

Compositional Utilisation of Indigenous Music Features in Selected Contemporary Nigerian Art Music

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Abstract

The pieces studied for this research are works by some contemporary Nigerian composers who are creatively consistent in their various interests and specialisation areas of nationalistic composition. The selected Nigerian art music works were dissected using a qualitative approach through analysis to divulge the indigenous music materials, elements, and concepts utilised by the composers. Although pioneer Nigerian art music composers were stylistically and idiomatically more Western, through cultural reawakening, creative reorientation, and the struggle for national identity, the contemporary composers became more engaged in experimenting, forging, and nurturing art music indigenisation through the adoption of intercultural creative approach.

Keywords: Contemporary Nigerian art music, composition, composers, nationalism, indigenous features

Introduction

A country or people that clamour for nationalism or indigenisation in its approach to life activities are a reflection of those who have been under the external influence/dependence on alien products or practices. Nigeria's art music composition is among the facets that external (European) forces have culturally and creatively influenced. Through Christian missionaries, Western education, colonialism, and military bands, their art music, known as classical music, was instituted, consumed, and enjoyed by Nigerians (Omojola, 1995, p. 11; Ofuani, 2022: 212-214). By assimilation, acceptance, or imposition, it became influential among music scholars who pioneered the emergence of art music composition in Nigeria (Onyeji, 2011: 8).

Underpinning concepts

In contemporary Nigeria, there have been reorientations for compositional nationalism/ indigenisation. Through cultural reawakening and the struggle for national identity, the composers became more engaged in experimenting, forging, and nurturing Nigerian art music indigenisation through an "intercultural approach" (Euba, 1989; Kimberlin & Euba, 1995: 3; Emama, 2022; Ofuani, 2022). Some of the composers achieved this by a fusion of Western and indigenous musical materials such as folk songs, folk music idioms/elements (rhythm, melody, harmony, form and structure), and indigenous musical instrument resources. All of these are harnessed, subject to an individual composer's creative style and inventiveness. The nationalism of music composition in Nigeria is not controlled by the utilisation of indigenous musical materials and concepts as Western music elements and instruments are integrated into the art. Thus, "intercultural creativity" (Ofuani, 2022) is a normal phenomenon as there is no human cultural entity, even those of developed countries, that does not depend on others for its dynamism, growth, and betterment (Euba, 1989, p. 115).

Proportional contents of indigenous elements in a composition should be a significant determinant in evaluating the indigenosity of a work. For example, a Nigerian

composer's work with a high proportion of Western idioms and insignificant/sporadic indigenous features could be considered "exotic Western art music" or "Western art music of African composers" (Euba, 1975, p. 46). A compositional development or dynamism informed by the spirit of "nationalism"/ "indigenisation" mutually allows the "old" (indigenous music elements) to dominantly infuse with the "new" (Western classical music tradition or other musical culture of the world) towards its relevance and appreciation by the immediate Nigerian audience as well as the global society.

Data collection

Musical scores that form the primary data of this study are sampled from contemporary Nigerian art music works that are stylistically and idiomatically nationalistic in concepts and contents. The pieces are works by Nigerian composers who are creatively consistent within their various interests and specialisation areas of compositional nationalism. The discourse evaluates/divulges indigenous features in some of the composers' works. Aural listening and observation tools were also explored by the writer for some nationalistic works by Nigerian composers, such as the works by Akin Euba, Okechukwu Ndubuisi, Laz Ekwueme, Joshua Uzoigwe, Debo Akinwunmi, Sam Ojukwu, Dan Agu, Emurobome Idolor, Christian Onyeji, and so on. For creative illustrations and examples, relevant references are made to some contemporary Nigerian art music works with a considerable focus on published compositions.

Analytical Discussion

The conscious desire for creative distillation and expression of indigenous music features are the principal factors that shaped compositional indigenisation in Nigeria. The composers, being aware of the supremacy of socio-cultural identity in the search for a creative autograph, decided to utilise the musical idioms and materials of their respective musical cultures through "creative ethno/musicology" and "intercultural musicology" approaches (Euba, 1989), which Onyeji (2005:105) similarly calls "research composition." Through these research-creative procedures, the composers can collect, reposition, and reinvent Nigerian folksongs; study and simulate indigenous music types/genres; collect and proliferate indigenous music idioms, styles, and techniques; study and utilise indigenous musical instruments resources; cultivate indigenous musical instruments' timbre and "melo-rhythmic" (Nzewi, 1974) orientations via foreign instruments – the piano for example; create indigenous lyrics for their vocal music; approach their creative works vis-à-vis indigenous music concepts and; coin feasible intelligible musical notation semiotics with which they notate/express indigenous features in written tradition.

Reposition and reinvention of Nigerian folksongs

Nigerian folk songs are the foremost indigenous musical materials from which most composers adapted native elements in their works. Arrangements of Nigerian folksongs abound either for the vocal or instrumental medium or both. Notable in this creative movement are composers such as Okechukwu Ndubuisi (see Ofuani 2022), Akin Euba, Felix Nwuba, Joshua Uzoigwe, Dan Agu, Emurobome Idolor, Christian Onyeji, Alvan-Ikoku Nwamara, this author, and so on. The most significant creative concern of these and other composers is to reposition and reinvent folksongs or indigenous tunes to modern art music fashion, which is often generally intercultural. For example, folk songs are often arranged for solo voice or SATB chorus in fusion with Western music elements, especially regarding harmony and the piano as an accompaniment medium, which is a straightforward intercultural approach. Folksong,

as a cultural entity, bears the sonic and idiomatic identities of the immediate ethnic society. These repositioned or arranged folksongs often inspire indigenous stimulus even though they are interculturally recreated.

Ofuani (2012; 2022) observes that Okechukwu Ndubuisi (O’Ndu) was a devoted arranger of Nigerian folksong, particularly those of the Igbos. Aside from his numerous unpublished folksong arrangements, which span across various Nigerian ethnic spaces, some publications of Nigerian folksong arrangements for solo voice with piano accompaniment are located in Toffolon & Nzewi (1980), Ekwueme (1995a & 1995b), Nwamara (2007), Onyeji (2008a), Ofuani (2016). Some folksongs were arranged for the orchestra, some for the military bands, and some for solo instruments with piano accompaniment; for example, see "Fri mi" for the flute with piano accompaniment by Akpakpan (2011: 9-14).

So far, the composers have achieved creative nationalism through the modernistic repositioning of indigenous folksongs and the socio-cultural norms/values and philosophies therein, thereby imbuing aboriginal songs with contemporaneous idioms and globally accessible means towards asserting Nigerian art music identity. The art of folksong arrangement among Nigerian composers is most importantly motivated by the "change and continuity" force. Folksongs that would have been forgotten or neglected given the contemporary lifestyle have been recreated and creatively documented in tune with modern socio-cultural realities, with their preservation for posterity enhanced. Against the erstwhile rural performance contexts, which are limited in coverage, the arranged versions are now performed worldwide in educational contexts, contemporary ceremonies, public concerts, and the electronic media, which are gradually replacing Western vocal art music performances in some parts of Nigeria. Through this creative approach, Western classical music tradition has creatively metamorphosed in the hands of Nigerian composers. Folksong arrangement art is, therefore, creatively and performatively dynamic and relevant in Nigeria. It has received compositional attention as well as significant appreciation, at least by the immediate ethnic audience. Consequently, numerous Nigerian folk songs of various ethnic nationalities abound. However, numerous folksongs of different ethnic groups in Nigeria are yet to be repositioned/reinvented through this process.

Simulation of indigenous music types/genres

Contemporary Nigerian composers are also creatively engaged in the simulation of musical traits that are peculiar to some indigenous music types (ensembles). This approach is investigative, experimental, and creative in procedure. It is usually carried out by specialised composers who are committed to experimenting and forging new indigenous art music based on "creative ethno/musicology" (Euba, 1989) or "research-composition" concept (Onyeji, 2005: 250) in which a composer undertakes scholarly research on indigenous music (ensemble) and collects the relevant musical materials/elements that are associated with it. With this, the researcher-composer creatively experiments and forges modern art music works. Thus, the indigenous music ensemble is a critical factor in drawing inspiration for such compositions. This approach to composition is more utilised in instrumental than vocal works, especially for the piano in tandem with "African pianism" (Euba, 1999) or "drumstick piano" (Onyeji, 2008b) concept/style. This is because the "melo-rhythmic" (Nzewi, 1974) and percussive traits of African instruments are easily realised through the piano, which already possesses appreciable sonic characteristics that are analogous to some

African musical instruments such as the various membrane drums, metal bells as well as Igbo xylophone etc. (Omojola, 1995).

In recent times, this creative approach has received significant attention among professional composers and undergraduate/postgraduate students specialising in composition. Reference must be made to works in “African pianism” or “drummistic piano” style, such as Akin Euba’s “Scenes from Traditional Life”; Joshua Uzoigwe’s “Ukom” and “Egwu amala”; Christian Onyeji’s “Oga”, “Ufie”, “Ohaofia war dance” as well as “Abigbo for the modern symphony.” The works are all entitled to the names of the simulated prototypes. For example, “Ukom” by Joshua Uzoigwe was informed by the “ukom” music of the Mbaise/Igbo people. Among others, the most significant indigenous elements replicated in the music are melo-rhythmic nuances, scale structures, and harmonic styles obtained from the respective ensembles that inspired the compositions.

Creative proliferation of indigenous music idioms, styles, techniques, and concepts

Some contemporary Nigerian works that are not explicitly based on folksong arrangement/reinvention nor simulation of a specific indigenous music ensemble are, at least, appreciably endowed with indigenous music idioms and styles. For example, some of the composers explore African pianism concepts and African melo/rhythmic nuances such as hemiola, rhythmic-counterpoint, syncopation, instrument's orientation rhythm, and speech-rhythm of the word. “African vocalism” (Onyeji, 2008a) style such as glissando, shout, fast-rolling of the tongue, heaving, whistling, and yodelling; African forms and structures such as 'call and response', solo and refrain; African harmonic and polyphonic styles such as duplication/imitation of a primary melody, hocket technique, movement of voices in parallel motion arising from obedience to word's tonal structure (see Ofuani, 2022b for details on tone language in music composition/perception). For example, the piece “Eghele akpo oben eruo” by Emurobome Idolor is based on an indigenous harmonic style. In the piece, continuous parallel fourths between soprano and alto parts versus perpetual parallel fourths between tenor and bass parts were crafted in persistent overlapping "call and response," which perceptively reflects traditional Okpe harmonic style:

Fig. 1: Excerpt from “Eghele akpo oben eruo” elucidating parallel fourths harmony technique

Moreover, in Idolor’s (2008: 1-13) another piece, "Glory Hallelujah to His Name", he deployed a strict pentatonic harmony, which is a creative advancement of African pentatonic tonal structure that was melodically utilised in the traditional settings:

Fig. 2: Opening bars of “Glory hallelujah to His name” showing a strict pentatonic harmony

The creative proliferation of these indigenous music idioms, styles, and concepts can be found in choral and solo works by Ayo Bankole, Akin Euba, Dan Agu (1998), Idolor (2008), Nwamara (2007), Onyeji (2008a), Ofuani (2016), Dan Agu’s works in Adedeji & Nwamara (2017), and many others. The proliferated indigenous elements sonically and melo-rhythmically imbue the music as Nigerian, even though they are intercultural in content. Sam Ojukwu’s choral works also fit as an example of an intercultural approach, but in essence, his compositions still reflect some level of indigenous orientation in performance.

Onyeji (2008a) distillates a significant proportion of African vocalism style/technique in his solo songs. He explored some body effects/sonics, such as foot-stamping and chest-beating, in the music and simulated Igbo membrane drums and metal bells (*ogene*) via the piano, which serves as an accompaniment to the songs. Parallel to Euba's “African pianism” concept, Onyeji (2008b) terms the style of his piano accompaniments “drummistic piano” while the vocal music is “African vocalism.”

Generally, these and related compositions by other Nigerian composers are intercultural, but in performance, the aural perception is more indigenous than Western. Thus, through the creative proliferation of indigenous music idioms, styles, and concepts, Nigerian composers can propagate native elements in their works even as they consistently find it inevitable/challenging to avoid the fusion of Western music elements and media.

Utilisation of indigenous musical instrument resources

Contemporary Nigerian composers explore indigenous musical instrument resources in many capacities. In some cases, a composition is solely for indigenous instruments, for example, “Edi Edise” by Issac Udoh (2017: 31-39). In other cases, they are combined with Western instruments, for example, “Dance of Seven Spirits” by Ogisi (2010), “Ekpo Spirit Manifest” by Johnson Akpakpan (2011b); the orchestral works by Layade (2017) and “Jolly” for Western and African instruments by Ofuani (2018: 24-36). More frequently, indigenous musical instruments are utilised as accompaniment of vocal music (solo or chorale), for example, Agu (1998: 1-22 and 47-72), Ofuani (2016: 16-24), Dan Agu in Adedeji & Nwamara (2017: 158-170), Idolor’s “Enyeren Kugbe”. However, some composers rarely score for indigenous instruments even when it is implicitly meant to accompany the composed vocal music. As the accompaniment is often tacit, some Nigerian performers usually understand how to incorporate the instruments in the performance even when the composer did not score for them. Apart from African performers, a complete recital of works with such deficiency may not be feasible as far as the instrumental accompaniment is concerned. Consequently, it cannot be strongly affirmed that indigenous instrumental

accompaniment of vocal art music is empirically and effectively featured in the scores of most Nigerian composers. (Ofuani 2015: 69-70). Undeniably, indigenous instruments have greatly assisted in promoting, enhancing, and surviving the composers' nationalistic movement.

Vocal surrogate of indigenous instruments' melo-rhythmic orientation

Some Nigerian composers surrogate indigenous instruments' melo-rhythmic characteristics in their vocal music. This is creatively mirrored for the human voice in such a way that the melo-rhythmic traits of the replicated instruments are unmistakably perceived. Thus, this technique serves as instrumental vocalisation. In some Nigerian works, the technique is the sole basis; other times, it is sporadically fused as a kind of effect, embellishment, or accompaniment. For example, in "Glory Hallelujah to His Name" by Emurobome Idolor (2008: 1-13), vocal surrogates of various indigenous instruments' Melo-rhythmic orientations were creatively utilised in the SATB parts that serve as quasi-instrumental accompaniment to the lyrical solo voice.

Creation of indigenous lyrics/texts

In Sub-Saharan Africa, musical arts traditions, language, poetry, and music are analogous. Nigerian vocal works are textually designed to parallel oral folk arts through the appropriation of indigenous poetic features, which include imageries, sound syllables or poetic fill-up syllables, various figures of speeches, and proverbs; imagery techniques are poetically harnessed to illustrate prevailing themes. For example, "Chineke doo" by Sam Ojukwu is replete with poetic imageries and indigenous proverbs, which heighten both the textual aesthetics and philosophical depth of the messages/music. One of the metaphoric imageries, "kpọ kpọ lọ pi jom", is an impressionistic syllable which images an empty vessel that tumbles and makes a loud noise. In Igbo socio-cultural context (where the song originates), "kpọ kpọ lọ pi jom" suggests a state of instability, unpleasant situation, emptiness, or scam. It was employed in the music to poetically image the unstable state of Nigeria in a masked expression. More so, one of the proverbs in the textual music, "Onye gafesi' o gwe: O si' o gwe jisisia, kpm kpm" (When one crosses the bridge, he/she tells the bridge to collapse, completely) analogously illustrates how leaders in the country destroy the systems that made them so that others would not benefit after them.

Some of the composers – as Nigerians who directly/indirectly partake in the social, cultural, religious, economic, and political realities in the country – are creatively engaged in recreating their life experiences, observations, beliefs, joys, and philosophies in their textual music. The vocal works poetically tell Nigerian stories using indigenous literary idioms and socio-cultural philosophies to fortify their vocal music. Generally, the texts/lyrics are thematically associated with the cultural, religious, social, political, economic, moral, patriotic, and sensational issues regarding either a supreme being, individuals, groups, people, ethnic groups, religious worship, or the country at large. For example, textual contents of Nigerian indigenous church music compositions are dedicated to the supreme God regarding Christian religion worship. Sam Ojukwu's "Ma ekele diri Chineke", Debo Akinwomi's "E korin iyin si Olorun", and Emurobome Idolor's "Glory Hallelujah to His name" are some examples of works in this category. The texts in Sunday Ofuani's "Chief B.S.C. Elue" and "The Right Reverend Doctor R.N.C. Nwosu" are based on the life stories of individuals; Okechukwu Ndubuisi's "Ozu-Item obodo mu" is based on Ozu-Item people in Abia

State where he hailed from. Joe Onyekwelu's "Reconciliation" is a folk opera based on Igbo social context. Sam Ojukwu's "Chineke doo", Dan Agu's "I am proud to be a Nigerian", Emurobome Idolor's "Nigeria, otore Ose owan", and Sunday Ofuani's "Put a k'anyi dozie obodo anyi" are based on Nigeria as a country.

Holistic utility of indigenous musical-arts concept

Some Nigerian music composers initiate communal tendencies in their compositions, especially in the area of group music-making. Nigerian folk operas such as Joe Onyekwelu's "Reconciliation" are based on indigenous musical arts concepts. Through this approach, holistic appropriation of indigenous art disciplines such as poetry, drama, dance, instrumentation, costume, and cultural theatres (festivals) is made possible in Nigerian art music works. However, other musical arts facets proposed in a given folk opera are often not noted; here again, the required instrumentation and dance steps often need to be scored. With reference to the musical arts concept, Ofuani (2016: 45-48, 49-52, 53-58, and 59-64) integrates folktale narrative and solo folksong arrangement, wherein the accompanying narratives stimulate communal impetus in performance.

Particular/indigenous music notation semiotics

For adequate appropriation of indigenous music materials and elements in written form, Nigerian composers as individuals devise notational semiotics. This is because some indigenous sound effects and melo-rhythmic figurations, such as heaving, indefinite pitch, and ululation, require distinct semiotics for effective interpretation. For example, Onyeji (2008a) is replete with particular semiotics, which include:

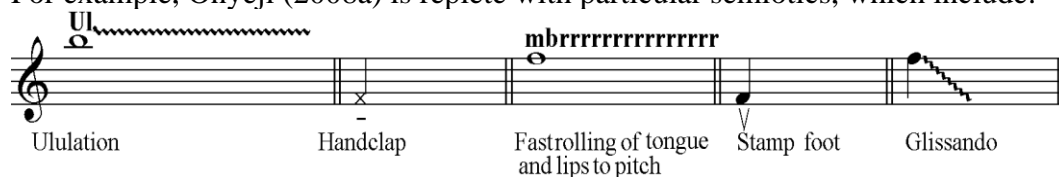


Fig. 3: Some special/indigenous notational semiotics from Onyeji (2008a)

Special semiotics are necessary as the conventional staff notation is limited in scoring some indigenous music elements. Thus, forging notational semiotics for such elements became necessary. This is acceptable as "The staff notation expounded to its present state as a result of composers' probing on how best to notate certain musical patterns, effects, and ideas" (Austin & Clark, 1989, p. 58). It will continue to expound as far as indigenous musical elements and exotic sounds are appropriated in modern art music. Through contemporary Nigerian composers' indigenisation movements as well as their creative innovations, staff notation semiotics have grown to become more fulfilling and reliable in notating, documenting, and expressing indigenous musical traits in written tradition.

Conclusion

While Western music idioms and styles are incorporated in Nigerian works, some of the composers creatively thrive in appropriating indigenous elements, materials, instrumental resources, and concepts; thus, art music indigenisation in Nigeria is a living phenomenon. However, numerous unutilised and underutilised musical features/cultures still abound in Nigeria. Nigerian composers of various cultural/ethnic backgrounds are therefore encouraged to further creatively harness and advance the art/act of utilisation of indigenous musical heritage in their works.

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