Intercultural Rhythmic Strategies in Contemporary Nigerian Art Music: A Comparative Study of Onyeji's Druministic Technique and Euba's African Pianism.

By

Albert Oluwole Uzodinma Authority Ph.D.
Department of Music, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
dr.albert.oau@gmail.com
+2348030684957,
ORCID iD: 0002-9433-3801

Abstract

This study explores how Nigerian art music sustains cultural heritage through rhythmic innovation, aligning with global goals for inclusive education and cultural preservation (UN SDGs 4 and 11). It addresses a gap in scholarship by comparing two distinct approaches to integrating African rhythmic traditions into Western classical forms: Akin Euba's African Pianism and Christian Onyeji's Druministic technique. Euba reimagines Yoruba drumming and speech rhythms for piano, while Onyeji centers the drum as a compositional tool, shaping melody and harmony. Using score analysis, rhythmic transcription, and contextual interpretation, the study draws on frameworks from Intercultural Musicology, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and Semiotic Theory. Findings show that both composers elevate African rhythmic heritage, Euba through pianistic reinterpretation, Onyeji through percussive logic. The research affirms rhythm as a vital expressive force in Nigerian composition and offers insights for music education, pedagogy, and cultural policy. It calls for deeper exploration of indigenous rhythmic logic in global music innovation.

Keywords: composition, heritage, interculturalism, pianism, rhythm, sustainability

Introduction

African art music, a genre that synthesizes indigenous African musical elements with Western classical traditions, has evolved significantly in Nigeria since the mid-20th century. Rooted in the pioneering works of composers such as Fela Sowande, Ayo Bankole, and Akin Euba, this genre reflects a conscious effort to preserve African musical identity while engaging with global compositional idioms (Omojola, 2012; Euba, 1989). As Nigerian composers continue to explore intercultural synthesis, rhythm has emerged as a central expressive and structural tool, particularly in the works of Akin Euba and Christian Onyeji.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on African art music, there remains a notable gap in comparative studies that examine how indigenous rhythmic idioms are reimagined within Western compositional frameworks. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the rhythmic strategies of Euba's African Pianism and Onyeji's Druministic technique, wo distinct approaches that reflect divergent aesthetic philosophies and cultural engagements. In doing so, the research contributes to the discourse on cultural sustainability and inclusive education, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 11, which advocate for quality education and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2017).

The purpose of this study is to investigate how rhythm functions as a vehicle for intercultural expression in contemporary Nigerian art music. It is significant both academically and practically, offering insights into compositional practice, music pedagogy, and cultural policy. The study is guided by three theoretical frameworks: Intercultural Musicology, which explores the synthesis of musical cultures (Euba, 1989); Rhythmic Hybridity and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, which examine the structural logic of African rhythm (Omojola, 2020); and Semiotic Theory of Music, which interprets rhythm as a cultural signifier (Monelle, 2000).

Existing literature has largely focused on individual analyses of African Pianism or Druministic technique, without a comparative lens that highlights their philosophical and structural divergences. This study fills that gap by posing the central research question: *How do Akin Euba's African Pianism and Christian Onyeji's*

Druministic technique differ in their rhythmic strategies and cultural philosophies, and what do these differences reveal about the role of rhythm in shaping contemporary Nigerian art music? To address this question, the study pursues three objectives: (1) to analyze the rhythmic structures and compositional techniques employed by Akin Euba and Christian Onyeji in integrating indigenous African rhythmic idioms into Western classical music frameworks. (2) to compare the philosophical and aesthetic foundations of African Pianism and Druministic technique, highlighting their respective approaches to intercultural synthesis and rhythmic innovation. (3) to evaluate the cultural and pedagogical implications of these rhythmic strategies for contemporary Nigerian art music and their relevance to global music education and heritage preservation.

Euba's African Pianism adapts Yoruba drumming and speech rhythms for the piano, creating a hybrid musical language that bridges oral tradition and Western notation. Onyeji's Druministic technique, by contrast, foregrounds the drum as a compositional tool, embedding its structural logic into melodic and harmonic development (Onyeji, 2005). These approaches reflect two paradigms of rhythmic innovation, one pianistic and interpretive, the other percussive and structural.

Methodologically, the study employs an integrated rhythmic hermeneutics approach, combining score analysis, rhythmic transcription, and contextual interpretation. This allows for a nuanced understanding of how rhythm operates as both a compositional device and a cultural symbol in Nigerian art music.

Literature Review

African art music emerged as a response to colonial musical imposition and the desire to preserve indigenous identity within formal composition. The genre blends African musical idioms with Western classical techniques, forming a unique intercultural expression (Omojola, 2012). Early pioneers such as Fela Sowande, Ayo Bankole, and Laz Ekwueme laid the groundwork for this synthesis. Sowande's *African Suite* (1944) exemplifies the integration of Yoruba melodies with Western orchestration, while Bankole's *Piano Sonata No. 2* reflects tonal experimentation rooted in African scales (Ekwueme, 1974).

Institutional support from Nigerian universities, particularly the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), University of Ibadan (UI), and University of Lagos (UNILAG), played a pivotal role in nurturing composers and scholars. These institutions fostered a curriculum that encouraged the fusion of African traditional music with Western theory and performance (Onyeji, 2005).

Rhythm, a central element in African music, has been explored by scholars such as Nketia (1974), Euba (1990), and Omojola (2006), who emphasize its structural and symbolic roles. Western classical rhythm, often metric and symmetrical, contrasts with African rhythm's polyrhythmic, cyclical, and participatory nature, making rhythm a fertile ground for intercultural exploration.

Yoruba and Igbo drumming systems are built on complex rhythmic structures, including timeline patterns, cross-rhythms, and call-and-response techniques. These systems are orally transmitted and deeply embedded in ritual, social, and linguistic contexts (Nketia, 1974). Yoruba talking drums, for instance, mimic speech tones and convey proverbs, while Igbo drums often accompany masquerade performances and communal ceremonies (Omojola, 2006).

Polyrhythm, a hallmark of African rhythm, creates layered textures that challenge Western notions of meter and pulse. Euba (1990) argues that African rhythm is not merely a musical device but a cultural logic that governs movement, speech, and spirituality. This rhythmic worldview informs the compositional strategies of both Euba and Onyeji, who seek to translate these idioms into Western notation without losing their essence.

Akin Euba's African Pianism is a theoretical and practical framework that adapts African rhythmic and melodic elements for the piano. His works, such as *Four Pieces for African Piano* (1992), incorporate Yoruba drumming patterns, speech rhythms, and tonal inflections. Euba's philosophy of interculturalism advocates for the synthesis of African and Western musical cultures through informed compositional practice (Euba, 1989).

Agawu (2003) critiques Euba's approach as both innovative and problematic, noting the challenges of translating oral rhythmic logic into fixed notation.

Nonetheless, African Pianism remains a seminal contribution to African art music, offering a model for rhythmic adaptation and cultural negotiation.

Christian Onyeji's Druministic technique represents a paradigm shift in African art music composition. Rather than adapting drum rhythms for Western instruments, Onyeji uses the drum as a compositional tool, embedding its structural logic into melodic and harmonic development. His *Drumusic* series exemplifies this approach, where rhythmic motifs derived from Igbo drumming dictate the form and texture of the music (Onyeji, 2005).

Joshua Uzoigwe's works also reflect rhythmic innovation, though his approach is more pianistic and lyrical. Onyeji's method, however, is more percussive-centric, emphasizing the drum's role in shaping musical architecture. Ajewole (2018) notes that Druministic technique challenges Western compositional norms and offers a new lens for understanding African rhythm in art music.

Three theoretical frameworks guide this study: Intercultural Musicology, Rhythmic Hybridity and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and Semiotic Theory of Music. Intercultural Musicology, as defined by Euba (1989), explores the synthesis of musical cultures through composition. Rhythmic Hybridity, discussed by Omojola (2020), examines how African rhythmic structures are layered and transformed in intercultural contexts. Indigenous Knowledge Systems emphasize the epistemological foundations of African rhythm, rooted in oral tradition and communal experience. Semiotic Theory of Music, particularly Monelle's (2000) work, interprets rhythm as a cultural signifier. In African art music, rhythm communicates identity, memory, and resistance, making it not just a structural element but a symbolic one.

Comparative studies in African art music are limited, especially those focusing on rhythmic strategies. Most scholarships analyze individual composers or stylistic trends without juxtaposing distinct rhythmic philosophies. This study fills that gap by comparing Euba's pianistic reinterpretation of Yoruba rhythm with Onyeji's percussive-centric Druministic technique. Existing literature often overlooks rhythm's role as a compositional and cultural tool, focusing instead on

melody, harmony, or form. By foregrounding rhythm, this study offers a fresh perspective on intercultural synthesis and compositional innovation.

African art music contributes to global intercultural dialogue by showcasing how indigenous traditions can be reimagined within contemporary frameworks. This aligns with SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), which emphasizes the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, and SDG 4 (quality education), which advocates for inclusive and culturally responsive curricula. By analyzing rhythmic strategies in Nigerian art music, this study supports cultural sustainability, promotes indigenous knowledge, and enriches global music education. It affirms rhythm as a vital expressive force and a bridge between tradition and innovation.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three interconnected frameworks, Intercultural Musicology, Rhythmic Hybridity and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and the Semiotic Theory of Music, to explore how rhythm functions as both technique and cultural expression in Nigerian art music.

Intercultural Musicology

Akin Euba's theory of Intercultural Musicology (1989) promotes the blending of African and Western musical traditions through informed composition. His concept of creative ethnomusicology positions composers as cultural mediators, adapting indigenous idioms within global contexts. This is central to African Pianism, where Yoruba drumming and speech rhythms are reimagined for piano, bridging oral tradition and Western notation. The framework supports Objective 1 by offering a lens to analyze rhythmic structure and cultural synthesis in both Euba's and Onyeji's work.

Rhythmic Hybridity and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)

Omojola (2020) describes rhythmic hybridity as the layering of African rhythmic forms, polyrhythm, timeline patterns, call-and-response, within intercultural compositions. IKS, as discussed by Nketia (1974) and Omojola (2006), emphasizes rhythm's deep ties to language, ritual, and communal identity. This framework aligns with Objective 2, highlighting how Onyeji's Druministic technique embeds

indigenous rhythmic logic into melodic and harmonic development. It also supports a culturally grounded analysis of rhythmic innovation.

Semiotic Theory of Music

Monelle's Semiotic Theory (2000) treats rhythm as a cultural signifier, conveying identity, memory, and resistance. In African art music, rhythm is more than structure; it's symbolic. This theory informs Objective 3 by helping decode the cultural and pedagogical meaning behind rhythmic choices.

The study uses rhythmic hermeneutics, score analysis, transcription, and contextual interpretation, to compare Euba's and Onyeji's strategies. Tools include mapping rhythmic motifs, transcribing indigenous patterns, and decoding symbolic meaning. Through these lenses, rhythm emerges as both a technical craft and a cultural force in Nigerian composition.

Methodology

This study adopts an *integrated rhythmic hermeneutics* approach, combining score analysis, rhythmic transcription, and contextual interpretation to examine the intercultural rhythmic strategies of Akin Euba's African Pianism and Christian Onyeji's Druministic technique. This methodology is rooted in the interpretive traditions of ethnomusicology and semiotic analysis, allowing for both structural and symbolic engagement with rhythm as a compositional and cultural force.

The approach is informed by three theoretical frameworks: Intercultural Musicology, Rhythmic Hybridity and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and the Semiotic Theory of Music. These frameworks guide the analytical lens through which rhythm is examined as both a technical device and a cultural signifier. Together, these frameworks ensure that rhythm is not only analyzed structurally but also interpreted within its cultural and philosophical contexts.

Data Sources

Primary data for this study include:

a) *Published musical scores:* Euba's *Four Pieces for African Piano* and Onyeji's *Ekele Diri Chineke*.
b) *Archival recordings and composer notes:* Retrieved from university music departments and digital repositories.

c) *Scholarly texts and journal articles:* Including works by Euba, Onyeji, Omojola, Nzewi, and other African musicologists.

Secondary data include:

a) Ethnographic accounts of Yoruba and Igbo drumming traditions.
b) Program notes and interviews offering insight into compositional intent.

Procedures and Analytical Tools

The research protocol follows these steps:

1. ***Score Analysis***
    a) Structural mapping of rhythmic motifs, metric organization, and phrase construction.
    b) Identification of indigenous rhythmic patterns embedded in Western notation.
2. ***Rhythmic Transcription***
    a) Transcription of oral rhythmic idioms (e.g., Yoruba talking drum, Igbo udu) into Western rhythmic notation.
    b) Comparative analysis of rhythmic layering, cross-rhythms, and timeline patterns.
3. ***Contextual Interpretation***
    a) Examination of cultural, philosophical, and symbolic meanings attached to rhythmic choices.
    b) Application of semiotic theory to decode rhythm as a communicative and identity-bearing tool.

Each procedure is mapped to the study's objectives:

a) Objective 1 is addressed through score analysis and transcription.
b) Objective 2 is fulfilled by comparative interpretation of rhythmic aesthetics.
c) Objective 3 is explored through contextual and pedagogical implications.

Ethical Considerations

Although this study does not involve direct human subjects aside from the digital interview with Professor Onyeji, it engages deeply with Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Ethical sensitivity is maintained by:

a) Respecting the cultural integrity of Yoruba and Igbo rhythmic traditions.

b) Citing indigenous sources and practitioners appropriately.
c) Avoiding reductive or extractive interpretations of oral traditions.

Where archival materials or ethnographic accounts are used, permissions and proper attribution are ensured in accordance with academic standards and cultural protocols.

Overview of the Composers and Their Philosophies

Akin Euba: Biography, Musical Ideology, and African Pianism

Akin Euba (1935–2020) was a Nigerian composer, pianist, and ethnomusicologist widely regarded as the father of African Pianism. Born in Lagos, Nigeria, Euba studied composition at Trinity College of Music, London, and later earned advanced degrees in ethnomusicology from the University of California, Los Angeles and the University of Ghana, Legon, where his doctoral dissertation focused on Yoruba dundun drumming (Euba, 1989; Wikipedia, 2025).

Euba's musical ideology centered on *intercultural synthesis*, a concept he termed "creative ethnomusicology." He believed African composers could integrate indigenous musical elements into Western art music without compromising cultural authenticity. His theory of **African Pianism** reimagines African rhythmic and melodic principles for the piano, using techniques such as speech rhythm simulation, polyrhythmic layering, and tonal inflection. Works like *Four Pieces for African Piano* and *Chaka: An Opera in Two Chants* exemplify this approach, blending Yoruba musical logic with Western compositional structures (Phamox Music, 2024).

Euba's legacy includes founding the Centre for Intercultural Music Arts in London and organizing global symposia on African and diasporic music. His scholarship and compositions have shaped the discourse on African art music and remain foundational to contemporary intercultural musicology.

Christian Onyeji: Biography, Compositional Philosophy, and Druministic Technique

Christian Uzoma Onyeji (b. 1967) is a Nigerian composer, ethnomusicologist, and professor of music at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He holds a Doctor of Music degree from the University of Pretoria, South Africa, and has developed a

unique compositional approach known as Druministic technique (BlackPast, 2024).

Onyeji's philosophy is rooted in his *Research-Composition* ideology, a method that integrates ethnomusicological fieldwork into the creative process. His Druministic technique foregrounds the drum as a compositional nucleus, embedding its structural logic, such as timeline patterns, call-and-response, and polyrhythms, into melodic and harmonic development. Unlike Euba's pianistic adaptation, Onyeji's approach is percussive-centric, drawing directly from Igbo drumming traditions and translating their rhythmic architecture into Western notation (Onyeji, 2008).

His works span symphonic, choral, and solo piano genres, with notable pieces such as *Ufie*, *Omenala bu ike*, and the *Drumusic* series. These compositions reflect a commitment to preserving indigenous musical paradigms while innovating within the art music tradition. Onyeji's contributions have earned national and international recognition, including awards at the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST) and fellowships for research on African musical traditions (A Seat at the Piano, 2025).

Comparative Positioning within Nigerian Art Music

Akin Euba and Christian Onyeji represent two generational and philosophical pillars in Nigerian art music. Euba's African Pianism reflects a reinterpretive synthesis, using Western instruments to simulate African rhythmic logic. Onyeji's Druministic technique, by contrast, embodies a structural transposition, placing indigenous instruments and their rhythmic systems at the core of compositional design.

While Euba's work laid the theoretical foundation for intercultural composition, Onyeji advances this legacy by asserting indigenous rhythmic paradigms as compositional frameworks. Together, they illustrate the evolving possibilities of rhythm as a cultural and expressive force in Nigerian art music, contributing to its global relevance and pedagogical richness.

Analytical Case Study: Akin Euba's *Four Pieces for African Piano*

Akin Euba's *Four Pieces for African Piano* is widely recognized as a cornerstone of African Pianism, a compositional philosophy that reimagines the piano as a vessel for African rhythmic and melodic traditions. As the originator of the term "African Pianism," Euba's work exemplifies the fusion of Yoruba drumming idioms with Western classical piano technique, making this piece an ideal case study for analyzing intercultural rhythmic strategies (Omojola, 1995; Euba, 1992).

Contextual Background and Compositional Intent

Composed in the mid-20th century, *Four Pieces for African Piano* reflects Euba's mission to create a hybrid musical language that preserves African oral traditions while engaging with Western compositional forms. Drawing from Yoruba drumming, speech rhythms, and tonal inflections, Euba's work is both a cultural archive and a pedagogical tool. His approach aligns with the broader goals of intercultural musicology and cultural sustainability, as outlined in the UN SDGs 4 and 11.

Euba's intent was not merely to imitate African rhythms but to embed their structural logic into the piano's idiom. This involved adapting techniques from traditional instruments such as the *dundun* (talking drum) and *agidigbo* (thumb piano), translating their rhythmic complexity into pianistic gestures (Euba, 1989).

Rhythmic Adaptation in Specific Movements

Each movement of *Four Pieces for African Piano* showcases a unique rhythmic strategy:

a) **Movement I: Ogun**
   This piece opens with polyrhythmic textures that simulate the layered drumming of Yoruba rituals. The use of alternating accents and syncopated motifs mirrors the call-and-response structure of ensemble drumming. Measures 1–16 feature rhythmic cells that resemble speech-tone patterns, a hallmark of Yoruba musical communication.

b) **Movement II: Igi Nla So**
   Here, Euba employs metric modulation and rhythmic displacement to evoke the unpredictability of oral storytelling. The piano mimics the tonal

inflections of Yoruba language, with rhythmic phrases shaped by linguistic cadence rather than Western meter.

c) **Movement III: Orisa**
This movement integrates ostinato patterns and dynamic shifts to simulate trance-inducing drumming sequences. The left hand maintains a steady pulse while the right hand introduces syncopated bursts, reflecting the spiritual intensity of Yoruba religious ceremonies.

d) **Movement IV: Eyo**
The final piece is dance-like, with rhythmic motifs derived from *bata* drumming. The interplay of duple and triple meters creates a festive atmosphere, emphasizing communal participation and rhythmic hybridity.

Euba's *Four Pieces for African Piano* exemplifies how indigenous rhythmic idioms can be structurally and symbolically reimagined within Western classical frameworks. His work affirms rhythm as a vital expressive force in Nigerian composition and offers a model for global musical innovation rooted in cultural heritage.

Analytical Case Study of Christian Onyeji's *Ekele Diri Chineke.*

Christian Onyeji's *Ekele Diri Chineke* stands as a seminal representation of his *druministic* technique, a compositional philosophy that elevates African drumming traditions from accompaniment to structural nucleus. Rooted in Igbo musical heritage, the work embodies a rhythmic consciousness that transcends mere ornamentation, positioning the drum as a symbolic and structural agent of musical meaning. The title, which translates to "Thanks be to God," evokes a spiritual and communal ethos central to Igbo cultural expression, where music functions as both ritual and narrative (Nzewi, 2007).

Druminism, as conceptualized by Onyeji, is not simply about mimicking drum patterns but about embedding the logic of African percussion, its cyclicality, call-and-response structure, and polyrhythmic layering, into the very architecture of Western classical forms (Onyeji, 2005). *Ekele Diri Chineke* exemplifies this by transforming the piano into a percussive voice, simulating indigenous instruments

such as the *udu*, *ogene*, and *ikoro* through rhythmic motifs and dynamic articulation.

Contextual Insights into Onyeji's Compositional Philosophy

Onyeji's compositional philosophy is deeply informed by the epistemology of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems, particularly the notion that rhythm is a carrier of cultural memory and communal identity (Agawu, 2003). In *Ekele Diri Chineke*, the piano is treated not as a European instrument but as a vessel for African rhythmic storytelling. The work reflects a deliberate intercultural synthesis, where Western harmonic progressions are recontextualized through African rhythmic syntax.
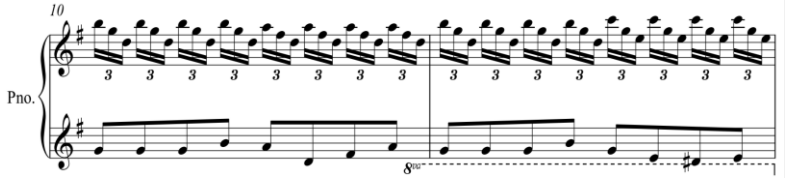
The score reveals a consistent use of rhythmic cells that mirror traditional Igbo drumming patterns. These cells are often repeated, varied, and juxtaposed to create tension and release, mimicking the dialogic structure of African ensemble drumming. Onyeji's use of metric modulation and syncopation further destabilizes Western metrical regularity, inviting listeners into a rhythmic space that is fluid, communal, and spiritually resonant.

Key Sections and Measures Where Percussive Logic Drives Structure

A close reading of the score of *Ekele Diri Chineke* reveals several sections where percussive logic is the primary driver of structural decisions:

a) **Measures 10–17**: This passage introduces a recurring rhythmic motif built on triplet figures and accented offbeats. The motif simulates the *ikoro* drum's communicative pulses, functioning as a thematic anchor throughout the piece.
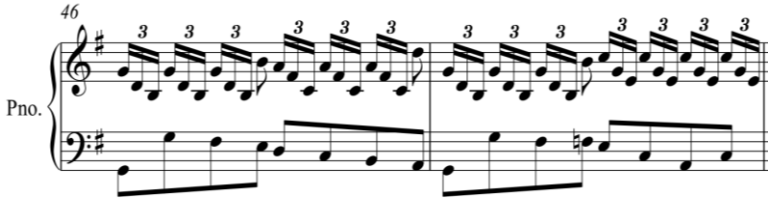
Figure 1. Showing Recurring Rhythmic Motif Built on Triplets (measures 10-11).



b) **Measures 45–47**: Here, Onyeji employs polyrhythmic layering, with the left hand articulating a steady duple rhythm while the right hand interjects
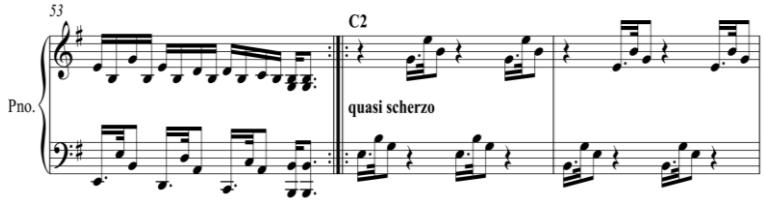
syncopated triplets. This mirrors the interplay between master drummer and supporting ensemble in Igbo musical practice.

Figure 2. Showing Polyrhythmic Layering (Measures 46-47).
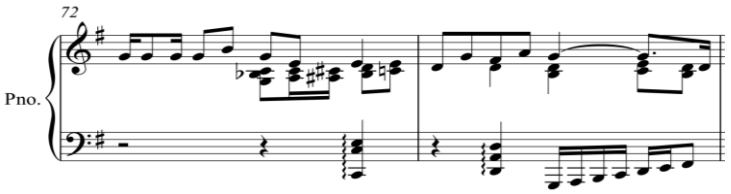


c) **Measures 53–59 (Quasi Scherzo section)**: The rhythmic density increases, with rapid alternations and dynamic shifts that evoke the celebratory energy of communal drumming. The piano's percussive timbre is emphasized through staccato articulation and sudden accents, simulating the *ogene*'s metallic resonance.

Figure 3. Showing Rhythmic Density (Measures 53-55).
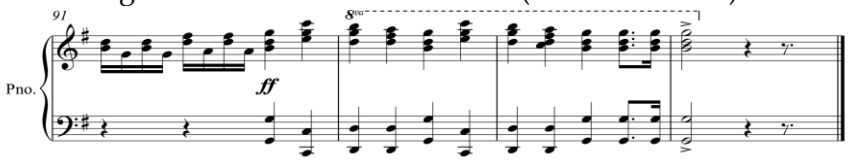


d) **Measures 72–80**: A transition marked by rhythmic diminution and metric ambiguity, this section reflects the improvisatory nature of African drumming, where tempo and meter are negotiated in real time. The structural logic here is driven not by harmonic progression but by rhythmic transformation.

Figure 4. Showing Rhythmic Diminution (Measures 72-73).



e) **Coda (Measures 91–End)**: The final section consolidates earlier rhythmic themes into a climactic percussive flourish. The use of repeated rhythmic cells and dynamic crescendos creates a ritualistic closure, echoing the communal affirmation found in traditional Igbo thanksgiving ceremonies.

Figure 5. Showing Climatic Percussive Flourish (measures 91-94).



Christian Onyeji's *Ekele Diri Chineke* exemplifies the Druministic technique as a radical reimagining of African rhythmic heritage within Western compositional frameworks. By foregrounding rhythm as both structure and symbol, Onyeji affirms the drum's role as a bearer of cultural identity and spiritual meaning. His work contributes to global music discourse by demonstrating how indigenous rhythmic logic can serve as a foundation for innovative compositional practice, pedagogical reform, and cultural sustainability.

Comparative Analytical Table

This section presents a comparative analytical table placing Akin Euba's *African Pianism (Four Pieces for African Piano)* side by side with Christian Onyeji's *Drummistic Technique (Ekele Diri Chineke)*. It highlights their similarities and divergences in rhythmic strategies, philosophy, and cultural grounding.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of **Euba's** *African Pianism* and **Onyeji's** *Drummistic Technique*

Aspect	**Akin Euba's African Pianism** (Four Pieces for African Piano)	**Christian Onyeji's *Drummistic* Technique**
Compositional Philosophy	Reinterprets Yoruba drumming and speech rhythms for piano, creating a hybrid intercultural idiom.	Embeds African drumming logic directly into piano composition, using the drum as a structural model.

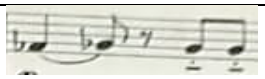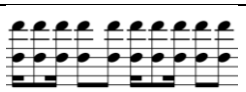
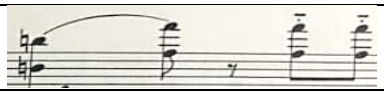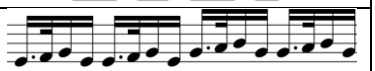
Rhythmic Foundation	Based on Yoruba agogo (bell) timeline, speech-tone rhythms, and polyrhythmic layering.	Derived from drum ensemble structures, foregrounding cross-rhythms, metric displacements, and ostinati.
Instrumental Approach	Treats the piano as a transcriber of oral/percussion traditions. Focus on pianistic reinterpretation.	Treats the piano as a drum surrogate, emphasizing percussive articulation and timbral attack.
Cultural Referencing	Strongly Yoruba-centered; adapts talking drum speech patterns and liturgical rhythms.	Draws from Igbo rhythmic practices, using drumming systems as templates for melodic and harmonic development.
Texture and Structure	Alternation of ostinato left-hand patterns (e.g., bell timeline) with right-hand atonal/pentatonic fragments.	Layered textures simulating multi-drum ensembles, often with percussive clusters and syncopated patterns.
Semiotic Emphasis	Rhythm functions as a signifier of cultural memory, pianistic symbols of Yoruba oral performance.	Rhythm acts as structural DNA, organizing form, melody, and harmony in a drum-derived paradigm.
Global Appeal	Bridges African oral traditions with Western piano idioms, appealing to performers worldwide.	Provides a new compositional paradigm rooted in African percussion logic, expanding global piano technique.
Pedagogical Implications	Useful for music education in African Pianism, integrating African heritage into classical pedagogy.	Offers performative and compositional models for rhythm-centered music education and cultural sustainability.

Summary:

a) Both composers elevate rhythm as the core expressive force of Nigerian art music.
b) Euba works through translation and adaptation of Yoruba idioms into Western pianism.
c) Onyeji advances a percussive-centric paradigm, where the piano emulates and embodies the drum's structural functions.
d) Together, they represent two complementary pathways of intercultural rhythmic synthesis in contemporary Nigerian art music composition.

Rhythmic Transcription

Table 4. Transcribed prominent rhythmic motifs from both works and their transformations.

	Euba's *Four Pieces for African Piano*	**Onyeji's** *Ekele Diri Chineke*
Prominent Rhythmic motif		
Transformed version		

Structural Analysis

This section of the study is a rich and rewarding intellectual comparison between Christian Onyeji's *Ekele Diri Chineke* and Akin Euba's *Four Pieces for African Piano.* The are both landmark works in African pianism, yet they approach intercultural synthesis through distinct rhythmic strategies.

a) **Metric Structure**

Akin Euba – *Four Pieces for African Piano*

i. *Polymeter and Additive Rhythms:* Euba frequently employs *polymetric layering*, where contrasting rhythmic cycles coexist. For example, in "Drum Dialogue," he mimics the interplay of Yoruba talking drums using overlapping meters.

ii. *Additive Rhythms:* Inspired by African drumming, Euba constructs phrases using additive groupings (e.g., 3+2+3), rather than symmetrical Western meters. This creates a fluid, non-isochronous pulse.

Christian Onyeji – *Ekele Diri Chineke*

i. *Polyrhythmic Complexity:* The score reveals dense polyrhythmic textures, especially in sections like first 8 bars of B1, where similar rhythmic motifs are layered across hands.
ii. *Metric Modulation:* Transitions marked *più mosso*, in measures 5 and 52, shift the pulse perceptually, echoing indigenous Nigerian practices of tempo fluidity without formal meter changes.

b) **Rhythmic Motifs and Their Transformations**

Euba

i. *Motivic Cells:* Euba uses short rhythmic motifs derived from traditional drum patterns. These are repeated, fragmented, and reassembled across the pieces.
ii. *Transformation:* Motifs evolve through dynamic changes, register shifts, and rhythmic displacement, mimicking oral improvisation in African music.

Onyeji

i. *Ostinati and Cycles:* Onyeji builds rhythmic motifs as ostinato, repetitive figures that anchor the texture. These are transformed through syncopation, augmentation, and metric shifts.
ii. *Dialogic Rhythm:* Motifs often function in call-and-response, with one hand or section answering the other, reflecting communal musical dialogue as demonstrated in bars 54-56.

c) **Phrase Structure and Indigenous Rhythmic Cycles**

Euba

i. *Phrase Elasticity:* Phrases are shaped by rhythmic cycles rather than harmonic cadences. The structure mirrors Yoruba and Igbo drumming sequences, where phrases expand or contract based on tension.

ii. *Cadential Patterns:* Euba uses referential cadences (e.g., high-register flourishes) to mark phrase boundaries, akin to the way African drummers signal transitions.

Onyeji

i. *Sectional Phrasing:* The score is divided into labeled sections (A, B1, B2, C1, etc.), each with distinct rhythmic identities. Phrase lengths vary, some are 4 bars, others stretch to 6 or 8, reflecting indigenous asymmetry.
ii. *Rhythmic Anchors:* Certain motifs resemble timeline patterns (e.g., *okpokolo* or Yoruba bell rhythms), grounding phrases in cyclical logic.

d) **Rhythmic Manipulation for Intercultural Synthesis**

Euba's Approach

i. *Abstracted African Idioms:* Euba doesn't quote traditional music directly. Instead, he abstracts its rhythmic essence, polyrhythm, additive grouping, and improvisatory phrasing, into a modernist piano idiom.
ii. *Structural Integration:* His synthesis is architectural, embedding African rhythmic logic into Western formal structures.

Onyeji's Approach

i. *Direct Rhythmic Quotation:* Onyeji leans more toward *explicit rhythmic borrowing*, using recognizable indigenous patterns and textures.
ii. *Expressive Fusion:* His synthesis is expressive and performative, evoking the communal energy of Nigerian music within a Western score.

Both composers achieve intercultural synthesis, but through different lenses:

a) **Euba** is a theorist-composer, crafting a cerebral fusion rooted in abstraction.
b) **Onyeji** is a performer-composer, channeling the visceral pulse of Nigerian music into the piano.

Use of Indigenous Rhythmic Idioms and Instrumental Simulation

Indigenous Rhythmic Idioms

a) Akin Euba and Christian Onyeji draw from distinct Nigerian traditions:

i. *Yoruba Talking Drum (Dùndún)*: Euba's compositions simulate the tonal and rhythmic inflections of the *dùndún*, which mimics Yoruba speech through pitch modulation and rhythmic contour (Oluranti, 2012).
ii. *Igbo Udu and Okpokolo Rhythms*: Onyeji incorporates idioms from Igbo percussion, especially the *udu* (clay pot drum) and *okpokolo* (slit drum), characterized by cyclical ostinati and syncopated pulses (Onyeji, 2008).

Euba's Simulation of Drumming Techniques

Euba's concept of *African Pianism* transforms the piano into a surrogate drum ensemble:

i. *Alternating Hand Patterns:* Mimicking interlocking drum rhythms, Euba uses staggered hand movements to evoke ensemble interplay (Omojola, 2001).
ii. *Dynamic Accents and Register Shifts:* He simulates drum timbres by accenting specific notes and using register contrasts to represent different drum voices (Oluranti, 2012).
iii. *Additive Rhythms and Polymeter:* Euba structures phrases using additive groupings (e.g., 3+2+3), reflecting African rhythmic logic (Bolaji, 2022).

Onyeji's Embedded Drum Logic

Onyeji's *drummistic piano composition* approach embeds indigenous rhythmic logic into melodic and harmonic textures:

i. *Layered Instrumentation:* In works like *Ekele Diri Chineke*, Onyeji simulates ensemble drumming through polyrhythmic layering across piano lines.
ii. *Melodic Contour and Harmonic Phrasing:* Melodies follow rhythmic contours of traditional drumming, while harmonies support tension and release cycles akin to indigenous phrasing (Ekpo, 2023).

Symbolic and Structural Roles

i. **Euba**: Rhythmic idioms serve as structural scaffolding and cultural symbols. His work abstracts African rhythmic principles into Western compositional frameworks, reinforcing African identity through form (Omojola, 2001).

ii. **Onyeji**: Rhythmic idioms are both expressive and structural, symbolizing communal participation and spiritual invocation. His sectional phrasing mirrors indigenous performance cycles.

Cultural Preservation and Pedagogical Innovation

a) **Euba's Legacy**: His *African Pianism* offers a theoretical and practical model for integrating African rhythmic systems into formal music education, fostering intercultural dialogue (Bolaji, 2022).
b) **Onyeji's Contribution**: Through *drummistic composition*, Onyeji provides culturally grounded pedagogical models that prioritize indigenous knowledge systems and promote heritage preservation (Ekpo, 2023).

Comparative Discussion

Akin Euba and Christian Onyeji converge in their use of indigenous rhythmic idioms to construct intercultural musical narratives yet diverge in execution. Euba's rhythmic strategies emphasize abstraction and polymetric layering, while Onyeji's approach is more literal, embedding recognizable Igbo rhythmic patterns into melodic and harmonic textures (Boamah, 2013).

In instrumental translation, Euba treats the piano as a surrogate for African percussion, using percussive articulation and alternating hand patterns to simulate ensemble drumming. Onyeji, by contrast, integrates drum logic into multi-part textures, simulating the communal interplay of Nigerian drumming ensembles through layered instrumentation (Igbi, 2017).

Culturally, both composers elevate indigenous idioms as symbols of identity. Euba's aesthetic leans toward structural symbolism, aligning African rhythmic logic with Western formalism. Onyeji's work foregrounds expressive symbolism, evoking spiritual and communal dimensions of Nigerian music (Bolaji, 2022).

Pedagogically, Euba's African Pianism has influenced curriculum development and performance practice, offering a theoretical framework for African art music. Onyeji's *drummistic* approach provides practical models for teaching composition rooted in indigenous logic, fostering cultural preservation and innovation in Nigerian music education (Petersen, 2021).

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated how Akin Euba and Christian Onyeji utilize indigenous Nigerian rhythmic idioms to achieve intercultural synthesis in African art music. Euba's abstraction of Yoruba drumming and Onyeji's embedded Igbo rhythmic logic reflect distinct yet complementary approaches to rhythmic innovation. Their contributions extend the boundaries of African art music by integrating traditional rhythmic paradigms into contemporary compositional frameworks, thereby reinforcing cultural identity and musical heritage.

The implications for future intercultural composition are profound, suggesting that African composers can continue to draw from indigenous sources to create globally resonant works without compromising cultural authenticity. As Owusu-Ansah and Acquah (2021) argue, such syncretic approaches foster a neoclassical African aesthetic that is both innovative and rooted in tradition.

Further research should explore cross-regional rhythmic idioms and their integration into diverse instrumental formats, as well as the pedagogical applications of these compositional models in African music education (IFRA-Nigeria, 2023).

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