The Functions and Applications of African Music and Musical Instruments

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Abstract

The music and musical instruments of the people are indicators of their cultural practices. Culture and music are interwoven, as each collaborates with the other. As culture differs, music and musical instruments functioned differently. This paper looked at the various functions of African music and musical instrument in Rivers State. The aim is to drawn home those functions that music played in the African cultures. The paper adopted a qualitative research method through the review of related literature and observation to gather data. The paper shows that music and musical instrument functioned in the African culture in transmitting information, announcing the birth of a prince and also the death of a king, alerting people for war, used for different festivals and rites etc. The paper concludes that music is the sole transmitter of culture. It is recommended that the Rivers State through the ministry of culture and tourism promote the ingenious instrument and music of the people for posterity.

Introduction

One method of finding out about the culture of a people is to examine how they conceptualize their music. Music and musical instruments serve as culture indicators; musical instruments probably present the most diversified sources of information on the artistic values, religion, belief, family, life and the general social structure of a society. Every standardized procedure in an ethnic group is an element of its culture. It is the symbol and rhythm that provides the key to the African spirit and culture. The value of musical instruments as symbols are fortified by Reamer (1970) that

sound is always 'felt' whether it is really 'heard'. This explains the tradition in Tanzania where a drum is hung on a tree when a child is circumcised and taken down when he recovers. The sound of drum is not heard but it is felt and conceptualized, since in many African communities, the sound of a drum heralds an important event.

Aim: The aim is to drawn home the indigenous functions of music and musical instrument in Rivers State.

Methodology: The paper adopted a qualitative research method through the review of related literature and observation.

Conceptual Clarification

Music

The concept of music has been discussed and considered by different scholars in music. Adetunji (2018) says:

> Music in itself is the communication of the culture and practices of certing group by means of songs and other musical practices. The lyrics of several songs often contain the indigenous practices of the locality or the beliefs and practices of the foreign styles being imitated. These could include marriage practice, intergroup relation, ethic identification, religious, family care, love, language among others. Some songs become so influential and customary that they have become adopted as a culture of the people. (p. 440)

The above citation by Adetunji shows that music is a transmitter of culture through the indigenous practices of the people that involved in the song text. It is obvious that song being sand and heard from far can be pointed to some setting cultural group because of it text and movement. In the same disposition, Agu (2017) states that "music is the force of living spirit moving within those who perform it, those who are its targets and those whose

actions and non-actions it dictates, influences and moulds" (p. 13). Also William in Giami 2018 says:

> Music is a succession of sounds, simple or complex. The ear hears the first note and links it to the second. The first is still in the memory as the second is followed by the third. This process continues like cinematography of sound and there is an illusion of onward movement. Memory enables the sounds to be compared, and it is possible for most people to remember a series of sounds that form a pattern lasting a few seconds. If one is accustomed to listening, one often knows what to expect; and while the ear is listening to the present, the mind is anticipating the future and remembering the past. (p. 1)

Music traditionally preserved our cultural heritage through sound, instruments and rhythms. Though the influence of Western music and urbanization has reduced some of the traditional musical culture of our people, the fact still remains that music upholds our cultural heritage. The force that motivates the known and the unknown to sing at various point in time, is music. The known comprises of the trained and untrained musicians, while the unknown are the mental deranged and those with different mental challenges.

Culture

Merriam (2016) defined culture as:

> The customary belief, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; also, the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared. (b) The set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize an institution or organisation. (c) These are set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic. (d) The integrated pattern of human

> knowledge, belief, and behaviour that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.

Okafor (2012) on culture states that:

> It is now a long way from the first principles when man's most novel activity and the meaning of culture was deliberate tillage of the ground for production necessary for his survival. Culture now embraces the whole complex of human achievement in ideas, words, actions, symbols, and works intended by mankind to give fuller meaning and expression to life in the cosmos. (p. 4)

He further says that:

> Culture originated everywhere from man's response to the diversities and dynamics of his whole environment. The experience of each generation is transmitted to the succeeding generation, which uses them to build upon and creates its legacy. As dynamics of the environment are varied, and as the environment has many facets, there should be matching responses or there could be sad consequences. (p. 4)

According to Onwuejeogwu in Okafor (2012)

> A culture area is therefore a geographical area occupied by people whose culture exhibits a significant degree of similarity with each other as well as a significant degree of dissimilarity with the cultures of others… Culture areas are delineated by categorizing cultures according to standard classifications, such as techniques, physical environment, religion, language, and saying that those that are similar and closely related belong to one culture area. (p. 5)

The African Functions of Music and Musical Instruments

The African music is culture oriented. Every part of it showcases the rich African culture and its diversities. As such, Ibekwe (2011) says:

> Traditional or cultural practises rang from the rituals of birth and puberty, marriages and death, cult activity, imitation, ritual and livelihood, such hunting, farming, gathering, recreation, parties to other aspects of life activities in a community. All these activities have music, either singing, dancing, playing instrument or combinations as their central pivot. Music making during any of these activities expresses most of the cultural traits a community is known for. As a group sings or dances, it is languages as well as style of body manipulation are part of cultural expressions. The types of costumes, masks, musical instruments, paintings and design in the prowess of singing and dancing are all culture indicators (p. 79)

Also Onyekwelu in Adetunji in Okechukwu, Ahanotu, and Ekezie (2019) stated that:

> Music plays vital in virtually every culture of the world. It is essentially a human activity denoting or expressing human emotions and the relationship of the emotions to the environment or to life. Not only is it a human activity, in its truest sense, it cannot exist without man. And so man recognises or seems to hear music in nature not only because the sound of nature appends to have close similarity with sounds that man consciously organizes to express his ideals. (p.177)

In the same aspects, chukwu (2011) discussed the value of African instrument by saying:

> The African membrane drums 'talks' as well as 'sing'. Each African society understands the sound or tones produced from the specie of her drum. During performance, for

> instance, the master drummer expresses and/or tells stories and gives information or directives to members of his group as the performance is going on, and they understand whatever the drum talks and sings. In dance, for instance, vary lively dialoguing takes place between the drummer and the dancer, which enlivens the spectators. (p.3)

Communication, works, festivals, worship, rituals, cultural identification, belief, and advertisement are the various ways African music functions in the African society. The communication here is on different levels. From the community town crier, to the various messages African music communicates to us about taboos and punishment, and those that reveal various ill committed by men in the society.

The slip wooden drum being used for passing information by a town crier



(Source from Youtude)

Evans (2019) discusses the applications of African music as:

> Musical instruments in Africa are not only used for making music, they are also used to communicate to both man and spirit, translating and emitting daily experiences and events. They serve a variety of roles: some may be confined to

> religious or ceremonial occasions; others are used in a more secular fashion for entertainment. There may be restrictions to the age, gender or social status of the player. The instruments range in size and complexity from hand-held objects to large, elaborate devices constructed of many parts and, even today, they are mostly crafted from natural materials using age-old methods. Most widely spread and played instruments in Africa are the drum, the xylophone, the mbira, rattles and shakers. The one-string musical bow, played all over the continent but now nearly abandoned, was once responsible for all the vocal scales that are used today in African music. Historical influences and migratory movement of peoples have defined both the style of music and the type of instruments played in the various regions. Most notable is the influence of Islamic and Arabic musical traditions into the northern and western African countries.

A singular idea in this citation is the communication of messages not only to human but spirit, and a restriction to age and gender. This is the unique part of African musical instrument in communication. Not only does it benefit the human, but the spirit within the region. Some are also played at particular age to ascertain maturity and initiations into manhood.

An Excerpt of the African Music



NYETOROFI (I WILL PRAISE YOU)

TEXT TRANSLATION

Ami yetoro fiofri usen, kor'afor di an di fak

I will praise you everyday, for you are my redeemer

Nyetoro fi kensinki, yetoro fi an di yanga

I will praise you forever, i will praise you my deliverer

Summary

Music and culture go together, as there is no culture without the involvement of music. It is the medium through which our culture is transmitted and communicated to the people. Songs accompany every activity of life in our culture: cycle of birth, puberty, marriage, death, and the worship of ancestral gods. Songs of insult and praise, work songs and songs of social control are transmitted by the use of music in our cultural setting. It can, therefore, be said that the culture of a people is buried in their music.

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