

THE CREATIVE APPROACH TOWARDS AFRICAN IDENTITY: A SCHOLASTIC DISCOURSE IN HONOR OF AKIN EUBA

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the works of ethnomusicologist and composer, Akin Euba. It examines how Euba projects African identity through his concept of African pianism. The paper explains that the concept provides the background for understanding how the European piano could be used to imitate traditional African musical principles and instruments in works that synthesize African and European elements. The research relies on published literature, the views of Euba, as well as analysis of selected works, mainly, his 'Scenes for Traditional Life'. The study draws attention to the pioneering approach towards expressing African identity in the world of Art Music as well as how Akin Euba's innovative concept has influenced the younger generation of composers.

Keywords: Creative approach, African Pianism, Akin Euba, Nigeria Arts Music, African and Western Idioms and Piano Instrument.

INTRODUCTION

The inception and practices of Western art music, as well as the introduction and acceptability of European-styled civilization into the Nigeria society have influenced the modes and practices of some musical genre in Nigeria. The Nigerian arts music has produced diverse outstanding voices that have contributed globally to the promotion and sustainability of the indigenous music. Among the several voices produced in the field of the Nigerian arts music, is Akin Euba. Akin Euba's voice has proven to be unique and resonates loudly from his generation to the present, and, has a sustainable capacity of continuous ringing unto the coming generations. This is due to his outstanding textural qualities and contributions to the scholastic discourse in the Nigerian art music and beyond. Furthermore, Akin Euba stands as part of the leading scholastic voices that have made remarkable landmarks within the modern

African arts music in particular, and the world of arts music at large. Among his significant contributions are his intellectual assertions of conceptualizing terminologies and theorizing concepts that capture and explain the existing indigenous practices in African music, through the platform of art music. This simply means that the actualization of Western art musical knowledge by Euba stands as a tool that led to an innovative paradigm that the 21st century African art composers and ethnomusicologists are using in projecting African identity (Euba, 1993; 2005; Omojola, 2001; Onyeji, 2016).

The immense intellectual part of Akin Euba as a veteran scholar presents him as a musicologist, composer, musical dramatist, pianist and a performer par-excellence. At this juncture, it is important to state that Akin Euba's voice has joined the sturdiest voices among the acclaimed Nigerian and African art musicians, among whom are T. K. E. Phillip, Fele Showande, Ayo Bankole, J.H. Kwabena, Nketia, Sam Akpabot, Joshua Uzoigwe, Meki Nzewi, Emmanuel Boamah, Linda Burman-Hall, George Dor, Paul Konte, Christine Lucia, Cynthia Tse Kimberlin, Kenn Kafui, Gyimah Labi, Gamal Abdel-Rahim, Victor Kasawu, Edward Ninna and Kofi Agawu. In the same vein, the scholarly mannerism of Akin Euba distinguishes his artistic works and research studies as unique and revolutionary, using the modern African art music to propagate the gospel of African culture in an exclusive dimension. This he achieved through the connective links and presentation of the African musical idioms through the platform of Western art music. Similarly, the introspective manner of proclaiming African indigenous musical heritage by Akin Euba through the world of modern African art music has repositioned and gives African indigenous music more notable recognition globally.

The ingenuity of Euba in conceptualizing the term African Pianism which is highly relevant in the world of art music today stands as the focal point of this study. The aim of this study is

not to reiterate the ideology of African pianism as done by other scholars, but to examine the creative approach used by Euba in unlocking the multiple rhythmic idioms in African indigenous ensemble, to form a single entity/piece of music to be played on the Western piano. Likewise, this study investigates the modes and adoptive procedures of Euba in applying the indigenous musical knowledge of his culture (Yoruba culture), of the Western Nigeria in the proceeding accomplishment of African pianism (Euba, 1970; 1974; Nketia, 1963; 1974).

PROCLAMATION OF AFRICAN IDENTITY BY AKIN EUBA

The process of revealing African identity using Western art music as a channel has been viewed in diverse dimensions. Probing into this subject matter, notable names that have created good platform for African art composers in promoting African identity are Béla Bartók, J.H. Kwabena, Nketia, Fela Showande, Ayo Bankole and Akin Euba. The Bartokian theory propagates and gives sustainable identity to African music within and outside the soil of Africa, through the use of the indigenous folksongs (Euba, 2002; Agawu, 2014; Ozah, 2013; Bolaji, 2015). The thoughtful act of using indigenous folksongs in the art music compositional style created a new phase of compositional works that showcased African identity on the global platform. The use of Western art music as a paradigm of expression made the Bartokian theory to be limitless in application since Western art music is a musical art that is used globally across diverse cultures. In view of the Bartokian theory, not just the use of art music as a tool is the subject matter, but the interpretative act of using African musical arts in a generally acceptable manner and style that could be understood and internalized beyond the soil of Africa (Euba, 1970; 1987; 1993; 2002; Agawu, 2014).

Similarly, in the quest of propagating African identity, the innovative terminology of presenting African rhythm on the Western piano was invented as African pianism. Although, in view of the author, this is not a new idea within the African milieu because, giving a typical African child/person the privilege of playing the Western piano for the first time, he/she will approach the instrument (piano) as a percussive/drum instrument. This explains the inbuilt instinctive nature that a typical African child/person portrays. It is of necessity to mention and acknowledge that having a generally acceptable terminology that captures, represents and presents the instinctiveness and practices found in Africa, and, the derivative procedure of applying the rhythmic phrases of African indigenous instrument(s) on the Western piano is loudly attributed to Akin Euba. Speaking of African pianism globally, the name that comes to mind immediately is Akin Euba. In view of this study, African pianism was born out of the intellectual potency of revealing identity that is strictly and uniquely and African.

The philosophy of African pianism serves as a continuum that expands and enriches African identity globally. Furthermore, the ideology behind African pianism disintegrates the ethnic, language, nationality and geographical barriers of any African society. Likewise, it is a thoughtful idea that objectively aimed at capturing and projecting the African musical identity in a creative and approachable manner to the entire world. Be it as it may, in viewing African identity through the sight of music, Onyeji (2016) opines that music in Africa is one of the phenomenon that described the enrichment of any societal value.

Furthermore, he stated that there must be a rationale behind a creative philosophy and a sustainable value in the creation of new musical idea in any given culture. This means that a creative musical idea does not emerge within the African milieu without imbibing the heritage of a culture, and, having the aim of projecting its stance within and beyond the

circumference of the culture. In the same vein, Nzewi (1999), states that “There will always be a definitive, creative intention, creative design, and structural as well as idiomatic content to validate a music product as a veritable cultural achievement” (p.9). All of these only tell that the concept behind African pianism goes beyond the mere creation of musical aesthetics that is of rhythmic derivation from indigenous instrument(s) of Africa. Rather, it is a deliberate procedure that is used in projecting and promoting the African identity as well as the cultural heritage and values of Africans. According to Omojola (1987):

...Akin Euba's ideas on the need for African composers to maintain a strong link with traditional African music have been reflected both in his compositions and research work. Clear parallels therefore often occur between his writings and his compositional practice. The writings show Euba's strong commitment, far beyond that of any of his colleagues, to a search for a contemporary African idiom of Art music which will be reflective of, and relevant to, contemporary African society.

The above submission justifies the burning desire and objective that led to the invention and practices of African pianism as presented by Euba. In addition, this particular act is seen and taken as the normative act that projects and affirms the musical feature that constitutes the existence of African identity.

UNLOCKING INDIGENOUS IDIOMS BY AKIN EUBA

The invention and introduction of African pianism by Akin Euba could be said to be a potent intellectual act of meeting not just the satisfactory inquisitiveness of his creativity in unveiling a new musical idea; but a deliberate act of unlocking the conceived musical heritage of his culture (Yoruba) on the global discourse. In his proceeding approach to this musical idea, Euba based his creativity on the philosophy of African music that embodies the expression of a new musical idea as part of the communal integral function of human life. In view of this, his primary objective is not to display his artistic dexterity or his musical vocabulary, but, a purposeful act of unveiling and promoting the hidden cultural heritage of

the Africans as it is embedded in the idiomatic rhythmic phrases of indigenous instruments in Africa (Nzewi, 1980; 1997; Euba, 2012; Onyeji, 2016).

The understanding of the Yoruba indigenous musical heritage by Akin Euba goes deep into the inward substance of knowing not just the musical practices within the traditional setting of the Yoruba but having a deep knowledge that captures the essence of music in the Yoruba society. The indigenous intellectual knowledge gained by Euba from the world of apprenticeship under the traditional master *dundun* drummers in his Doctoral field research, made the narrative experience and expression of Akin Euba more unique in application and interpretative approach (Euba, 1974). Hence the narrative experience of Euba goes beyond the application of the theoretical knowledge that he acquired from literature, but a practical fundamental tutelage that he received, and, that exposed him to the clear understanding of the norms governing the world of indigenous music of the Yoruba society. Furthermore, the mastery of the usage, roles, significance and application of each indigenous rhythm(s) that constitutes the performance context of a particular ensemble in the Yoruba institutional ceremony, enhanced the in-depth insightful expression of Euba in promoting African identity through the concept of African pianism (Euba, 1974; Omojola, 1986; Nketia, 1974; Akpabot, 1986; Nzewi, 1991; 1997).

The above submission implies that, the effective ability of using the concept of African pianism by any composer depends on the level of his/her indigenous knowledge of African rhythm. Likewise, it is necessary for modern art composers to understand the functionality of the Western piano to evoke the indigenous rhythmic pattern of African instruments. This sets to be the connective link between the Western and African idioms in the application of the concept of African pianism. Generally, this implies that a modern African art composer may

not be able to translate or evoke the rhythmic pattern of any indigenous instrument on the

Western piano without the proper knowledge of the principles, functions and characteristic features that govern the piano. Additionally, the creative signature of Akin Euba in presenting African identity could be seen clearly in his African pianism works and his ethnomusicological research. Study reveals that Euba's African pianism works reflect the indigenous music of the Yoruba of the Western Nigeria. The ideological approach of Akin Euba in creating African pianism comes with the revealing and employment of the principles of two different institutions. The Western principle that is represented by the use of Western piano instrument and the indigenous rhythmic phrases derived from the indigenous instrument(s) in the Yoruba milieu. Moreso, investigation into Akin Euba works show that the melodic idiomatic expression of his works derives their thematic ideas from the indigenous rhythmic phrases. At this juncture, it is of necessity to clearly state that; the fundamental idea that governs the concept of African pianism is hinged on the procedure of capturing, representing and expressing African rhythm on the Western piano. This act became an achievable procedure due to the undertone similarities and functionalities of Western piano in having the imitative ability to reproduce the rhythmic phrases of the indigenous instruments of Africa. That is to say, the evocation of the textural rhythm(s) of Africa music by the piano established and explained the concept of a piano playing in African method; African style, different from the conventional Western way of playing the piano.

Nevertheless, the identification of melo-rhythmic and percussive nature of the Western piano made the applicability of its imitative nature of some indigenous instruments of Africa possible. For example, Yoruba *dundun* instrument (Talking drum) and the igbo xylophone (*Ngelenge*) can be imitated successfully by the Western piano (Omojola, 2001; Euba, 2005; Agawu, 2011; Onyeji, 2016; Oluranti, 2012; Bolaji, 2016).

It is worthy to note that the invention and creation of African pianism by Akin Euba has a huge positive influence on the young composers and researchers in Nigeria and across the globe. The compositional works that has employed the concept of African pianism from the historical trend of its creation; it is obvious that Euba's concept has given an insightful knowledge to numerous modern art composers. Following the insightful knowledge gained from this, diverse modern art composers have patterned their compositional works in relation to this invention. This has launched and promoted various African rhythms and cultures on the global platform for discourse. In addition, beyond this view, the adoption and mastery of the concept of African pianism has announced and promoted the musical artistic and dexterity of modern African art composers who have underscored some of their compositions towards the African pianism concept. Examples of this include Joshua Uzoigwe, Justinian Tamasuza, Bode Omojola, Christian Onyeji, Absolum David Nkosi, Ayodamope Oluranti and David Bolaji, just to mention a few (Nzewi, 1980; Euba, 1987; Euba, 2002; Agawu, 1992; Lwanga, 2013).

THE ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW OF SCENES FROM TRADITIONAL LIFE

The musical piece 'Scenes from Traditional Life' serves as one of the major outstanding African pianism works composed by Akin Euba in the 1970s. The principle of the 12-tone rows was employed in the composition. Although the transmission of musical note(s) against predetermined rhythmic phrases in the piece were approached systematically with the intention of achieving a simulation of melo-rhythmic movements in an atonal form, using the Western piano. Viewing this piece of music, it could be said that the fundamental principles that govern the performance structure in relation to the *dundun* ensemble were imitated and presented in three different rhythmic contractions, to form a single piece. This was presented in a factual systemic concept that reveals the interaction and interwoven connectivity of the

first, second and third structural rhythmic movements of the three sections in this piece. Likewise, the creative structure of the rhythms in this work can be likened to the ethos that symbolizes and depicts the performance contrasts that categorically represent the functionality of *Iyailu dundun* and *gudugudu*, as the case maybe. Basically, the rhythmic structure of this piece of music were captured and abstracted in a deliberate and logical cipher. This reveals the endemic nature and characteristic of African rhythm based on the functional role in all indigenous ensembles.

The opening phrase of this piece of music started with the introduction of a rhythmic pattern presented in the first measure at the lower register of “A1 note” The direct repetition of this same rhythm was captured in the third and eight measures at the announcement and introduction of the right hand; the first direct repetition of the rhythm occurs at the third measure, below and outside an octave range of notes from middle C, on an “A3 flat note” that is within the compasses range of an octave of middle C notes. The first rhythmic motif in the first measure established the performance procedure that suggests the mode, tempo and performance direction that the piece might employ. Besides, the performance context of the first rhythmic motif of the piece could be said to typically reflect the active coordinating role that is usually played by the master *dundun* drummer in a *dundun* ensemble (Euba, 1974; Samuel, 2006; 2009). This is a performance responsibility that is part of the major role and functionality of the master drummer.

Furthermore, the introduction of the new rhythm at the left hand in the third measure gives and establishes a clear accentual stress of the potent beat that keeps and guards the combination of the two rhythms of both the right and left hands in a proper performance flow that represents a typical African rhythm. This can be seen categorically in measure 3 to 6, as illustrated in Figure 1.

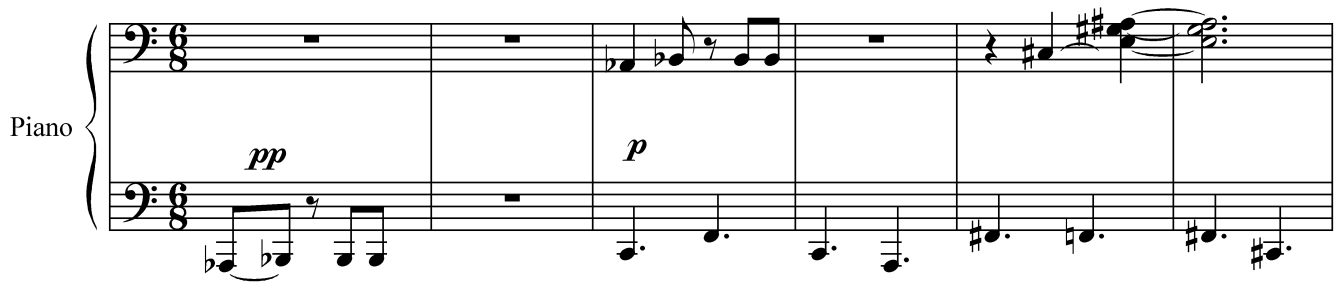


Figure 1: Combination of two rhythms in an African performance

The introduction of new rhythmic phrases with variances characterizes measures 9 to 16. This was accomplished with the use of basic fundamental principles governing the functionality of the Western piano. Similarly, characteristic features that exhibit musicality and capabilities of the piano were as well put into consideration in this section. Basically, the composer employs diverse compositional techniques that presents the characteristic features embedded in African music. These include a steady melo-rhythmic movement, a repetition of an existing rhythmic fragment(s), direct imitation of ideas, steady movement of rhythms in arpeggio pattern and crossing of thematic ideas from right to the left hand in form of an interwoven dialogue. Specifically, a distinctive thematic repetition of the main rhythmic idea recurs in the half part of measure 13, which was introduced in the bass clef in an octave movement apart. This could be said to be the repetition of the main motif and the cross exchange of the rhythmic fragments between the both hands. The beginning of measure 15, re-established the same rhythmic motif that accrued in the 1st, 3rd and the 13th measures, while the cadential point in measure 16 ended with a statement of unison with the right hand taken in an octave higher apart.

The alteration of the main motif begins the new phase of measure 17. This alteration occurs in the first three beats of the rhythm, while the last three beats maintained the same rest and

note values respectively. The alteration of these notes runs simultaneously with the movement of different rhythmic patterns. Furthermore, measure 17 to 22 serve as the rhythmic phrases that led to the introduction of an ostinato rhythm maintained by the left hand in course of this section. This specific section ushered in the extemporization of variance rhythms against the ostinato rhythm of the left hand. In the view of Ofuani (2014), the use of a steady repeated rhythm in a constant form is said to be an orientational-rhythmic pattern. Similarly, Nketia (1963) affirms that:

One of the regular means of establishing and maintaining the beat is the accompanying rhythm played by the idiophone. Any of these [gong, woodblock etc.] provides a timeline, a constant point of reference by which the phrase structures of a song as well as the linear metrical organization of phrases are guided.

The concept behind this encapsulates the steady flow of a particular rhythm or motif that portrays the functional role played by any indigenous instrument that maintains the time-line/metronome function in indigenous ensemble performance. The logical of the time-line is subject to the rhythmic pattern played on the piano with the left hand within the last beat of measure 22 to measure 43. Measures 17 to 45, in which the ostinato/orientational rhythm appeared, serve as the height of the musical piece, as they unveil a high level of expressionistic and musicality view of the composer. This was achieved in a parallel linear style of movement with the use of laconic rhythmic phrases that occur within the range of different intervallic distances outside the stipulated nomadic distances of the tone row.

Moreover, the extemporization of the right hand, as displayed from measures 17 to 45, portrays an imitative pattern of the functionality and dexterity act of *Iyailu dundun* in any performance context of the *dundun* ensemble. This outstanding versatility showcases the proficiency of the *dundun* master drummer, coordinating strength and improvisation skills in any performance context of *dundun* ensemble.

The rhythmic fragments employed by the composer in capturing the atonality sound that forms the basis of the extemporization through measures 17 to 43 embody the use of the variance rhythmic phrases that are repeated in different segments of the measures. For example, the established rhythmic phrase in measure 17 was recaptured in measures 19, 34, 37 and 39 with varied differences in their intervallic placements on the staff. This enables the alignment of the steady linear rhythmic motion played by the left hand with the brief rhythmic phrases from the right hand. In the same line of expression, the thematic rhythmic motif in measure 1 of this piece forms part of the extemporization rhythms employed by the composer. This particular rhythm was repeated in an octave apart in measures 41 to 42 and measure 43 respectively, while measures 20, 21, 35 and 38 express the same musical idea in their rhythms. These helps in creating a circumference circle of repetition of the same rhythm in order to avoid monotony of rhythms in the piece. Additionally, this serves as one of the compositional technique used in elongating the piece of music. The recalling and interceptive approach applied on the structural rhythmic phrases in measures 24, 25, 28 into 29 expresses the versatile view of the composer in using these various rhythmic structures to avoid the monotonous of the motion piece.

The third section of this piece began with the main rhythmic motif of measure 1 on the bass staff, and the direct imitative of it in measure 2 on the treble staff. These were recaptured on the treble staff in measures 45 and 46. The entire rhythmic phrases of measures 3 to 6 were reestablished in the third section in measures 48 and 49. Holistically, one could say that the comprehensive structure of the third section serves as the proclamation of different rhythmic phrases that constitute fragments of some rhythmic structures in sections one and two (1 & 2); although, the rhythmic movement employed in the third section expresses and demonstrates more of a dance-able pattern as captured and played in more of constant

sonority by the left hand. Nevertheless, different segment phrases of rhythms on the right hand were used to interject the resounding rhythms of the left hand. All of these rhythms could be viewed as potent melo-rhythmic expressions that come in well-articulated and short phrases. Moreover, this displays the creative dichotomy of rhythms as crafted intentionally by the composer in order to give a new phase of structure to the entire piece. The constitution of measures 45 to 65 of the “Scenes from the Traditional Life” unveiled the use of varied expressionistic and captivated melodic phrases that could be affiliated to the endemic rhythmic prevalence’s of 12 tones row. At the same time, it could be said of some rhythmic ideas used by the composer that, the definite pitch sound of notes that constitute each rhythmic phrase has no link with the world and structural movement of the tone row.

Nonetheless, the melodic instability of the laconic phrases used by the composer represents the simultaneous movement of rhythms moving in a linear agreeable pattern. This singular feature expresses the concentration of the composer on the rhythmic nature and link of one note to the other, as it forms the smallest unit of each phrase. This reveals the deliberate shift of the composer’s attention from the placement of notes, the view of definite pitch. This intentional act depicts the attempt of capturing and presenting rhythmic movement that speaks and represents the totality of the indigenous heritage of the African people.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to justify the set objectives. This was achieved by unravelling the scholarly contributions of an erudite scholar, Akin Euba, to the scholastic discourse of the modern African art music and the world of art music, at large. Furthermore, the study unveils extensively the remarkable landmark, sustainability and promotion of African identity through the conceptualization of Akin Euba’s terminology. Similarly, the impactful and educative knowledge that the young modern art composers imbibe from Akin Euba’s concept

of African pianism was viewed extensively. The evidence of this was seen in the exploration and derivation of different rhythms of diverse cultures in Africa. Finally, in relation to the concept of African pianism, this study attempted the holistic overview of the “Scenes from the Traditional Life” as composed by Akin Euba in 75. The study reviews the compositional techniques that Akin Euba employed in revealing how the European Western piano could be used to imitate the traditional African musical principle and instruments, as it is used to synthesize the African and European elements together. Consequently, it is of the opinion of the author that the 21st century modern art composers could as well imitate and adopt this concept by composing more musical pieces that will use the Western piano as a channel of promoting the indigenous rhythm of Africa.

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