence.

It may be necessary at this juncture to recall that most Nigerian cultures (music inclusive) were termed fetish, pagan and ungodly in the early days of Christian religion in Nigeria. This disapproval of the performance and appreciation of all Nigerian music by regarding them as fetish and ungodly almost alienated the people from their language, music and worship style (Omojola, 2001). But as time went on, the quest for self/cultural identity and realization gave rise to Nigerian indigenous Christian music. This went further to develop into gospel band music side by side with highlife music and encouraged the use of modern western dance band musical equipment in Nigerian musical performances. All these metamorphosed into what is known today as contemporary Nigerian music of which Naija hip-hop seems to be in the fore-front in recent times.

The issue of “interculturalism” manifests in various ways in contemporary Nigerian music such as the use of mixed languages, intercultural musical instruments, mixed rhythm, costumes, dance styles etc. In contemporary times, individuals from various parts of Nigeria and beyond sing in different Nigerian local languages, musical styles, and tunes as a result of this “interculturalism” in music. Thanks to the modern global technology (the internet). The word “interculturalism” is a compound word which means a relationship involving representation of different cultures in some way. According to www.definitions.net it refers to support for cross-cultural dialogue and challenging self-segregation tendencies within cultures. It involves moving beyond mere passive acceptance of a multicultural fact of multiple cultures effectively existing in a society and instead promotes dialogue and interaction between

cultures. It is not originally a musical term but is borrowed from the social sciences for use in music to achieve this desired goal. In music, exploring aspects of “interculturalism” can be achieved by a fusion of different languages and culture to make a complete sense within a culture. History has it that this type of music has existed since the early nineteenth (19th) century. This was known in American Southwest as Conjuto Texmex style, which was a fusion of Hispanic and German culture. This Conjuto Texmex is a stylistic influence derived from German and Czech, while the song text is Spanish (Butler, 2009). Muchimba called this a Pan-African music which evolved through the Church choirs and pop music as a form of contextualization. He cited an example of “Odi odi” which means (knock) and “Odini” which is (welcome) in Zambian language in a song “Christ Yesu was Born” (Muchimba, 2008: 89).

In Nigeria today, “interculturalism” has become a common phenomenon in Naija hip-hop music (text, instrumentation, dance styles and costume inclusive). This is most especially as a result of improved modern day technology as mentioned earlier. Butler attests to the fact by stating that the revolution has provided high-quality sound and video recording, radio and television, as well as computers. He informs that it is difficult to overstate the importance of these innovations on musical cultures in the world. Improved technology has led to the dramatic shift of boundary lines of cultures and subcultures. He further stated that it has been almost impossible for at least the past few decades to find a folk-level musical culture within which listeners are exposed to only the music of their own culture and no other (Butler, 2009).

Intercultural music has cross-fertilized cultures, and this seems to be a sign of healthy cultural and artistic growth in Nigerian music. In various parts of Nigeria, contemporary music-

making cuts across cultural, ethnic and language boundaries. Children as well as adults are seen today singing and dancing to songs in various Nigerian languages other than their own indigenous languages; irrespective of cultural differences and social, religious or political disunity that abound in Nigeria in recent times. This is what Paden (2009) refers to as a global culture that is producing a musical “interculturalism” that combines all the forms within a culture to create Hybrid musical form. A typical example of such songs that have combined several Nigerian languages as well as English and Nigerian pidgin is “*Igwe*” by the Midnight Crew. Take a look at the lyrics that follow which are all found in this single track:

Section A: Yoruba Section

Yoruba Text

Kos’Oba bire, Kosi Baba bire

Komas’Olorun bire,

Response: *Igwe (Igbo)*

Kos’Oba bire, L’aye at’Orun

Komas’Olorun bire,

Response: *Igwe (Igbo)*

Eba mi p’Olorun tobi

Response: *Oba nla Oba t’oga*

Eba mi p’Olorun tobi

Response: *Edumare Oba t’oga*

Translation

There is no King like you,
no Father like you

There is no God like you,
The King

There is no King like you,
on earth and in heaven

There is no God like you,
The King

Join me to call on this
great God

The mighty King, the
highest King

Join me to call on this
great God

The Creator, the highest
king

Call: *Igwe (Igbo)* The King
Response: *Igwe (Igbo)* The King

Section B: Igbo Section

Igbo Text

Translation

Onye dika gi, Onye dika Chukwu Nna Who is like you, who is
 like God the father

Omaricha, Agu n'eché mba 1 The best, the Lion that
 watches the city 1

Call: *Bulie ya*

Lift Him up

Response: *Elu*

Higher

Call: *Bulie Jesus*

Lift Jesus

Response: *Elu*

Higher

Section C: English Section

English Text

He brought me out of darkness He sets my feet on the rock to stay

He brought out of the miry clay and now I can shout Halleluya

Igwe, my father, Igwe, my Lord, Igwe, my King, Igwe, my Lord

Section D: Nigerian Pidgin

Nigerian Pidgin Text

Call: I neva see dis kin of God

Response: I neva see dis kin of God

Igwe e e, Igwe e e,

The song above is a popular Nigerian gospel song that was packaged by the Midnight Crew in diverse Nigerian languages yet it passes across a meaningful and understandable gospel message to people of various Nigerian cultures. The word “*Oba*” in Yoruba language and the word “*Igwe*” in Igbo language mean

King. The composer(s) of this song did not stop at just the fusion of languages, but exploited the rhythmic pattern of the Urhobos of the South-South of Nigeria. This shows that “interculturalism” in music can extend to the rhythmic content of musical compositions. The song is in a very simple and clear language, the form is centrally call and response which is a characteristic of African music. The song equally explores some basic musical elements like repetition, contrast and variation.

Some other songs that explored some minor aspects of “interculturalism” in their make-up include:

- a. I just wanna say, baba ooo, ese eeee etc.(English and Yoruba Nigerian Gospel)
- b. *Ikirikata nwata di nma*, baby so fine. *Ukwu sara mbara nadi mu nma n’obi m ooSheekima oo*, Baby dancia!! (Igbo and English/Nigerian Pidgin by Flavour)
- c. Chukwuebuka (Igbo and English by Frank Edwards)
- d. If you dey slap your mama, *Okpomekwe*. If you dey smoke igbo, *Okpomekwe* (Central Igbo mixed with Enugu/Nsukka Igbo and English by Desperate Chicks)
- e. *Obodo mara nma* milk and honey *juru*, Anambra state oo, Light of the Nation (Igbo and Nigerian Pidgin, Anambra State Song)

Promoting national unity through “interculturalism” in music

In Nigeria, there are 521 languages listed by Ethnologue Languages of the World, a database of language resources (Lewis et al, 2013). This represents 521 ethnic groups with distinctive cultural practices, beliefs, and dialects. It is impossible to achieve in one song, the fusion of all these languages and still maintain meaningful musicality in the song. But attempts are being made

to use as many as possible to create music without ambiguity and vagueness as the languages are fused. This is to ensure that the melody is easy to understand without an interpreter. As these go on, several ethnic groups in Nigerian are gradually and unconsciously understanding and accepting each other's culture; believing that no culture supersedes the other. "Culture is a way of thinking, feeling and believing in any given society resulting in behavioural pattern which gives that society a distinctive identity" (Akpabot, 1986:91). Having the ability of fusing various cultures, "interculturalism" in music composition will among other things ensure:

1. Togetherness in issues pertaining to culture differences and similarities as every culture now seems to understand one another to an extent through active/passive participation or what we can call involuntary and unconscious involvement in intercultural music.
2. Easy approach to language teaching and learning among Nigerians through songs.
3. Abolishment of inferiority complex among cultures in Nigeria since these cultures now have a medium of expression as well as means of projection their cultural heritage.
4. Heightened interest, better involvement and commitment of various ethnic groups in matters of national interest, having in mind that no culture is ignored or relegated to the background.
5. Better and clearer dissemination of information of national unity and progress to the doorsteps of at least the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria; Igbo Hausa and Yoruba.

The list can continue to flow inexhaustibly. But in general, we have been able to showcase "interculturalism" in music

composition as a sure step towards the actualization of greater national unity in Nigeria. Therefore, Nigerian music composers and performers are encouraged by this to explore this approach even more to achieve better successes both in the aspect of popularizing their works and promoting national unity.

Conclusion

Nigeria is on the verge of breaking into various regions that are requesting for referendum and calling for their independence. While the East is agitating for Biafra, the West is asking for Oduduwa and the North sticking to Nigeria and clinging in power. There is serious tension in the land and hate speeches have become the order of the day. To regain oneness, intercultural music a necessary option as it encourages cultural integration which according to Edmondson is “the cultural movement which is associated with political struggles and national independence of 1960s throughout Africa” (Edmondson, 2007:5). This movement was characterized by strong desire to break away from Western leadership and life style, to regain conscious understanding of their identity as Africans and to cherish the same. This course was channelled through government, institutions, political leaders and individual artists and writers had been exploring African indigenous knowledge system, African traditional materials, and African approaches (Sanga, 2011:36). According to Wiredu, the movement was aimed at restoring African’s confidence and culture (Wiredu, 1992:60).The writer is optimistic that extended promotion of intercultural music will help cushion the tension in Nigerian land over tribal/ethnic differences and hate speeches. Communication will be made lot easier as well as information reaching the interior areas of different parts of the country. Whether it is

bi/multi-lingual or bi/multi-cultural in approach, intercultural music helps to restore unity in the minds of its end-users. Nigerian musicians/composers should explore this area more in their creative works and not forget that music is love.

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Alvan-Ikoku O. Nwamara is an associate professor in the Department of Music, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.