
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE RELEVANCE OF MUSIC IN HISTORY

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Abstract

According to George Santayana, those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. History is, therefore, a very important aspect of human life which should form a reference point at every sphere of human existence. The human race and its activities are preserved only in history. History contains the life and activities alongside the major events of society. In time, history has been transmitted through various means, ranging from oral, written and artistic means. Artistically, we would be interested in Visual arts and the performing arts. This work takes a look at the performing arts, specifically, music. As part of arts, music plays a very important role in the transmission and preservation of history. In this work, we shall examine the relevance of music in history. This work shall see how music has been used through the ages to preserve the events and happenings of man in the past. It shall narrowly expose music and history respectively while highlighting their point of convergence.

Keywords: Music, history, preservation and transmission of art.

Introduction

To be ignorant of history is to be ignorant of one's existence; therefore, every human is a composition of history. After one's death, the only thing left of the individual is his history. Denial of history is the denial of the existence of a source from which the human race emerged. Denial of history is also a denial of process, time and the now because every now ceases to be "now" as soon as the "now" is identified. After this identification, the "now" melts into the past. An argument against history is an argument against the tenses; past, present and future tenses especially the past tense. This is so as a mention of history is a mention of the past. To this effect, the concept of history and its existence alongside its components are not and cannot be in contention.

Having established the undeniable and ever-present presence of history as a part of man's existence, it would be important to note that if history is never talked about, there would be no such concept as history. It is from the constant reference of man to past events that bring the concept of history into consideration. It is also important to note that history can be lost. It is in light of that, the Igbos insist that when an elder dies, a library is lost. Till today, there are still debates concerning the great works of ancient philosophers, because after the invasion of the Alexandrian library, only fragments of these books were left. Those that were gutted by the flame were tagged to have been lost history because what were left of them were mere speculations.

Furthermore, it was the knowledge that history could be lost that necessitated the search for a means to preserve events and happenings of the past. From the beginning, humans have unconsciously and consciously transmitted history through the oral medium, but as the

mortality and uncertainty of the human life dawned on the human race, better means were sort for the preservation of history, with the writing medium been one of the media which has proven to stand the test of time. Amongst the oral medium, alongside storytelling, music is still one of the most effective means of historic preservation. Music has played several roles in history, and it is these roles that music has played, and is playing in history that would form the focus in this work, as the relevance of music in history would not also be over sighted.

What is Music?

Music like any other concept has been subjected to definitions from various scholars. Music, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary, is said to be, sound combined in such a way as to archive beauty of form, harmony and expression of emotion. From this definition, we can classify music into the arts, because it involves beauty. Blacking (1973) in Okafor (2005: 270), defines music as a humanly organized sound. Odunuga (2009: 1) views it as the combination of sounds that are pleasant to hear. Ekwueme (2008: 1) defines it as a phenomenon using the medium of sound which is organized and manipulated into socially accepted and manfully, verbally, ideals, feeling, emotions and event to people.

From the above definitions, we can conclude that music is made up of an organized set of sounds, to pass across an idea. These points to the fact that music is never empty, it always has a mission. Either it is there to entertain or pass across a message or emotion. Music always has a part of the human existence which it transmits along with its melody. To this, Chuma-Udeh (2014) in Okpala (2016) posits that:

Music is the universal language of the soul and the music of oral literature flows from the essence of a people's existence. Here it becomes a way of expression intricately tied to their social, cultural, and to a great extent becomes the determinant of the peaceful co-existence of the society of the people that spawns it (p. 15).

By this definition, Chuma-Udeh exposes the indispensability of music in the life of man. It also goes a long way to showcase how man has unconsciously infused music as an intrinsic part of his being. One can easily conclude that music is an instrument of living.

What is History?

Just like music, history has also received vast attention in its definitive aspect because of its importance to man. According to Ronald (2013), History is the chronological study of a subject. It involves tracing ideas back to their origin and undertaking a study of the evolution of ideas and events. For Kopanic (2019), History is the story of the human experience, although he insists that history does not constitute all fact there is. According to him, history is made up of only what the historian wants us to know.

From the definition of Roland, we can deduce that history has to do with a retracing of steps. It involves going back to the past in search of facts and not just information. What makes history is the involvement of facts. The facts have to be epistemic and not doxastic. These facts are studied chronologically, often from the origin to the time of interest or now. On the

other hand, Kopanic brings in a very important feature of history which is the human being. By defining history as the story of the human experience, he opens up the value of the human person to history. He leads us to the conclusion that man is the pinnacle of history. Although natural events occur, these natural events are greatly dependent on the human experience. It is the observation of the human being that brings these events to life through committing them to memory and reproducing them as history. In light of that, he insists that history does not contain all facts. This conclusion must be based on the finitude of the human mind and the fallibility of his memory.

Furthermore, in all these, amidst the culmination of facts, a very important question is always asked for there to be a complete arrival at the aim of history. This important question is; why? The inclusion of a why into the study of history pressures' Roland (2013) to insist that; history is not really an academic subject like Mathematics or physics, rather a method of understanding the evolution of ideas. By this he means that it is not enough for the historian to gather these facts, it matters more to have an understanding of these events and facts.

The Importance of History

We can't undertake an expose of history without x-raying its importance. History just as any discipline is very important in its own sphere. Firstly, when George Santayana said, that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it, he by this statement pointed out the fact that history repeats itself. According to research, it has been discovered that some events of the past still reoccur in our everyday life. These events include the good the bad and the ugly, alongside natural disasters. The study of history becomes pertinent because an understanding of these events and how they were managed in time past, together with the flaws of those in that time would equip one with the necessary knowledge needed to tackle such situation in case they occur again. It also aids in the development of preventive measures to curb certain disasters which are prone to repeat itself.

Secondly, history can be used as a great source of inspiration. In history is recorded the life and achievements of great men like Alexander the Great, Socrates, etc. a critical study of the life and achievements of these men can be a motivational factor for the one studying. One can decide to pick a role model not from the people of the present generation, but the heroes of history.

Thirdly, the identity of a group of people or a nation largely depends on their history. In fact, it would be plausible to say that history is the identity of the people. That explains why pupils are advised to learn their local and international history, as it helps them to better understand the place of origin and their place generally in the world view. Also, the values of a society can always be understood better in history. One look at the building blocks of society in history would tell you the kind of values they possess.

Music History

To undertake a study of the role and relevance of music in history, it would be very plausible

to have a proper examination of the evolution of music in history. An understanding of the evolution would aid us in a clearer picture of the contribution of music in the various historical eras.

History has it that music has evolved over time into five distinct phases with music taking a unique form in each of the musical epochs, but still keeping its qualities which makes it worthy of the name music. The various historical epochs of musical evolution include; Prehistoric Music – Paleolithic Age, Beginning of life until 600 BCE. Ancient Music – Neolithic period (c. 5000 BCE), 600 BCE until 476 AD, Early Music – 476 AD until 1760, Common Practice – 1760 until 1900, Modern & Contemporary Music – 1900 until present times. Let's now consider them in details.

Firstly, Prehistoric music or most commonly called primitive music refers to all kinds of music produced in preliterate or primitive cultures as the case may be. It was said to have existed from the beginning of life to 600 BCE. History records this mostly amongst some peoples of the Altai-Sayan region, including Tofa. Prehistoric music involves music ranging from the mimicking of animal sounds, hunting calls and traditional music preserved for old people. In this epoch lies the origin of music which is said to have come about due to emotional manipulation of the human person. The instrument at this period was majorly the human voice. Other instruments include Percussion instruments made out of animal horns, *Divje Babe* flute made out of animal bones, and the *Hurrian* songs, made up of songs inscribed in cuneiform on clay. At this stage, music was used majorly for communication and certain types of dialogues.

Secondly, Ancient Music which existed in the Neolithic period was dominant between 600 BCE until 476 AD. With the advent of writing, the prehistoric music came to an end. Greek is seen in history as the origin of all classical art, little wonder they are said to be the first civilization to practice ancient music. At this time, music was written down on papyrus and was taught to children from the age of six. Music at the period was used by the Greeks for religious, social and entertainment purposes as was seen in several theatres in Greece. This kind of music spread fort latter to the Roman Empire and further to the Indian civilization. During this period, musical instruments used included; *Seikilos* epitaph, a cylinder-like stone on which musical notes are engraved. *Ravanahatha*, a popular string instrument made of wood; the *cornu* and the Roman Tuba both made of steel, etc.

Thirdly, Early Music, which was performed around 476 AD until 1760. The music of this period represents the classical music of the European medieval tradition. During these periods, there existed several cultures in Europe possessing unknown music cultures, but they were all bound together by the music of the Roman Catholic Church. The kind of music performed at this time was a sort of chanting and plane songs, as the only surviving evidence of such music is copies of the Gregorian Chants. The kind of music composed in this era was more of sacred music as they were performed more by the Churches choir. Musical instruments of this era include: The *Byzantinelyra* or lira and the virginals or virginal both

string instruments made of wood.

Fourthly, Common Practice which was invoked from 1760 until 1900. At this time, the focus was shifted to more of instrumental music. Also evolving in this time was genre such as; the sonata, the concerto, and the symphony. Other kinds were the trio, string quartet, serenade and divertimento. At this era, we see the advent of romantic music. At this juncture, music begins to play the role of expression especially, emotional expressions. Some musical instrument of this epoch includes; piano sonata, the piccolo, the German horn, and a percussion section.

Finally placed in the musical epoch is Modern & Contemporary Music which runs from 1900 until present times. The 20th century saw the evolution of classical music into different genre and sub-genres. With the introduction of the radio and audio recorder alongside the ability to edit music, the focus of music as a performance art shifted into something which could be heard and done at any point in time. This period also witnessed the birth of Jazz and Rock music. The major instrument of music in this era is the electronic mixer. On this mixer, one can provide for himself any kind of sound he needs and how long he or she wants it to last. This form of making music has its advantages and disadvantages. One of the great advantages of the electronic music is that by its aid music can be produced very easily and it can be made to reach a great multitude of people unlike in the past when only the present crowd could enjoy the music of the individual. On the flip side, electronic music somehow has succeeded in extrication pure emotion from the music. People now go into the studio, not minding their audience, what they feel and how they can be touched. There is no emotional connectedness with the crowd behind the microphone, so anything can be put out in the name of music.

The Relevance of Music in History

This caption relevance of music in history can be vastly substituted for other captions such as the importance, relevance and even effect of music in history. These concepts possess a certain similarity which points to the immense contribution of music to world history. From our above discussions, we can deduce so many impacts which music has on history. History is man, and man is history and because the humans are involved in history, the phrase the importance of music to the human race could be plausibly brought forward and discussed as part of the relevance of music to history.

Furthermore, before a thought is given to other subsections of this discuss bothering on the relevance of music in history, we shall first discuss the direct relevance of music in general history. This relevance is majorly seen in its preservative role and in its relevance at certain eras before we can consider its impact on certain aspects of human development in history.

The Preservative Role of Music in History

On hearing the melody of a particular song, one who is conversant with its lyrics and genre would be driven to the period which the music was produced. In tracing the history of music,

we find out that every epoch has its kind of music which encloses and tells the story of the period. The story of the people is been told in their music as music has served as a medium to communicate from the beginning of time and as a means of emotional expression in recent times. In situations where language proves to be a barrier to the understanding of a particular culture in history, an understudy of the kind of music they played and the kind of information passed across would provide a better partway to an easy understanding of the period.

Amongst the preservative role of music is the transmission of history as we said, is the understanding of events chronologically. It would be a waste of effort and time to undertake such an exasperating task without having to consider a means by which such findings and understanding could be made readily available to the younger generation, saving them the pain of going through the same tedious studies. Sequel to this, several media has been used as a means for the transmission of history to which one of them is music. This function of music in history is seen very clearly when we listen to the music of the past. In individuals such as Fela Kuti who made it a duty to preserve the history of his time in his music. One who never existed during the time of Fela would through his music know the kind of government that was in power during that time. Music has taken the shape of a box in which derricks of history is been placed inside and handed down to the generation behind.

Furthermore, mentioned amongst the preservative role of music is the ability for music to be a representation of major epochs in history. When we read the biblically formulated music like music made in honour of David after he killed Goliath and the song of praise rendered by the people of Israel after they were saved from the hands of the Egyptians, we would discover that in the history of humans, music is often created to mark great events, these music carry in their lyrics the actions which accompanied this epoch making events, and by the aid of the music, these events are been preserved and transmitted along the line of history.

The Impact of Music in History

The relevance of music in history cannot be treated without considering the impact of music in history. The impact of music in history and on the human race has been very obvious culturally, emotionally and morally. Throughout history, music has had a great impact in shaping, preservation and transmission of culture. In the area of shaping culture, we can observe that the kind of music played by a particular generation goes a long way to influence their thinking and their worldview, which would, in turn, influence their lifestyle in the long run. As time goes on, these changes become acceptable by society and by so doing; it becomes an adopted culture either consciously or unconsciously. In preservation and transmission of culture, music untouchably has been a medium for the preservation of culture. This is evident in the classification of music into the culture of origin. Examples are as follows; we have African music, European music, Asian music etc. narrowing it a bit further, we would have in African music subdivisions such as; Nigerian music, Kenyan music, Egyptian music, etc. narrowing it even further in Nigerian music, we can get other subdivisions such as Igbo music, Yoruba music, Hausa music, etc. one who is at home with his music genre can easily access the culture of a nation from the kind of music they play. I

might have never been to Europe before, but when I hear a song recorded by an artist about the social class system of either the Americans or the British world, I can easily deduce if they have a culture of classism or a communist culture.

Most especially in Africa, music is used as a means of transmitting the culture of the ancestors down to the younger generations. The genre of music which possesses this transmitting power is folk music. This kind of music is the kinds which tell stories of past events and great activities or disastrous ones, in order to keep them alive in the memory of the younger generation, either that such actions be replicated and passed down, or that they should be avoided to forestall future damages.

Furthermore, the emotional impact of music on the human race cannot be undermined or overlooked. It might be plausible to say that 80% of man's activities are consciously or unconsciously connected to either his long term emotions or his short term emotions. History on its own is made up largely of the human activities. So it would also be plausible to say that history is also consciously or unconsciously affected by human emotions. The various genre of music comes with different sparks of emotions in man, and with these emotional stir actions which would be recorded in history are carried out. This point can be backed up with the existence of music forms such as war songs. These war songs are specifically meant to charge the emotion of warriors. These emotionally-charged warriors are then let off to act upon the impetus of their emotions.

Finally, music contributes greatly to the moral development of every generation. A typical example is our present-day generation which would soon be part of history. We find out that our contemporary music is aimed at downplaying the importance of morality. Contemporary music has now trivialized sexual addictions of all kinds, drug addictions and violence by the constant brandishing of violent weapons on music videos and the usage of violent words on audios. The moral lives of a people also form part of their history, as Sodom and Gomorrah till today are still remembered for their immoral lifestyle.

Conclusion

Music as an art cannot be examined without consideration of human beings who give meaning to music. Man and everything around his existence have developed since the origin of the world, and music as parts of man's activities is not exempted from this development. It is this steady development in man's activities that has formed a great deal of present-day history. It is an exposition of the relevance of music in this development that this work was aimed at.

This quest is begun with an introduction for which an argument on the existence of history was established alongside the inclusion of music in man's history. Following that, it explained what music is, looking at its nature and what it tends to do for man. As an important aspect of this discourse, we answered the question of what is history, while exposing the very pertinent question asked by history which is why. After proffering the answer to history's

question which is for a better understanding of the facts gathered by the historian, it was unavoidable to consider the importance of history to the human race. One of the importance of being the avoidance of a vicious circle of error.

Furthermore, we went ahead to discourse about the history of music itself. This task was undertaken because it would only be plausible to examine the progress of music in history before we examine its relevance in it. Talking about the relevance of music in history, we pointed out is the most important relevance which has to do with its role as an agent of preservation. Also mentioned was the impact of music on man during the course of history. Finally, this work is believed to have served its purpose, which is exposing the relevance of music to history.

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