Contemporary Approach to the Performance of African Pianism Music: The Nigerian Pianists' Viewpoint

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Abstract

In Nigeria, music concerts that involve solo or duet piano performances are being staged, featuring lots of Western piano repertoires that is, piano pieces of the baroque, classical, romantic etc. eras reflecting and promoting Western music culture. Despite the existence of African piano music repertoires, they are often not performed in present day music concerts as they seem to be neglected, thereby creating little or no avenue for African contribution in piano playing. This study therefore poses the following questions: are African piano works up to standard to be performed in music concerts? Are African piano works meant for the traditional setting? This paper aims at bringing to awareness possible challenges pianists encounter when faced with piano pieces composed with African idioms.

Keywords: African pianism works, Performance, Intercultural composition, Nigeria

Introduction

Civilization in various societies around the world has brought about development with great benefits which is visible in every sphere and facet of man's existence. This development did not elude music as the world of music encountered rebirth and rebranding. This became visible in different areas of music including the formation and development of new music forms, styles, and concepts. Upon coming into Nigeria, the Westerners brought with them their music culture which

superseded indigenous music culture because of colonial factors. But due to the existence of both cultures, there rose the possibility of intercultural creativity. This blend was also spurred from the return of Nigerians that travelled to the western countries to study music. These returnees then created a music style by fusing both the Western and Nigerian music cultures to form a new breed. This was birthed by intercultural activities (Euba, 1970; Omojola, 2001; Ofuani, 2022), one of which gave rise to "African pianism."

African pianism is a style of music that utilizes the fusion of both the African and Western music elements in the piano music of Africa, a concept that was coined by Euba was drawn from his interest in cross-cultural musical combinations (Euba, 1970). The piano is of the Western culture and is one of the most important instruments used in their music-making. It is the medium through which African pianism is communicated. The piano is an instrument of the western culture and is often used during their music-making. However, it has been seen to have a close relationship with African music style thereby creating a way that it can sound like some African instruments.

African Pianism

The exigency arises for Africans to have delight and indulge cheerfully in African music as it is performed vocally or through the playing of any musical instrument, be it Western or African (Ofuani, 2015). This is possible as it concerns the piano in that it creates an avenue for rhythms to be Africanized. Omojola picks up a factual view of Euba asserting that the piano is percussive, and it possesses characteristics that are African in nature, emphasizing that the playing techniques of the thumb piano, drum chimer, xylophone and plucked lute, would set a strong foundation for African pianistic style (Omojola, 2001:157).

In an attempt to fuse the idioms and elements of two different music cultures, Euba was intentional as he constantly showcased its syncretism in his compositional works. Hence Omojola (2001) posits that:

> Euba's approach to musical composition reflects a strong desire to reinterpret elements of his native Nigerian, especially Yoruba, musical tradition in contemporary musical terms. His compositions often outline a bi-musical approach in which European and Nigerian

> elements constantly interact. While his creative experiments reflect a liberal approach that is generally open to the use of foreign, especially European elements, Euba has constantly been seeking fresh means through which the essence of Yoruba musical tradition can be effectively captured in his compositions (156)

Due to the fact that many Africans pay much attention to the European styles and being ignorant of the indigenous idioms and styles, there is therefore the need to encourage and bring to limelight African music as it concerns both vocal and instrumental. Hence Akin Euba (1970) established a concept that involves African composers and called it African pianism. He defined African pianism with respect to the piano music of African composers as well as the piano works of composers that are non-African and indulged the use of African elements in their compositions (Euba, 1993:8). He saw the piano as an instrument that can successfully blend with, as well as imitate, most African instruments (Euba, 1970).

Going forward, Euba (1988), observed that there are other western instruments that are being adopted by Africans in their performances that would likely be classified as African instruments, like the lead guitar, bass guitar, and rhythmic guitar. He emphasizes that the piano remains the closest to being given a new identity as an African instrument as it has already assumed African musical characteristics (Essay 1). He also outlines the ingredients of African music as: thematic repetitions, direct borrowing of thematic materials (both rhythmic and tonal) from African traditional sources, the use of rhythmic and/or tonal motifs which although not borrowed from specific traditional sources, are based on traditional idioms and percussive treatment of the piano (151-152).

Aside Euba's definition of African pianism, other notable scholars described this concept based on their perspective. For example, Boamah (2012) sees it as a compositional approach that concerns the vocal and/or instrumental music of the African tradition, as well as the piano music of African art composers. He supports Euba's view that piano works of non-African composers that utilize African music elements and idioms can also be seen as African pianism.

African pianism can manifest in various ways, depending on the individual pianist's or composer's view, training, and musical influences. It may involve incorporating syncopated rhythms, polyrhythms and percussive patterns inspired by African drumming traditions (Ofuani, 2014b). This possibly influenced the view of Onyeji (2008) as he gave it a different nomenclature, "Drummistic piano", seeing the piano as being able to depict the drumming styles and pattern of the Igbo music, with a closer attention on the left hand (Ofuani, 2014). He sought to infuse the piano, a Western instrument, with the energy, drive and rhythmic complexity associated with drumming in the Igbo music.

Another erudite scholar and an African composer who endorsed the concept of African pianism is Nketia. In citing examples from the playing techniques of the bells, xylophones, drums and mbiras, he describes African pianism as a piano music style that obtains its musical elements and idioms from African percussions (Nketia, 1994). He stressed on the fact that African pianism has no limit or barrier as to where it can get its techniques, idioms, and styles from, but that its modal and cadential characteristics are strictly of traditional music. He also stated that composers are not restricted to a particular style of composition as he/she can decide the mood and impressions to be created.

From the varied definitions from different scholars, it is safe to say that African pianism is a unique approach, techniques, and musical expressions employed by African music composers and pianists who draw inspiration from African musical traditions. It is a creative and inventive venture that seeks to incorporate and fuse elements of African music into piano music, resulting in a distinct style that reflects the cultural heritage and musical richness of the African continent.

African Music

The study of African music is vast, with definitions and interpretations that vary depending on the scholar's focus, context, and approach. Nketia (1974) defines African music as the organization of tones and rhythms crafted by Africans to reflect their unique societal structures. He emphasizes that African music is not monolithic but encompasses a broad array of musical practices and expressions found across the continent, each deeply tied to the cultural, social, and historical contexts of African societies.

Stone (1997) further elaborates on the complexity of African music by describing it as a rich interplay of rhythmic patterns, melodic structures, and vocal or instrumental expressions, which represent the diverse musical traditions of African ethnic groups. She identifies call-and-response forms, polyrhythms, and improvisation as key features of African music. In this view, music is not only for listening but is intricately connected to dance and communal interaction. Stone stresses that rhythm and dance are inseparable in African music, where movements are closely tied to the music, creating a strong synergy between the two (Stone, 2008).

Adding to this, Kubik (2010) and Agawu (2003) agree with Stone's assertion, underscoring the communal nature of African music. They point out that music in Africa is not merely an individual pursuit but a collective experience that fosters group interplay and community engagement. In African societies, music plays a pivotal role in social, religious, and ceremonial occasions, facilitating social cohesion and the transmission of cultural values and oral traditions.

Yes, both Agawu (2003) and Turino (2008) explore the idea that African music is not a monolithic tradition but rather an umbrella term for the rich and diverse musical practices across the African continent. These traditions are intricately connected to the cultural, social, and spiritual life of African communities. In particular, Agawu (2003) emphasizes that African music encompasses a vast array of styles, sounds, and practices, and it often plays a significant role in social communication, rituals, and community life. He explores the ways in which African music has historically been framed by outsiders, arguing for a more nuanced understanding of its complexity and richness. Turino (2008) also addresses the multifunctionality of African music, noting that it serves various roles beyond mere entertainment. It is used for communication (such as in talking drums), social bonding, storytelling, rituals, and other cultural expressions. Turino focuses on the ways in which music is embedded in everyday life and is closely intertwined with dance, language, and identity. Both scholars underscore that African music is an essential part of African cultural expression and cannot be fully understood without considering its broader cultural and social contexts.

In terms of the instruments and structural characteristics of African music, Nzewi (2012) highlights the polyrhythmic nature of the music, which often involves intricate layering of rhythms and the interplay of multiple percussion instruments. Nzewi points to the use of call-and-response patterns, improvisation, and vocal polyphony as key elements. He also emphasizes the importance of traditional African instruments like the drums, mbira, kora, balafon, and various stringed and wind instruments, which are central to the identity of African musical expression.

African music is a multifaceted and dynamic field, with its definitions shaped by the cultural, communal, and rhythmic contexts in which it is practiced. It not only serves artistic and entertainment purposes but also acts as a vital tool for cultural preservation, social unity, and communication.

Piano Music in Nigeria

The study of piano music in Nigeria provides a rich exploration of how a Western instrument has been adapted and integrated into Nigerian musical traditions. The piano, a keyboard instrument, produces sound by pressing keys that cause hammers to strike strings, offering players dynamic control over the volume and expression of the music. Kriger (2006) explains that the piano was introduced to Africa through the Western music tradition, while Ogisi (2008) expands on this by tracing the piano's introduction to Nigeria to returnees after the slave trade and those who had sojourned in various Western countries. These individuals, often through private coaching, taught and learned the piano, eventually integrating it into African music practices.

The establishment of colonial schools and the spread of Christianity indeed played a pivotal role in embedding Western classical music in Nigeria. As Sadoh (2010) and Nketia (1974) note, Western music education through colonial institutions introduced Nigerian students to European instruments like the piano and organ, along with teaching music theory, history, and performance techniques. The introduction of Western classical music into the Nigerian school curriculum fostered a blend of Western and Nigerian musical traditions, laying the foundation for the development of a unique musical culture. In these schools, students were exposed to the works of European composers such as J.S. Bach, G.F. Handel, W.A. Mozart, and Joseph Haydn. Concerts were often organized as part of their practical

assessments, which allowed students to showcase their skills in performing Western piano repertoire. This immersion in European musical traditions helped shape Nigeria's music education system and musical output, establishing piano music as a significant part of Nigeria's cultural and musical landscape.

The role of elite groups and military bands, as highlighted by Nketia (1974), was also crucial in promoting Western classical and piano music. These groups organized concerts, often featuring both vocal and instrumental music, and held performances in churches, public auditoriums, and at outdoor gatherings. These performances not only catered to the elite but also made piano music more accessible to the wider public, helping to popularize Western classical music in Nigeria.

The piano became deeply embedded in African music culture, evolving into a significant instrument for various musical genres. African musicians began incorporating it into different music styles, such as *chimurenga* music in Zimbabwe, *highlife*, which originated in Ghana and gained popularity in Nigeria, and Afrobeat, a Nigerian genre pioneered by Fela Kuti. These music styles blend traditional African rhythms and melodies with Western influences, with the piano playing a key role in bridging the two traditions.

The piano is seen as a universal instrument with the ability to convey feelings and interpret the essence of any musical culture. Eze (2022) underscores this idea by highlighting notable African pianists such as Thelonious Monk, Oscar Peterson, Ray Charles, and Scott Joplin, who used the piano to express their African heritage through their performances. Eze also references Onyeji's compositions, particularly *Oga* and *Ufie*, in which the composer reinterprets traditional Igbo dance and royal/sacred music on the piano, demonstrating how the instrument can find expression within African cultural frameworks.

In Nigeria, the piano has been a key instrument in concert music, especially in the performance of Western classical music. However, as Omojola (1995) notes, there was initially a disconnect between the music performed on the piano and traditional African music concepts, which posed challenges for the development of piano music performance in Nigeria. Despite this, the expressive and universal

nature of the piano allowed it to flourish in various settings, including solo performances, ensemble and orchestral performances, and piano concertos, sonatas, and chamber music.

Nigerian pianists have showcased the piano's technical and expressive capabilities, performing a wide repertoire of compositions that reflect both Western influences and, increasingly, African interpretations. The piano remains a versatile tool for musical expression, bridging cultural divides and enabling new interpretations of both Western and African music.

Over time, this interaction between Western music and indigenous Nigerian traditions led to a unique hybrid of musical styles, as Nigerian composers began to integrate elements of their cultural heritage into the European classical forms they had learned. This dynamic process has continued to shape the development of Nigerian music, including the emergence of African pianism as a distinct and important contribution to the global music scene.

Research Method

The researcher utilized both the qualitative and creative (performative) methods in obtaining data but specifically deployed the gestalt analysis in dissecting the pieces gathered. The first stage of the study involves the process of thinking and organizing the step-by-step activities needed to achieve the set and desired goal. Here the researcher looks to find answers to: what to do? How to do? For whom to do? And when to do? In getting these questions answered, the researcher initiated a sequence of procedures on how the data can be obtained, organized, and presented. The researcher begins by first selecting a topic that portrays the need to perform some African musicologists' piano works possessing the unique music trait of Africa. This spurred the search for piano works written and arranged in this light.

Method of Data Collection

In collecting data, the researcher made use of the primary sources consulting the internet and Youtube for African piano works (video clips and audio clips of live concert recordings as well as rehearsal sessions) and how it has been performed, which gave a better choice of pieces selected. The researcher also interacted one on

one, as well as through online interview with few of the African piano work composers creating a broader view or perspective of how the music came about, thereby contributing to a better understanding of the piece and revealing some facts and findings that influenced possible applicable solutions for further analysis. The researcher also made use of secondary sources of collecting data by consulting journals, composed piano works of music scholars, and literatures published by music scholars. Through these media, current pieces of information that improved the research were gathered. Materials that contained a detailed exposure to the strict rhythmic patterns and general structure of African music were obtained.

Sampling Technique

Since this research is on Nigerian Musicologists' piano works, the center of focus is drawn to Nigeria. Hence, the researcher randomly selects renowned scholars who are piano music composers not minding the cultural background the composer and/or the piano works represent. These composers were selected because they have been consistent in the act of composing African piano pieces. Also, in selecting the pieces, the researcher looked out for piano compositions that possess African music elements and idioms such as strong rhythmic and metric complexity, polyrhythms, call and response forms, extended syncopations, etc. the choice of pieces selected was hinged on the fact that they are difficult and challenging.

Practice and Rehearsal

The sole aim of the performer, as far as this study is concerned, is to promote African musicologists' piano works in concert. This research seeks to demonstrate this in a performance concert bringing the selected music pieces to the knowledge and awareness of the audience as well as establishing a demonstration of the study topic. Here, the researcher engaged in a scheduled three-hour daily practice routine, that is twenty-one hours weekly, to enable an adequate preparation for the proposed concert. Before every rehearsal, the researcher engaged in some etudes, which would help in improving his skills and mastery of fingers on the piano.

Although the rehearsal was scheduled, there were hinderances and challenges faced by the researcher (performer). The first is the unstable power supply, as well as the difficulty in regularly purchasing gas (fuel) to power the generator, which made practice very irregular and quite frustrating. While practice went on, some observations were taken note of. One of which is the fact that hunger deters practice in that the performer easily lost strength and energy physically which made the fingers to be shaky and not firm on the keys, and psychologically leading to loss of concentration. So, a performer will have to eat properly to be able to effectively play the piano. The researcher also observed that the early hours of the day (between 12am and 4am) are better for rehearsals because distraction is highly minimal.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The following African piano works were selected for the purpose of this study: "Ukom" composed by Joshua Uzoigwe; "Ufie" by Christian Onyeji; and "Phases of Life" by Sunday Ofuani,

Ukom

This piece is composed for the piano by Joshua Uzoigwe in 1992 and is accompanied by an optional woodblock timeline rhythm pattern. It is 182 bars long and takes about ten (10) minutes to perform.

***Meter and Tempo*:** The piece is written in compound quadruple time, (12/8). It has a tempo of M.M = 112. This tempo continues until bar 74^{b} where there is a *sub. piu. rit.,* and lasts till bar 76. At bar 77, the original tempo is restored till the end of the piece.

***Tonality*:** This piece has a minor tonality of A-minor. It began with the wood block and the left hand on the piano and was joined by the right hand at bar 2. The composer also made use of pentatonic scales.

***Dynamics*:** The dynamic levels employed in this piece are *pianissimo (p, pp), mezzo piano (mp), forte (f), mezzo forte (mf), fortissimo (ff, fff), crescendo, diminuendo, simile* and *sub.* They are applied in the work as follows. The piece begins without any dynamics marking until bar 8 where the piano plays *piano (p).* From bar 9 to bar 56

the piano plays *mezzo forte (mf)* and then bar 57 introduces the *pianissimo (pp)* to bar 64. The piano plays *mezzo forte (mf)* at bar 65 until bar 69 when the music transits to *piano (p)*. Bar 71 introduces the *mezzo piano (mp)* which lasts until bar 74 where it becomes *forte (f)*. The piano begins bar 77 with *mezzo forte (mf)* which is sustained to bar 104, and at bar 105 the music is played *piano (p)* until bar 109. Bar 110 continues with *mezzo forte (mf)* to bar 121. The piano plays *forte (f)* at bar 122 which then changes to *piano (p)* at bar 127, and suddenly switches to *forte (f)* at bar 128. It again immediately switches back to *piano (p)* at bar 129 lasting till the first part of bar 131^{a}. *Forte (f)* begins at the end of bar 131^{b} and changes to *piano (p)* at bar 133. The end of bar 135^{b} continues with *forte (f)* bringing the music to *piano (p)* at bar 137. The end of bar 139^{b} shows the music yet again on *forte (f)* until the end of bar 141^{b} where *fortissimo (ff)* is introduced. The piano resumes on *forte (f)* at bar 147 until the end of bar 156^{b} where it switches to *mezzo forte (mf).* At the beginning of bar 108, the music continues with *forte (f)* and the music came to a climax as the end of bar 108 assumed the *fortissimo (fff).*

Diminuendo is applied in the piece at bars 51 to 52, 58 to 59, the end of bar 114^{b} to 121, 124 to 126, the end of bar 143^{b} to 146, and finally from 149 to 151. *Crescendo* is applied at bars 53 to 56, 71 to 73, the end of bar 139^{b} to 141, 155 to the first part of bar 156^{a}), and finally at bar 180.

***Range*:** The lowest note in this piano piece is C_2 which is applied at bars 73 and bar 155, while its highest note is B_6 and is applied in bars 141 and 142.

***Ornaments*:** The use of acciaccatura is employed to decorate tones at bars 39, 40, 171, and 172.

Ufie

This piece is a rhythmic representation of an Igbo dance and is composed for the piano by Onyeji Christian. It is made up of three (3) movements namely: Ufie I, Ufie II, and Ufie III.

Ufie I: This movement is 212 bars long, and it takes about eight (8) minutes to play. ***Meter and Tempo:*** The piece is written in compound quadruple time, (12/8). It has a tempo of 'Moderately fast' as indicated by the composer. This tempo continues

until bar 25 where there is an increase in tempo (*piu mosso*), and a *ritimico* mark emphasizing precise and strong rhythm, this continues till bar 58 where there is a little slow down (*poco rit*). At bar 59, the normal tempo of the piece is established which lasts till bar 101 where the tempo becomes less quick than the original tempo (*meno mosso*). The music slowed down a little once again at bar 161 and re-establishes the original tempo at the next bar. Allargando is established at bar 175 where the song gradually slows down until bar 192 where the original tempo is restored. At bar 211, the piece observes a slowdown in tempo (*ritardando*) which leads to a cadence at the next and final bar.

***Tonality*:** This piece has a minor tonality in the key of A-minor.

***Dynamics*:** The dynamics applied in the work are: *mezzo forte (mf), mezzo piano (mp), piano (p), forte (f), fortissimo (ff), crescendo, diminuendo, ritimico, cantabile,* and are used in the work as follows.

The music begins with a *mezzo forte (mf)* which terminates at bar 9. At bars 10 to 12, the music goes slightly reduced in volume with the *mezzo piano (mp)* marking, and then drops even more at bar 13 to a *piano (p).* The music rises at bar 14 immediately to *mezzo forte (mf)*, and even louder with a *forte (f)* marking at bar 15. *Mezzo forte (mf)* takes effect at the second part of bar 16^{b} and lasts till the first part of bar 18^{a}, with the *mezzo piano (mp)* flowing through bars 18^{b} to 22. At bars 23 to 57, the music is *mezzo forte (mf)* while ending bar 58 with *piano (p).* The music goes on with bars 59 to 63 on *mezzo forte (mf),* and 64 to 66 on *mezzo piano (mp).* It continues at bar 67 with the *piano (p)* and lasting till bar 88, while bars 89 to 100 comes out loud (*forte, f*).

Between bars 101 and 117, the music is moderately loud (*mezzo forte, mf*), which drops in volume to *mezzo piano (mp)* running through bars 118 to 160, and ending bar 161 with a *piano (p)*. Bars 162 to 188 utilizes the *mezzo forte (mf)* and ending bar 191 with a *piano (p).* the music returns to *mezzo forte (mf)* from bars 192 to 201, and much louder at bar 202 with *forte (f).* From bars 203 to the first part of 205^{a}, the music is *mezzo forte (mf)*, while from the second part of bar 205^{b} to bar 209, the music is *mezzo piano (mp),* becoming loud (*forte, f*) at bar 210 and very loud (*fortissimo, ff*) at bar 211. The music comes to an end at bar 212 with the *piano (p).*

Crescendo is utilized by the composer at bars 14, 56, 189, and 210, while the *diminuendo* is utilized at bars 15^{b} to 16^{a}, 58, 161, 191, and finally at 211. The composer also utilized the *Cantabile* effect to depict a singable melody which appeared from bars 131) to 160.

***Range*:** The lowest note in the piece is D_1 which is applied at the very last bar 212, while the highest note is D^7 which is applied at bars 15, 137, 138, 160, 191, and 202.

Ufie II: This movement is 52 bars long, and it takes about seven (7) minutes to perform.

***Meter and Tempo*:** The piece is written in compound quadruple time, (12/8). It has a tempo of 'slow' with '*quasi ad lib'* as indicated by the composer. This tempo continues until bar 4 where there is a little slow down (*poco rit*), and goes back to the original tempo, and yet again slows down gradually at bar 6. At bar 10, the tempo becomes faster a bit (*piu mosso*) and immediately at the end of same bar slows down gradually (*poco rit*), and then *ritardando* at bar 12. The original tempo is re-established and runs through until bar 26 where the tempo yet again becomes a little faster than the original temple (*piu mosso*) and at the end of same bar reduces gradually and finally comes to *ritardando* at bar 28. The music continues the normal tempo at bar 29 which lasts until bar 49 where the composer effected the *subito* indicating a sudden change in temple, making it faster. Bar 50 brings the music back to its original tempo and finally comes to an end with a gradual decrease in tempo, which the composer represents with the *rallentando.*

***Tonality*:** This piece is centered on two different tonalities. The first is A-minor which ends at bar 28. The composer then utilized the modulation at bar 29 changing the tonality to E-flat minor. This process is to create variation and emotional depth.

***Dynamics*:** The music begins with the *piano (p)* and at bar 3 becomes moderately soft *(mezzo piano, mp),* which sooner becomes soft *(piano, p)* at the second part of bar 4. Bar 5 continues with the *mezzo piano (mp)* which suddenly drops in volume at the last chord of bar 6 to *piano (p).* Bar 7 yet resumes with the *mezzo piano (mp)* till bar 9 where the music goes soft (*piano, p*) with the piano playing light (*Leggiero*).

At the middle of bar 10, the *mezzo forte (mf)* is utilized, while at bar 11, the music goes soft (*piano, p*), leaving the music at *pianissimo (pp)* and a temporary pause.

The music continues at bar 13 with the *piano (p),* and at bar 14 the *mezzo forte (mf)* is used, while bar 16 utilizes the *mezzo piano (mp)* lasting till bar 24. At bar 25, the music observes *pianissimo (pp),* and *mezzo forte (mf)* at the middle of bar 26. Bar 27 brings the music to *piano (p),* and *pianissimo (pp)* at bar 28. The music continues at bar 29 softly until the middle of bar 33 where the composer utilizes the *mezzo piano (mp)* maintaining it till bar 48. At bar 49, the composer initiates a sudden loud (*sub.forte, Sf*) dynamics. The music continues at bar 50 with the *mezzo piano (mp)* and finishes at bar 52 with a *pianissimo (pp).*

Diminuendo is applied in the piece at bars 4, 8, second half of 10, 16, 17, 19, 21, 26, and 52. Also, the *crescendo* is applied at bars 3, 7, 10, 15, 17, 18, 21, and 26.
***Range*:** The lowest note in this piece is C_1 shown in bars 2, 11, 12, 13, 27, and 28. While the highest note of the piece is $D\#^7$ shown in bar 4.

Ufie III: The third movement is 86 bars long, and it takes about five (5) minutes to play.

Meter and Tempo: The piece is written in simple duple meter, (2/4). It has a tempo of 'fast' as indicated by the composer, as well as a *ritimico* marking implying a precise, strong, and driving rhythm. This tempo continues until bar 82 where the composer effects *poco rall* to imply a subtle and moderate decrease in tempo bringing it to a final stop.

***Tonality*:** This piece has a minor tonality of A-minor.
***Dynamics*:** The dynamic levels used by the composer in this piece are *mezzo forte (mf), forte (f), fortissimo (ff),* and *crescendo, and are applied in the work as follows:* The piece begins on a moderate volume until bar 12 when the dynamics becomes *forte (f).* This is sustained till bar 82 where the composer utilizes the *mezzo forte (mf),* which gradually climbs to *forte (f)* at bar 84, and lastly *fortissimo (ff)* at bar 85 bringing the music to an end at bar 86. The composer also utilized *Crescendo* at bar 82 which built up the volume to its peak at the very last bar of the piece.

***Range*:** The lowest note of this piece is C_2 shown in bars 82, and 86, while the highest note is D^7 shown in bars 85 and 86.

Phases of Life

This piece is composed for the piano by Sunday Ofuani in the year 2014. As its title implies, it musically narrates the stages a human being passes through from birth to death as it is sectioned into eight parts labelled A to H, and tagged as follows: A - Herald of birth; B – Childhood; C - Youthful days; D – Adulthood; E – Manhood; F - Old age; G – Death; and H – Herald of death.
It is 210 bars long and takes about ten (10) minutes to perform.

***Meter and Tempo*:** The piece is written in compound quadruple time, (6/8). It has a tempo of one dotted crotchet = 60. This tempo continues till the end of the piece and in the researcher's opinion, subject to self-interpretation of tempo depending on the mood with regards to the particular phase of life. Except for bar 185 which has a fermata on the very last note of the "old age" phase which could depict quietness in transition to death. The fermata also appears on the very last note of the music.

***Tonality*:** This piece has a bitonality of F-major and D-minor.

***Dynamics*:** The dynamic levels employed in this piece include *pianissimo (p), mezzo piano (mp), forte (f), mezzo forte (mf), fortissimo (ff), crescendo,* and *diminuendo.* They are applied in the work as follows. The piece begins with the *mezzo piano (mp)* from bar 1 to 4 and then introduces the *forte (f)* at bar 5 and lasts till bar 11. The music returns to the *mezzo piano (mp)* at bar 12 till bar 15, and then *mezzo forte (mf)* at bars 16 and 17. At bars 18 and 19, the *forte (f)* is utilized while bars 20 to 25 utilizes *mezzo piano (mp).* The *mezzo forte (mf)* begins the 26th bar and interrupts at bar 27, progressing in dynamics to *forte (f)* at bar 28 till bar 32. At bar 33, the *piano (p)* is introduced for the first time in the piece and takes up a bit in dynamics to *mezzo piano (mp)* at bars 37 and 38, and yet again a little bit louder using *mezzo forte (mf)* at bars 39 and 40. The music continues with *forte(f)* at bars 41 and 42 and then introduces the *fortissimo (ff)* for the first time in the piece at bar 43 and lingers till bar 50. The volume drops abruptly at bars 51 to 53 utilizing the *piano (p),* and bars

57 to 60 having the *mezzopiano (mp)*. The music resumes with *mezzo forte (mf)* at bars 61 to 62, and *forte (f)* at bars 63 to 70.

The "adulthood phase" begins with *mezzo forte (mf)* at bars 71 to the first part of 92^a, which later drops to *mezzo piano (mp)* at the second part of bar 92^b. The music becomes very loud with *fortissimo (ff)* at bars 94 through 97. It dropped slightly in volume to *forte (f)* at bar 98 till 111, and yet again dropped to *mezzo piano (mp)* at bar 112. Sustaining a steady volume of *forte (f)* from bars 114 till 168, the composer gradually drops the volume to *piano (p)* at bar 169 and remains till bar 174. The music continues at bar 175 through 182 with the mezzo *forte (mf),* and increases very slightly to *forte (f)* from bars 183 to 185 where a slight pause occurs. The composer introduces the "death phase" lightly with a *piano (p)* at bars 186 to 200 and ends the piece sustaining the *forte (f)* vigorously from bar 201 till 210.

Diminuendo is applied in the piece at bars 1 to the first part of 5^a, 33 to 34, 35 to 36, 53 to 55^a, the second part of 55^b to 57^a, the second part of 92^b to 93, and 112) to 113). *Crescendo* is applied at only bars 167 to 168.

***Range*:** The lowest note in this piano piece is F_1 which is applied at bar one 162, while its highest note is C_7 and is applied in bar 147.

***Ornaments*:** The use of acciaccatura is employed to decorate tones at bars 95 and the first part of 96.

***Articulations*:** The composer utilized three articulations which are legato, staccato, and accent. The *legato,* which is applied at only bars 186 to 200. Staccato was applied at bars 12, 28, 29, 85, 86, 87, 88, and 97, the accent appeared in almost every part of the piece and was used by the composer to further emphasize rhythm.

Summary

This study emphasizes the intercultural potential of the piano, specifically its ability to express African musical traditions. It aims to showcase the effectiveness of the piano as a medium for conveying the African musical sense and expression while encouraging art music enthusiasts to appreciate and engage with African

piano works. Additionally, the research seeks to inspire African composers to create more piano compositions that integrate African music idioms and elements.

The theoretical foundation of the study is based on the Intercultural Musicology theory, developed by Akin Euba (1935–2020) in 1970. Euba's theory explores the interaction, exchange, and fusion of musical traditions from various cultures. It underscores the piano's versatility and expressiveness, suggesting that the instrument can serve as a bridge for fusing elements from different musical cultures, such as folk melodies and rhythms, into piano compositions. This theory frames the piano as not only a Western instrument but also a tool for cross-cultural musical exploration.

The study also delves into the historical introduction of concert practice into Africa, particularly Nigeria, which was largely influenced by returnees from Sierra Leone after the abolition of the slave trade in the mid-19th century. These returnees played a significant role in bringing Western concert traditions to Nigeria, marking the beginning of formalized Western music practices in the region.

To achieve the primary objective of the study, the authors collected African piano works composed by scholars using African musical idioms and elements. These works were analyzed based on key musical features such as tonality, meter and tempo, dynamics, range, and ornamentation. Following this analysis, a concert program was curated and performed, showcasing the ability of the piano to effectively convey African musical traditions while blending with Western classical forms. This study underscores the piano's potential as a powerful medium for cultural fusion and encourages both the performance and composition of piano music that reflects the rich musical heritage of Africa.

Conclusion

The study concludes that while the piano is traditionally recognized as a Western musical instrument, integral to Western orchestras, bands, and solo performances, it has demonstrated its effectiveness in conveying African musical expression. This conclusion is supported by the analysis of piano compositions that incorporate African idioms and elements, gathered and studied by the researcher. These

compositions prove that the piano can serve as a powerful medium for interpreting and expressing African musical narratives.

One of the key features of African music highlighted in the study is its storytelling ability, often reflecting daily activities or cultural practices. The study showcases how the piano can interpret these narratives, as seen in works like Onyeji's "*Ufie*", which captures the essence of a traditional Igbo dance, and Onyeji's "*Oga*", which portrays the maidens' dance. Through these examples, the piano successfully bridges African cultural expression with Western musical form, reaffirming its versatility as an instrument capable of cross-cultural interpretation.

Findings

It was observed that: (1) African piano works composed by African musicologists are up to standard and can be performed in concerts and (2) African piano works are not meant for the traditional setting alone as elites in big cities who are culture friendly attend concerts featuring these works.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are made to further promote and showcase the rich musical heritage of African music through the piano: (1) African composers should be encouraged to write more works that incorporate African music idioms, rhythms, and themes. This would help create a wider and more diverse repertoire of African piano works, ensuring that African cultural expressions continue to thrive within the realm of art music. (2) Piano performers in Africa should seek to familiarize themselves with their own cultural and musical traditions by staging concerts that feature African piano works. This would significantly contribute to the projection, promotion, and expansion of African art music, raising its profile and accessibility both locally and globally. (3) Both composers and performers should strive to maintain a strong link with their traditional music by incorporating indigenous materials and musical elements into their compositions and performances. This balance between tradition and modernity would help prevent the overshadowing of African music by Western influences and ensure that African musical heritage remains vibrant and relevant in contemporary settings.

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