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## *CHAPTER TWO*

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### **PROF. CHUKWUEMEKA ELEAZAR MBANUGO: LESSONS FROM A MUSIC PEDAGOGUE**

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#### **Abstract**

*This paper does not attempt a biography of Professor Chukwuemeka Mbanugo but rather a short testimony of my encounter with him. This testimony embodies the lessons I learnt from him as a teacher, mentor, humorist, and an academic.*

**Keywords:** Professor Chukwuemeka Mbanugo, Teacher, Mentor, humorist and An academic.

#### **Introduction**

My encounter with Professor Chukwuemeka Mbanugo, emeritus professor of Music Pedagogy, was an exciting one and the experience was during my stay as a postgraduate student of music at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Many music pedagogues have traversed the musical cosmos but only a few have well-set their footprints like Prof. Mbanugo. A man with an indefatigable passion to teach, brilliant but not belligerent; tall and handsome but not assertive nor egocentric, interspersing every lecture with didactic humour and detailed in his approach to every topic. He is a first-class graduate of music from the renowned University of Nigeria, Nsukka with a doctorate degree in Music Pedagogy from the prestigious New York University, Buffalo. It is amazing that a man of such achievements and standing would humbly submit to teaching and this attests to the many lessons to learn from his person.

#### **Professor Chukwuemeka Mbanugo the Teacher**

The date was January 2009 in his office at the old Department of Music Building, Garba Square, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. It was a lecture on Music Research methods for Post-graduate Diploma in Music. We were three postgraduate students admitted that year and we all reported in time to his office. He welcomed us and inquired to know the particular Postgraduate Program we came for. When we mentioned Postgraduate Diploma in Music, he repeated and reechoed it to our hearing and amazement: "PGD! PGD! PGD! PGD!" Even though we got worried and nervous but the tone of his voice quickly alerted us on the import of his reiterations. It was not a condescending interjection, rather, he was metaphorically warning us about the depth of our program and the level of commitment required of us.

The lecture continued with expositions on the tenets of research: research problems, research design, research methodology, research findings, and research report writing. He advised on the need for research to be problem-oriented; that problem should be the basis of research. We were also warned against what he called "armchair research" which so many people have settled for but which was a lazy man's way of reaching conclusions in serious academic matters. According to him, "the pains of going into the field to source first-hand data on a

problem is worthwhile."

Professor Chukwuemeka Mbanugo would never complete any lecture without drawing a lesson from the shelf of his life experiences. One occasion was very vivid as he expatiated on the demerits of pride and 'superiority syndrome' peculiar to musicians and musicologists. His post-graduate studies in music in University at Buffalo, New York took him to a nursery/primary school in New York for his teaching practice. He narrated how he was humbled by a pupil who asked him, during a piano session: "what are you doing on that piano"? and gently pushed his hands away and took over and played perfectly well the piece he was supposed to be taught.

Professor Mbanugo is imbued with an indefatigable passion to teach; handling the bulk of Diploma, Undergraduate, and Post-graduate courses with incredible finesse. A man that is knowledgeable in virtually all orthodox and modern teaching techniques and methods but prefers engaging his students through some unorthodox techniques such as jesting, jokes, unrelated discussions, topical societal issues, etc, but realizing the objectives of the lecture thereafter.

- **Amentor**

Professor Mbanugo has contributed immensely to the business of academic mentoring having nurtured many musicologists, academics, professors, scholars, and many more.

- **An Academic**

Professor Mbanugo is a highly-published academic. His publications have traversed local, national and international shores. Though a prolific writer, he was never part of the 'publish or perish' syndicate who, en masse, churn out 'publications' for the sake of promotion and cheap acclaim. He always writes to address a problem, getting to the root of the situation, sourcing first-hand data, subjecting such to thorough analysis, and always arriving at a meaningful end. The high citation index of his publications is a testimony of the resourcefulness and significance of his works in academia.

His publication titled: "Rising Costs and Diminishing Educational Funding in Nigeria: Exploring the way out for secondary school music education" (1991), was a sensitive and timely one as it came when music educators in Nigeria were bordered about the future of musicology in the face of musical philistinism and poor funding.

The paper was resourceful during my Master's Degree research on "Towards the Resuscitation of Music Education in Primary Schools of Anambra State" (2010). Prof. recommended in his paper, amongst other things, that in the face of rising costs and diminishing educational funding that music educators should source for available and affordable materials to sustain music education. I drew on that recommendation and explored the utility of the recorder in resuscitating music education in primary schools and the idea was successful.

- **A Humorist**

Behind the image of erudite music scholar is a man whose sense of humour is irresistible and contagious. A master of comic relief; manoeuvring his way out of every contention with an ameliorating joke. Even with his numerous students, he was never sarcastic nor ever heard raising his voice against any. He could say and communicate the most difficult message with a jest. But even amid all the humour, he was sagacious and careful with words.

The popular banter and greeting among musicologists, “I greet you well, well” originated from him. This was his way of exchanging greetings with his colleagues and students and the emphatic 'well, well' gives the receiver a warm sense of belonging and acceptance. Sometimes he even decorates the greeting with a bow or the duffing of his black hat that always adorns his regalia. He is a man that starts greeting you even before you are aware of his presence, always extending his hand for a warm handshake. He does not believe in the purported line of divide between professors and students; between professors and non-professors. He is simply reachable to everyone. Professor Chukwuemeka Mbanugo is an approachable man.

The popular slang amongst musicologists and music students, “*itili obodo*” (shaking the town) also came from him. It was his humoristic way of demystifying (IPS exams) amongst students. It was coined from his narrative about his undergraduate days at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka when individual Performance Studies Examination (IPS) was a nightmare to students because the examination required that students showcased their various abilities in singing, playing musical instruments, playing piano scales and pieces, and performing many genres of music.

In one of the sessions, Prof., as a student, pranced up and down the corridor, stretching his fingers, warming up his entire body and waiting for his turn to be called in. When it got to his turn he quickly mounted the piano seat and bamboozled the panel by playing the piano scale with so much energy and dexterity, sight-singing and performing all of his set-pieces with remarkable effusion of musicality that threw the panel into applause. The prancing up and down the corridor, stretching of the fingers, energetic and articulate playing of the piano and proper interpretation of the set pieces are regarded in his parlance as “*itili obodo*”.

As funny as this narrative might sound, it works some magic on students who have ever listened to him, or heard it, as it generally spurs them, particularly those who face various challenges in their IPS examinations.

The slang has become a motivational tool in the hands of IPS instructors and a source of motivation for students during IPS exams. Just tell a student, “*jee tilie obodo*” (move into the panel and 'shake the tables') he or she gets prepped up for action and excellence.

### **Conclusion**

Professor Chukwuemeka Eleazar Mbanugo has distinguished himself in academia and has set a mark for all to emulate. He has carefully set on his track many lessons for all to learn.

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