

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

THE FORGOTTEN ESSENCE OF SACRED MUSIC IN NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES: THE COMPOSER'S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Music composition entails creative fixing of musical notes to produce music of a particular type, used for a specific purpose to suit the function it is meant to accomplish. Most religions in the world use music to enhance worship. Music's diverse roles in Christian religious worship cannot be overemphasized. But in recent times, some of the music used in worship in some Nigerian Christian churches seem not to adequately serve their purpose. This could be as a result of ignorance of the essence of Christian sacred music on the side of the music creators/composers. This paper seeks to elucidate on the essence of sacred music and suggest some considerations a composer of sacred music of any genre should take in his course of music composition. This research work is hinged on Adedeji's transformative theory. Data is collected majorly through participant observation and study of some musical works, as well as a review of some related literature. The paper, therefore, concludes that for any music to be suitable for use in the church, the composer ought to be guided by the essence of sacred music while he does the composition.

Keywords: Composers, Music Composition, Essence of sacred music and Christian churches

Introduction

Music is a form of intentional manipulation of sounds to achieve a desired emotional effect. It is created with a purpose, to express a particular mood. The Creation of music is known as composition and its creator is called a composer. Music composition could be for voice (vocal music), musical instruments (instrumental music) or a combination of both. Composition in this context is limited to vocal music of various genres used in Christian worship. Most religions in the world use music to enhance worship. "Music and religion are compatible bedfellows...Christianity is a religion of the followers of Christ... a religion that entwines music as its principal mode of worship" (Okafor, 2015: 2-3).

Music, however, plays very significant roles in Christian worship. Adedeji (1999) recognizes anabolic and catabolic roles of music in the religious milieu. He affirms that no sacred music is or should be without purpose; otherwise, it loses its sacredness. Music helps to articulate various kinds of prayers, sections of the liturgy, as well as different seasons of the Church's calendar because when speech is used alone, it is sometimes difficult to lift important parts of the service above the rest. In the Orthodox churches, for instance, the Ordinary of mass or the holy Eucharist has five sections which include: *Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei*. These sections of the mass have different moods each, and music helps to elevate the mood of each section. Okafor (2018) elucidates the moods of various sections of the Ordinary of Mass as follow:

- I. The *Kyrie* (Lord have mercy) is a plea for mercy. It has to be slow and with passion.
- ii. The *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* (Glory to God in the highest) is a Christian hymn of praise and should be joyful.
- iii. The *Credo* (I believe in one God) is a profession of faith and should be sung with pomp and pageantry.
- iv. The *Sanctus* (Holy, holy, holy) is a complex combination of two different prayers, two different scriptural acclamations, and two different contexts. The first part (1), The *Sanctus* – Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Host should be rendered *religiously*, whereas the second part (2), The *Benedictus* – Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest should be sung majestically.
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- v. The *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God) should be sung with deep and solemn respect.

Unfortunately, many church music composers in different denominations of Christianity in contemporary Nigeria do not take cognizance of the roles music play in Christian worship while composing. They compose to entertain and show off their compositional dexterity; not considering the mood of the chosen text and the language which the congregation understand. Performance preoccupies their minds while they compose, forgetting that the main venue for their musical rendition is the church, not concert halls, though could also be performed during concerts. They also use texts which have no liturgical meaning or biblical base, especially when creating texts by themselves. This is because they may have forgotten or are ignorant of the essence of Christian sacred music. This, as a result, has led to abuse.

Moreover, it is said that purpose guides choices. Before someone embarks on a project, he/she needs to know why he/she wants to achieve that. After the purpose is clearly known by the individual, he plans on how to achieve it and then, comes execution. So it is with music composition. A composer should, therefore, realize that music composition is a project. The composer needs to know why he wants to compose and what he/she wishes to achieve with the composition, and thereafter, makes an adequate plan on how to accomplish it. This plan, in other words, could be regarded as pre-compositional considerations which include: title, medium, style, tonality, metre, tempo, texture, mood, length and audience. Based on these,

Okafor (2002) states that:

The essential thing is that man consciously sets out to compose music of a certain type, of a certain effect, of certain use and of a certain shape just as he consciously sets about to combine or assemble certain compounds and elements into a product of a certain type, colour, shape, texture and for special use by targeted customers and users. (p. 34)

The Essence of Sacred Music

The noblest and most sublime part of something is its essence. The essence of sacred music,

according to Onaa (2016) is the glorification of God and the sanctification of the faithful. Chaney, Keyes and Klukas (2007) inform that the three doctrines that form the essence of Christian sacred music include creation, incarnation and sanctification. God is the audience of sacred music; therefore the purpose of sacred music is not to entertain the congregation or assuage the emotions of the hearers, but to be what the congregation offer to God in its liturgy. Chaney et al. (2007) maintain that human subjectivity is not the target of sacred music. But music directed to God has, as a by-product, the power to elevate the emotions of those who offer it or hear it.

a. Creation

The doctrine of Creation implies that God is the creator of the world and everything in it, including music, and that through His spoken words everything came to be. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the floods" (Psalm 24: 1 & 2).

In acknowledgement of God's greatness and supremacy over all things, humans praise, thank and worship God and also to show Him of their absolute nothingness without Him. Adedeji (2014) insists that:

If there is God, He must command the respect of His subjects and He must be revered and worshipped in obeisance. Among the Yoruba, a child does not look straight to its father's face but bows to show some reverence. How much more God? (p. 108).

This is best achieved through the use of music.

Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty heavens. Praise Him for His acts of power; praise Him for His surpassing greatness. Praise Him with the sounding of the trumpet; praise Him with harp and lyre. Praise Him with timbrel and dancing, praise Him with the strings and pipe. Praise Him with the clash of cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. (Psalm 150: 1-6)

b. Incarnation

The incarnation signifies Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, through whom creation was made. Who has the nature of God, yet wore human flesh and dwelt among men. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... Through Him all things were made; without Him, nothing was made that has been made. (John 1: 1 & 2). God communicates with the creation through His Word, and communication is an essential aspect of all the arts especially music. St. Augustine said, "He who sings prays twice" (<http://fauxtations.wordpress.com/2015/02/24/augustine-he-who-sings-prays-twice/>). Robertson in Adedeji (2014) states:

Music itself cannot, of course, be religious: but when conditioned by sacred words, it can be disposed to receive the religious spirit in the same sense that a church, which is simply a building, is nevertheless a building disposed for prayer and praise". (p. 109)

The Word of God is communicated through the use of music to encourage those in distress, calm, agitated spirit, heal the sick in mind and body as is reflected in the following hymn:

Art thou troubled, art thou languid,
Art thou soar distress?
“Come to me”, saith One, “and coming
Be at rest”. (Ancient and Modern 196)

Music also helps in committing biblical passages to memory. Hayward (2003), while discussing the role of music in Christian worship, states:

Music has enormous power to engage the emotions, and the Bible resounds with praise and thanks to God through music. In the Old Testament, music played a number of different roles, including assisting in the memorization of God's truth and in reminding God's people of their fallenness and salvation. In the New Testament, God's people gather together to express their praise to Him and to build one another up in the faith. A rich variety of music that is in harmony with the ministry of God's word is a significant part of the life of the Church and points towards the role of music in our praise of God in Heaven. (www.jubilee-centre.org/music-worship-and-the-church-by-christopher-hayward)

c. Sanctification

Chaney et al. (2007) inform that growth in grace is sanctification. Music also has a sacramental quality that can aid us in the process of our sanctification. This implies that music is a means of grace and can enable us to keep in tune with heaven and bring us into God's presence. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever" (1 Peter 1: 23). The word of God transforms, remoulds, guides and enables us to live in accordance with the will of God. Communicating these words through music is a very effective tool for evangelization and soul conversion. "I have hidden your word in my heart that I may not sin against you... Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path" (Psalm 119: 11 & 105).

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on Adedeji's (2006) transformative musicology as applied in various aspects of music. "Transformative theory in Christian sacred music, however, has as its focus, a spiritual change that would draw man to God through the use of music. Positive spiritual transformation is the end-result of most biblical functions of music" (Adedeji, 2014, p. 112).

The essence of sacred music as stated earlier is the glorification of God and sanctification of the faithful. The positive spiritual transformation could also be referred to as sanctification. According to Adedeji (2018), "the most direct element of transformation in music is the song text" (p. 56). The text of Christian sacred music is derived from the Bible, the Word of God. "I will worship towards the holy temple, and praise Thy name for Thy loving kindness and for Thy truth: for Thou hast magnified Thy word above all Thy name" (Psalm 138: 2). "Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is the truth" (John 17:17). When sacred music is directed to God, it has as a by-product, the power to elevate the emotions of those who offer it or hear it.

It, therefore, behoves a composer of Christian sacred music to always be guided by its essence.

Concept of Composition

The composition has been defined in several ways by different composers and musicologists. The Hutchinson Concise Dictionary of Music defined composition as "the process of combining sounds creatively to yield a work; also, the work itself". According to encyclopedia Britannica (2011), musical composition is defined as "the act of conceiving a piece of music and the act of creating music". Music composition entails putting together of musical notes to create a melody. The art of musical composition is not just a mere fixing of musical notes but calls for a high level of intellectual activity. Onwuekwe (2001) explains that music composition is the art of creating an original melody that has never been created by any other composer". She further argued that music comes from within as an attempt to express some emotions, be it of sadness, of joy, or reverence. Musical composition can also be defined based on its texture, form and structure. Musical work can be monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic or binary, ternary or rondo in form. Musical composition can as well be in solo, call and response, call and refrain, solo and chorused refrain or mixed structural form. Scholes in Onwuekwe (2007), further explains that composition is:

The art of putting together of words to make a poem or a piece of prose, of notes to make a waltz or symphony, of detail to make a picture. In music, the putting together consists chiefly in (a) combining successive notes to make melody (b) combining simultaneous notes to make harmony (c) combining melodies to make counterpoint (d) combining phrases to make sentence and sentences to make long passages or movements and (e) combining themes and their treatment to make piece or movement and (f) combining movements to make cyclic forms. (p. 21)

However, music used for Christian worship is the vocal music type. Its composition involves putting together of sacred words of the liturgy to create an intelligible sacred text, as well as combining musical tones to create music that would lift the mood of the text. Musical composition is best accomplished when its purpose is achieved.

The Process of Composition

The process of music composition, according to Nwamara (2009) involves two methods: (a) Spontaneous (improvisatory) means which takes place during performances, most especially, in the traditional African context, and (b) Conventional method which involves putting down musical ideas or representing musical sounds on paper, using the conventional system of notation. The general process of composition involves inspiration, training, talent and hard work.

a) Inspiration

Inspiration may be defined as the spiritual, elevating or stimulating influence that allows a person to think, speak or act in a way that transcends ordinary human abilities. A composer mostly draws inspiration from his/her experiences, environment, inner feelings and imagination, and so forth. Onwuekwe (2007) states that:

A composer from the riverine area is likely to draw materials for some of his

compositions from items found in the river. In the same vein, a composer from a snow area can naturally base some of his compositions on items connected with snow. (p. 2)

Writing on sources of inspiration, Agu (2002) narrates that:

The annual music festivals organized by various denominational churches, the national and State Music Festivals and the existence and role of radio and television studios have tremendously inspired the Igbo contemporary composers to great heights. (p. 86)

He further explains that the churches, especially the Anglican Communion, usually patronize them by occasionally commissioning them to compose anthems for special services or religious occasions or ceremonies. Inspiration can also be drawn from performing the works of renowned composers or performing with them. It can equally be as fantasy. Some composers have the initial talent of hearing beautiful melodies either in dreams or when isolated. Since the Scripture is written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the texts of Christian sacred music is derived from the Scripture; a composer of Christian music should therefore always seek inspiration from the Holy Spirit so that his/her music should be able to serve the purpose of sacred music.

b) Compositional Talent/Creativity

It is not all practising musicians that are composers. Composition talent is a divine gift or natural endowment. Many musicians have lived and gone without arranging any work, not to talk of composing any melody. For someone to be a composer, he/she needs to have compositional talent, which can be nurtured by the composition teacher and be able to create things that meet the demand of his society.

c) Training

It is pertinent to know that composition talent alone without skill is not enough. Talent is a natural endowment but skill is acquired through learning/training. Therefore, it is always needful to nurture the talent so that it could be used efficiently and effectively. Training in composition could be formal or informal, direct or indirect. Onwuekwe (1997) also points out that:

Art composition is not learned in the classroom environment only. What the classroom teacher does is to help the student bring out what he already has because the style of composition varies from one composer to another. The style of the composition of a teacher might naturally affect that student. However, many composers learn the art of composition in the normal classroom environment (p. 75).

Nwamara (2008) adds that:

The teaching aspect of the composition provides the student with basic ingredients for composition, but this mere provision does not ensure any specific artistic results as the pencil in a student's hand does not ensure drawing competency or competent drawing (p. 25).

Training and retraining of composers of Christian sacred music is very important. This could be achieved through organizing seminars for church music composers/practitioners, which

will involve the priests/pastors and professional composers as facilitators. Understudying a fulfilled composer is also important. More so, conferences/symposium for church music composers is also necessary.

d) Hard Work

It is said that potentials must be exercised before it is fulfilled. Anyone that has compositional talent needs to work very hard to develop and improve on the talent the more. Any lazy talented composer is equivalent to someone without compositional talent.

Music and Language

Language is defined as "a body of words, and a set of combining them (called a grammar), understood by a community and used as a form of communication" (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by.sa/3.0/>). *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* also defines language as "a method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting in the use of words in an agreed way, the language of a particular community". Yekini-Ajenifuja and Okunade (2013) add that "language can either be in verbal or sign communication. Verbal communication is the composition or arrangement of letters to form words, words to form sentences, and the appropriate use of sentences to make good communication (p. 234).

Music according to Blacking in Okafor and Okafor (2009) is "a humanly organized sound" (p. 1). According to Okafor and Okafor (2009):

The implication here is that though there are many sounds in creation – some natural, others made by living things – only sounds which have been deliberately organized by man to specific ends – an expression of emotion, communication of ideas, touching the senses and the emotions, calming the nerves or tuning the minds to certain planes of communication and worship – qualify to be called music...The purpose and ends of this organization of sounds will vary from culture to culture (pp. 1-2).

The terms that are common with the definitions of both language and music are communication and community or culture. In other words, there must be agreement among the members of a community or culture on the mode of communication within that community or culture. Okafor (2005) states that "since man uses music to express and communicate an idea or emotion, music is then a language" (p. 383). Music as a language, whether vocal or instrumental can convey a message to the audience. For instrumental music, different interpretations could be given to it by different members of the audience, depending on how one perceives it but the case of most vocal music is different, as it implies the use of words. Ekwueme (2004) asserts that:

It is the possibility of direct verbal and linguistic communication that distinguishes vocal music from instrumental music. The human voice is, at least at the moment, the only 'instrument' which can transmit intelligible language unequivocally to an audience. All other forms of meaning ascribed or ascertained from non-vocal music are subjective and vague, ambiguous and imprecise. (p. 284)

This possibility of direct verbal and linguistic communication can be achieved, only when the audience of the vocal music performance understands the language of communication and the principles that govern it, if not the intelligibility of the language will be lost and the audience perceives it as instrumental music. According to Agu (2010), “the linguistic elements possessed by a piece of music, depends on its associations with the culture, which on the other hand depends on the society or the individual” (p. 11). Therefore “the language of composition remains the choice of the composer. However, if the composer is creating original work for someone else, the language will be that of whom the music is being composed” (Onwuekwe, 2014:75).

For a composer to create music in any particular language, he/she has to be conversant with that language or at least know the meaning and tonal inflexions of the chosen texts for that composition if the language is tonal.

Onyekwelu (2008) adds:

In the parlance of music, particularly church music, language and communication are interwoven since much of church music is vocal and based on the language of a culture. Text, songs and speeches are essential components or combinations in oral communication arts of which choral music is a part. Christian songs are prayers packaged and put together in various sound forms that involve a combination of sounds in melody and harmony that, often with words centrally dominate the communication role (p. 141).

Therefore, to communicate the words of any language effectively in music, the composer needs to understand the language and the principles guiding it and adheres to it, to ensure intelligibility.

The Texts and Melodies as Framework of Composition

Texts in this context are the chosen words of a language used in a composition, literary or musical. Texts are either used literally or figuratively to convey messages. They depict specific moods and are used to express emotions. The message of a song is clearly expressed in the text through proper and careful selection of words. For Christian sacred music, its text is derived from the Bible, whether verbatim or paraphrased. It could also be composed by an individual but must be liturgically meaningful and have its base on the Bible. Adedeji (2015), listed the message of a gospel musician as follow: Gospel Invitation/Evangelism, Praise/Worship, Admonition/Exhortation, Prayer/Prophesies, Warfare, Christian Festival messages, Eschatology, Socio-political/cultural issues.

Melody, on the other hand, is the arrangement of different musical sounds one after the other to create music. Ammer (2004) defines melody as "a group of musical tones sounded one after another, which generally have a characteristic rhythm and musical shape" (p. 237). He further explains that melody is a succession of pitches, and therefore it involves two principal factors: intervals (the distance between each pitch and the next) and duration (how long each pitches lasts or is held).

Melody and text go hand in hand in vocal music, in the sense that the message to be communicated is embedded in the text, whereas the melody helps to articulate the message

of the text by careful selection and arrangement of musical notes. According to Adedeji (2015), there are three sources of melodic composition, as agreed by composition experts. They are logogenic, melogenic and pathogenic. The logogenic is the composition in which the text is given, over which a tune or melody is composed. Melogenic is the one in which the melody or tune is given, to which you set the words. Pathogenic is inspiration-born. Additionally, adaptation/arrangement is another source of melodic composition, whereby the composer picks an already existing song by a known or anonymous composer and modifies and develops it. Since the fourth source is not an original composition, the arranger must obtain permission from the original composer, as well as acknowledge him/her or indicate that the original composer is not known. He should not claim ownership of the song. He/she, therefore, should write his/her name as an arranger and not composer. These sources mentioned above are utilised in composing Christian sacred music.

However, before setting a text to music for Christian worship, it behoves the composer to first, carefully study the text and understand the mood before creating a melody that would reflect its mood. Praise is meant to have a bright mood, whereas penitence should be solemn, and so forth. The musical setting of *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world; have mercy on us), for example, should not spur the singers and congregation into dancing but should arouse solemnity and soberness; If not, the music has lost its purpose. More so, if the text to be set to music is not clearly understood by the composer or that the message of the text is vague, especially the one that is derived from a passage of the scripture, the composer has to read both the preceding and proceeding verses of the scriptural passage circumspectly for clarity. He can also add another passage of the scripture or create a few sentences to exegete the given text. For example, the author was given a text chosen from Saint Matthew's gospel chapter six, verses seventeen to twenty to set to music. To drive home the message, he concluded the composition with the text derived from Proverbs Chapter four, verse twenty-three.

Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone. (Matthew 15:17-20)

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. (Proverbs 4:23)

The normal shape of melodic lines of a composition should to a large extent dependent on the linguistic features of the language of the text. The composer of Igbo vocal music, for instance, should therefore not conceive the melody first before fixing the words; rather the movement of notes of the melody line should be guided by the up and down movements of the syllables of the words of the chosen text for the composition.

While discussing the creativity of an African composer of vocal music, Agu (1999) states thus:

His (the composer's) creative act is guided by certain rules, like the proper placement of words to achieve intelligibility, ensuring that the intervallic range of notes and the

ambit of the melody agree with the speech-tone patterns of the chosen text, and ensuring that the melody conceived must be based on the chosen mood of the text. (p. 33)

Furthermore, Nketia (1974) asserts that “phonological characteristics of speech – namely, rhythm and speech melody or intonation – correspond to analogous features of songs as well... The relative durational values of the syllables of words are reflected in the rhythm of songs” (p. 180). In support of this, Olaniyan (2001) adds that the “decision was guided by the fact that in any African community, the essence of music performance is the conveyance of direct meaning” (p. 59). If a given melody is meant to be fixed a text, there is also need to change the positions of some melody notes to adhere to the tonal inflexions of the chosen text, if the language is tonal for intelligibility.

Conclusion

The several roles vocal music plays in Christian worship cannot be overemphasized. The achievement of these roles is only possible when the essence of Christian sacred music is known by the practitioners. Unfortunately, many composers of music used for Christian worship are ignorant of or have forgotten what Christian sacred music should be and this, as a result, has led to abuse. They compose to entertain, as well as show off their dexterity in the fixing of musical notes. The essence of music in Christian worship is the glorification of God and the sanctification of the faithful. This paper, therefore, concludes that for Christian sacred music composition to achieve its purpose, the composer should be conscious of its essence to avoid abuse. The researcher recommends that seminars on church music practice be organized once in a while by the churches for training and re-training of church music composers/practitioners, which will involve the priests/pastors and professional composers as facilitators. Also, young composers are encouraged to understudy fulfilled composers and more so; attending conferences/symposia is necessary for composers, where issues bothering on church music composition are discussed.

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