

## THE IMPACT OF SOUL MUSIC IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*The emergence of soul music in Nigeria represents the flowering of the transatlantic intercourse between Nigeria and the Americas in respect of music. Soul music was a socio-musical bombshell that impacted several aspects of Nigeria's music and her social life and left enduring legacies thereby. Over the years, very few attempts have been made within Nigerian scholarly circles to explicate its impact and legacies, thus creating a yawning gap in these aspects of literature on popular music in Nigeria. It is this gap that this study seeks to fill. While the paper is largely descriptive, it is spiced with context analysis that derives from secondary and primary data. Primary data were obtained from interviews of musicians, participant and non-participant observations, listening to recordings while secondary data were gleaned from books, journals, seminar papers, newspapers and magazines. This paper reports that Soul introduced a new harmonic sequence, ensemble format, enthroned originality as a mark of musicianship, heightened dance as a factor that generates vogues, and introduced the practice of costuming in African popular music. Socially it established fandom as a critical element in vogue creation and patronage and popularized the American English accent in Nigeria. Through these effects, Soul established the African – American presence in Nigerian popular music and it became a niche that others have since built upon.*

**Key words:** Soul music, African-American music, Nigerian popular music.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Several music types and genres exist simultaneously in society and some become dominant resulting in vogues which often last a few months or even shorter and thereafter recede to the background. It is noteworthy that most genres remain undercurrents with slim possibility of taking the centre stage in becoming a vogue. For example, when highlife music was in vogue (1949-1966) in Nigeria, it completely dominated the Nigerian music scene and overshadowed other genres that they appeared to be undercurrents literarily waiting in the wings to break-forth. However, the dislocation of the social fabric upon which highlife depended led to its decline thus

providing opportunity for other genres that hitherto had been sidelined to come into the limelight.

The destabilization of the social, political and economic structures that sustained highlife created a caveat for the youths to seek other genres that they could use in asserting themselves and expressing their sentiments within Nigeria's social circles. In their search, there were two possible options available to them: they were to either utilize the available genres in unconventional ways or to create hybrids by fusing elements of two or more genres (Ekwueme, 1980). In addition, there was the issue of the unpredictability of the musical taste and behaviour of Nigerian youths, who as purveyor of music had experienced the failure of British pop, exemplified by the Beatles, to meet some critical aspects of their needs such as the race question. So the arrival of *Soul* in the second half of the 1960s offered the youths another opportunity to experiment with a new genre. Whether their search was idealistic or realistic is a matter of conjecture, the fact remains that the presence of *Soul* offered the youths opportunity to experiment or realize their auspicious sentiments concerning music. So they embraced *Soul*, albeit half heartedly, in wait for what is the idyllic music. For, in so doing, they transferred their allegiance from *pop* to Soul music, the latest arrival from the west that had taken the music scene by storm. This paper is an account of the emergence of Soul music with emphasis on its popularity in Nigeria for Soul music defined the Nigerian music space during its vogue. Despite its marked influence, Soul is yet to receive the scholarly attention worth the impact. This paper is contribution in that direction.

### **Beginnings and Emergence**

The emergence of *Soul* as a vogue in the United States of America in the mid 1960s had a startling effect in Anglophone West Africa. Initially, it was largely unnoticed in Nigeria because

the country was engulfed in a political crisis and highlife was still the predominant genre among the political elite who regarded it as symbolic of the African voice in world popular music. So the social, political and cultural environment of the country were obstacles to other music genres taking hold of the music space as the existing genres were strong musicals under currents subsumed within the dominant superstructure of highlife that were seeking opportunities to break forth.

Although Soul had made a modest showing in some West African countries in the early 1960s, it was virtually unknown of in Nigeria. However, soul had gained a significant following in Sierra Leone where there was indigenous band *Geraldo Pino and the Heartbeats*; the band also hosted a television programme that was aired across the country. While the band was a sensation in Sierra Leone, it was barely known outside its shores. In Nigeria there were no *Soul* musicians or bands in the early 1960s. It appears that the promoter, Chris Okolie (1949-2007), saw the business niche for Soul within Nigeria's popular music space that made him organise a performance tour of *Geraldo Pino and the Heartbeats* in 1962. In so doing, Chris Okolie was instrumental in introducing Soul music to Nigeria. The highly successful tour was due, primarily; to Pino's electrifying stage acts especially his dancing skills and stage presence. According to Ewens (2009) 'He was a major influence in West Africa's Soul, Funk and Afrobeat movement in the 1960s and 70s . . . He impressed Fela Anikulapo-Kuti (then Ransome-Kuti) when he played (in) Lagos'. On Pino's impact in the Lagos music scene during the mid 1960s, Ewens (2009) quotes Fela Kuti to have said:

I was playing highlife jazz wenn (sic) Geraldo Pino came in '66 or a bit earlier, with soul. He came to town with James Brown's music . . . and with such equipment you've never seen, man. This man was tearing Lagos

to pieces. Wooooooooh! man. He had Nigeria in his pocket. He made me fall right on my ass!

His performances were couched in the mould of James Brown's stylistic rendering of Soul but with more emphasis on rhythm. Pino's electrifying stage acts and dazzling floor shows made him a darling of Nigerian youths thus extremely popular and the most successful Soul musicians in Nigeria. Arising from the warm reception and affection from his numerous fans, he became a naturalized Nigerian and went on to establish some successful businesses while still maintaining links with his constituency- the popular music public.

By 1968, Soul had become a vogue of unprecedented dimension and unparalleled in the annals of popular music in Nigeria consequent on a number of factors among which were radio, Africanist thought, the record industry and the thaw in the soar Nigeria-and Ghana diplomatic relations.

### **1. Radio**

The media especially radio, played a decisive role in the emergence of Soul in Nigeria in this wise. This author recalls that during the 1960s, radio stations in Nigeria ran daily breakfast-time music request programmes while on Saturdays they did special mid-day request shows. Apart from their entertaining role, the programmes informed listeners about trends in the popular music industry, emerging and start-up artistes, new records releases, and vogues. As a result, listeners became acquainted with goings-on in the National and to a lesser degree in the global popular music scenes. This was possible because by then it was standard marketing strategy for record companies to offer complementary copies of their newly released records to radio stations in anticipation that the producers will find them useful in programming. Through this means, disc jockeys and music presenters of various radio stations were able to keep abreast with the turnouts of the record companies and were able to incorporate some of the newly released records in their

programmes, especially, the music shows and request time. As a result, the records that were played in request programmes reflected trends in the record market.

Furthermore, radio listenership consisted mostly of youths who were impelled by a desire to be acquainted and to keep pace with developments in the popular music industry. The youths who were the main patrons of the radio requests wrote and send in request cards to radio stations for records to be played for ‘the listening pleasure’ of their friends and family members. The youths constituted the larger segment of the radio listeners to the request programmes and thus kept the programmes going. Writing about the specific impact of radio during the era, Bucknor (1986, p.

2) notes:

...radio stations in Nigeria during the late sixties devoted substantial air time to pop music, mostly by Euro-American artistes, the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service ran a two-hour, non-stop pop music show every morning in addition to other musical shows during the day and the British ‘Top Ten’ pop chart every Sunday. The Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation ‘Big Beat’, hosted by Segun Sogowote, became in the flurry of music provided by other stations, one of many such programs. The two hour daily program of the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service (WNBS) was hosted by Tunji Marquis, the father of disc Jockeys in Nigeria on the radio such pioneer disc jockeys like Tunji Marquis, Tony Ibegbuna and Segun Sofowote opened the ears and minds of the youths to this new music.

Arising from the political exigency of the time, the Federal Republic of Nigeria split into twelve states in 1967. Each state set up their radio stations as a medium for informing, educating and entertaining their citizenry that by 1970 there were no less than fifteen radio stations in Nigeria. The radio stations disseminated music and musical ideas and influenced public taste as they played music from various cultures around the world, but because Soul was vogue, it was the genre that dominated the music played by most of the existing radio stations.

It is worth mentioning that up to 1980; most of the radio stations had music departments with their complement of staff and were duly equipped to produce music programmes. However, it was the popular music based programmes that resonated with the youths and were thus more widely received. The programmes came in various guises but request shows were very well received by the listening public, especially, the youths who the programmes sensitized about trends in world popular music, while promoting a bloated imagery and the glamorous lifestyles of successful popular musicians such that they became role models to some youths. These apart, the ‘bloated imagery’ of the lifestyles of popular musicians especially their fame and fortune, impacted the youth who began to perceive popular music as a shortcut to fame and fortune. For example, the fairytale-like history of James Brown’s rise from extreme poverty, as a shoe shine boy to fame and wealth fictional yet it was true. His success in popular music inspired the youths to the extent that some were desirous of taking the popular music route to achieving their aspiration for success. In short, becoming a professional musician became a career option among the youths in the hope that they too, like their heroes, would become stars. Although the attraction that popular music had for the youth did not begin during the Soul vogue (1968 – 1970), it however intensified during the era. This, in part, explains the proliferation of youth based bands that characterised the era.

Apart from attracting the youths towards music as a career, radio also stirred some into the business aspect of music as promoters and financier as it was during the Soul era that the promotion and financing of artistes became a viable business in Nigeria. Hitherto, popular music was only an industry in the sense that its primary concerns were within the ambit of record production but during the Soul era, it became evident that the industry could also subsist through its allied sectors such as promotion and financing. It was in this wise that small scale recording

companies which could not have survived on account of their small size, came into existence and even flourished. Some prominent promoters of the era include Chris Okolie, George Ebijei, Tony Ogeah, while financiers include Benjamin Adekunle (1936-2014), Beko Ransome-Kuti (1940-2006) and Babs Akerele (1959- 2005).

## **2. Africanist Thought**

Promoters and financiers played pivotal key roles in the development of Soul and indeed popular music in Nigeria, for they were instrumental in organizing most of the gigs of the late 1960s and through the 1970s. The newspapers of the era were replete with adverts and reports of gigs.<sup>i</sup> Following on the heels of the popularity of the ‘tea time dance’ or ‘afternoon jump’ as it later came to be known in the late 1960s onwards, promoters took advantage of school and public holidays to organise shows and literarily brought popular music of various genres to the doorsteps of fans and patrons.<sup>ii</sup> Thus, there were indeed organising events for youth based genres such as Soul, Afrobeat, Afrorock.

But why were the youths so fascinated by Soul music that it became a vogue? There are a few reasons for this. Primarily, it met their musical yearnings and addressed their desire for freshness occasioned by the stagnation that resulted at the end of the highlife vogue. It is worth recalling that the success of ‘Soul’ in Nigeria was in part borne out of the fact that it expressed both the prevailing sentiments of the non-white world in general and brought the issue of racial discrimination against brown-skinned peoples worldwide to the fore of civil rights discourse. It was in this circumstance that James Brown’s hit ‘*I am black and proud*’ (See appendix 1) was released. This song contributed to raising the awareness of brown-skinned people about their unique cultural heritage that they took special interest and pride in it as a symbol of their identity.

In Nigeria, the record *'I'm black and proud'* particularly heightening afro consciousness to the extent that they used it to express their identity in music, dance, fashion and other manifestations that youth culture became a symbol of the desire for a renaissance of black civilisation.

In the United States, Soul was an expression of the struggle for racial equality but in Nigeria, it represented a long history of the interaction between African and Western music and the result and change and continuity. As African derived music, it bore stylistic semblance to sub-saharan African music and its themes touched on the sentiments of the brown-skinned people of the world such as equality of humans, fairness. These sentiments appealed to the youths because they represented their struggle for self-esteem in a world that is increasingly being dominated by western ideas and ideals. The popularity of Soul was equally symbolic as it represented the black cause, and a triumph of sub-Saharan derived music in the world of popular music. Among the Nigerian youths, James Brown's music was a craze among the youths that they idolized him, sang his songs, and imitated his singing, dance styles and stage craft/presence. Then it was the craze as to so do and to do otherwise was regarded as being out modelled. Most youths followed his career and followed his new record releases. In this wise, hit songs like 'Mashed potato popcorn', easily comes to mind.

### **3. Records**

Records also played a decisive role in the emergence of soul music in Nigeria. Its impact came primary from Motown records which had a marketing representative in Lagos. Of the several records of Soul musicians in the Nigerian market, it was James Brown's 1968 hit singles *'Please, Please, Please'* and *'I'm Black and Proud'* that first made a definitive impact and assisted Soul in creating a niche in the Nigerian audio space.



Nigerian youths were so enthralled by the Soul vogue that record companies leveraged on the situation for profit. It is worth mentioning that there was a high demand for soul record which far outstripped supply that the major record companies in Nigeria during the era (Decca, EMI, and Phillips), leveraged on the shortfall by importing records of Soul musicians for sale in Nigeria. More so, worth recalling is that as late as May 1974, Polygram (formerly Phillip) was still importing records of foreign artiste for sale in Nigeria<sup>iii</sup>. Importation of records was a viable business because the shortfall in supply of Soul record was mainly because the infrastructure for large-scale production of records did not exist. However, record importation was a short term measure as the potentials of Nigeria as a hub in the global recording industry was just becoming evident and recording companies were equally coming to terms with the facts and were rallying to exploit the potentials of the huge market that existed. It was in this regard that some record companies without operational offices in Nigeria introduced an entirely different business approach to exploit the market. Instead of continuing on the path of importation of records, some Nigerian-based international record companies franchised with some locally based foreign international record companies to print and distribute the products of the foreign based record companies in Nigeria. This gave the franchising companies strategic advantage over those who chose to import finished records. It was Motown record<sup>iv</sup> which introduced this business model in the Nigeria recording industry, when it used EMI's well-organised distribution network and sales outlets in Nigeria to market her products. Through this arrangement it flooded the Nigerian market with records of artistes on their label and those of other American record companies with which they were franchised. Their efforts resulted in the music of several African-American musicians such as Diana Ross and The Supremes, Stevie Wonders. The Stylistics, Barry White, Curtis May field, The Commodores, Otis Redding, Sam Cook, The Temptations, Roberta Flack,

Gladys Knight and the Pips, James Brown, Percy Sledge, Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, Ray Charles, Al Green, The Tree Degrees, The Staple Singers, Tina Turner, Sam Cook and The Jackson Five becoming available in prominent Nigerian sale outlets like the Kingsway stores specifically in the Nigerian market. Through this means the Nigerian society, especially, fans of popular music became aware of other music genres and other of African-American popular musicians.

It is worth mentioning that the youths, the pacesetters in the unfolding phenomenon, invented ways of showcasing their interest in popular music. One of such ways was through record collection which for the youth was a means asserting one's trendiness is asserted and assessed. The more up-to-date one's record collection was, the trendier was the collectors standing among his/her peers. For most youths, peer acceptance and rating were important aspirations because they bolster their standing among their peers. Record collection was one of such activities, so the youths collected records and Soul being the music in vogue took a large chunk of record collections of most youths during the Soul era. The collection of records was not sufficient in itself unless the collection is current; so record collectors strove to update their collection. Although this phenomenon began with the advent of singles and the use of record players in the 1960, the practice intensified and became a trend during the Soul vogue. Youths took pride in purchasing records, building a collection, taking some records from their collection to parties, thereby reinforcing their status of being musically trendy among their peers.

Before the advent of Soul, most of the foreign records sold in Nigeria were products of European or Latin American musicians. Motown's effort in the record market overturned the offerings of the market and Latin America and African-America records became dominant. Collectively, the

record companies were instrumental in establishing Soul as an African-American niche in the Nigeria record market.

The emergence of Soul in Nigeria was also impacted by the repatriation of about half a million ethnic Nigerians<sup>v</sup> from Ghana by the Kofi Busia government in 1969. This writer recalls that several of the returnees came with albums of Ghanaian big bands such as the *Ramblers Dance Band* and the *Uhuru Dance Band* of Ghana. Their arrival changed the demographic ambience of the Nigerian music scene as music of Ghanaian dance bands heaved across Nigeria as the returnees played them in their various abodes across the country. Thus the records of Soul music by Ghanaian dance bands became popular and caught the fancy of Nigerians across the social spectrum in their own rights and dominated the air waves as they were played on radio and in entertainment houses across the country. Through this process, some songs such as '*Knock on wood*', '*Atawuniyeye*'<sup>vi</sup> were highly popular and were at par, in terms of their social impact, with some of James Brown's hit songs such as '*Mashed Potato*' which employed the subdominant and dominant chords of the major tonality with occasional use of the sub-mediante chord as a variant of the subdominant that was established by Highlife. The enriched harmonic palate resulting from the presence of Soul music required improved musicianship on the part of the performing/musicians but as many of them were insufficiently knowledgeable musically to deploy such harmonic vocabulary that characterised soul music from the USA and also because such were yet to be entrenched in Nigerian popular music practice. Even in playing the Soul classics, most Nigerian bands were unable to deploy the harmonies used in the recordings instead they played an approximate rough estimate while maintaining the external configuration of the music that was sufficient to satisfy their audience who were not as concerned about the chordal exactness of the renditions as they were with the rhythm and song text. Indeed, in playing songs

by James Brown in this fashion, bands could be said to be adapting Soul to the existing sonic configuration that highlife had established. It is worth recalling that highlife was based on a sonic configuration of musical elements of African and Western music. The resultant format seems to be same in other climes where Western music has interacted with traditional music. It is for this reason that Afro-Caribbean and African-American music genres resonated with Nigerians much more than music from other parts of the world. Consciously or otherwise, the Nigerian music public is conscious of these elements and respond to them. In playing the works of musicians from other traditions, Nigerian musicians do not strive to give exact reproduction of the music rather; they sought to re-invent the music within the ambit of the parameters of the popular musical aesthetics of the Nigerian society. Once this is done, the audience is satisfied and will respond positively to the music being performed irrespective of its place of origin. Indeed, a Nigerian musician performing a recorded work by other musicians regards his effort as a reinterpretation, or stylization of the recording. Indeed Nigerian audiences expect this attribute of performing musician. This explains why Nigerians accept and enjoy the performance of copyrighted songs of other musicians even when the performance ethos does not synchronize with the original recording because music cannot have a significant following in a community unless it is in sync with or has semblance with the prevailing musical traditions of the community.

For Nigerians, Soul music was more of a rhythmic than a harmonic experience. As rhythm-based music, the emphasis was on the horizontal relationship (rhythm) than on the vertical (harmony) thus accounting for the interest of Nigerians in the rhythmic aspect of music than in the harmonic. Despite this, Soul introduced a new harmonic sequence in popular music in Nigeria. According to Bucknor (1986, p. 2):

. . . when the dominant influence was British, the chord progression was from the Tonic to Sub-dominant to dominant and the back to Tonic. With the rise of black American music, the form changed to what was typically referred to as 12-bar Blues – Tonic 4 bars, Sub-dominant 2 bars, Dominant 1 bar. (sic) sub-dominant 1 bar and the finally to the Tonic 2 bars.

Although the new chord sequence was adopted in few instances, the dominant sequence remained the hackneyed I, IV, V chord progression that had hitherto been thoroughly exploited by Highlife.

Apart from its harmonic impact, Soul left imprints in the ensemble structure of Nigerian stage bands. Prior to the advent of Soul, typical Nigerian bands were usually chamber-like ensembles consisting of a lead guitar, a rhythm guitar, a bass guitar or fiddle bass, trumpets and saxophones, a strap drum set, a conga set, and some portable percussion instruments such as the clave, tambourine, maracas, agogo etc. Rather than follow the instrumentation of a typical soul band, Nigerian musicians adapted the music to the prevalent ensemble framework of the new musical sound scape and in this case highlife. This explains why Nigerian Soul bands did not adopt or model their ensemble format after American soul bands but left themselves susceptible to the influence by the musical sensibilities of West Africa and in this regards, used the ensemble structure that had been developed by highlife for Soul, but in so doing, they included the electronic organ thereby changing its instrumentation and sound architecture. Through this means the organ became a prominent member of the ensemble format of bands in Nigeria and competed with established frontline instruments such as the trumpet and the guitar for dominance as the principal melodic instrument. In fact, the entry of the keyboard changed the spatial arrangement of Nigerian bands wherein the organ shares the front of centre stage with the lead singer with other instruments positioned slightly behind. This formation eventually became standard spatial format for most bands during the Soul vogue and thereafter.

The popularity of soul music spurred a need for dedicated Soul bands across West Africa. Initially, when Soul bands were non-existent, general type bands expanded their repertory to accommodate Soul music. In Ghana, Soul affected the repertory of existing bands that they had to change their repertory to catch in on the favour that soul elicited. The bands were not mere copycats because they made efforts to compose Soul songs wherein a few were successful hits. Thus, the writing and performing of original compositions became a trend among Nigerian popular musicians resulting in a burst of creativity and a flurry in song writing activities. Most of the songs were written in English with isolated use of Pidgin English or indigenous languages, a reflection of the perception of English as a language for the enlightened to which most Nigerian crave to speak and be literate in. Very few Nigerian bands made success of recording Soul songs during the period. Some of the songs are . . . by Segun Bucknor and the Revolution' . . . by 'Tony Benson and the Stranger' . . . by 'The Hykkers' and . . . by 'Joni Hastrup'. However, despite their sincerity of purpose none of their records were commercially successful on the scale of James Brown's hit records.

Dance had always been part of the African-America musical heritage and this was reflected by Soul in Nigeria. The emergence of Soul as a genre in Nigeria was largely dependent on the part played by both music and dance as the Soul vogue is a musical as well as a dance phenomenon. It is therefore incorrect to ascribe the Soul vogue entirely to music because dance equally had a share in it. It is worth mentioning that the extent of James Brown's success as a musician was largely due to his use of dance as performance component of his songs. It was this aspect that was the hallmark of his performance which fascinated and attracted the youth to the point of ecstasy. The dances, which James Brown referred to as 'walks'<sup>vii</sup>, were significant in creating the Soul vogue worldwide and particularly so in Nigeria. The dances that he created, the 'moon

walk’, the ‘Carmel walk’, were extremely popular among the youths that they learnt to dance them. The dances were in vogue because they were in sync with the music to the extent that one cannot separate one from the other.

In fact, the Soul vogue highlighted the interdependence of music and dance in popular music. In this respect Soul can be regarded as a composite musical art form consisting of sound and movement in balanced proportion. In fact dance was so important to Soul that there developed what became known as the floor show, an interval during a performance when distinguished dancers take to the stage to display their dancing skills. Pino’s pioneered the floorshow to the extent that musicians saw it necessary to engage show dancers to enhance their performance. Apart from Geraldo Pino there were other noted dancers such as Mona Fini and the veritable Don Bruce. It was during the soul era that the use of dedicated dancers was introduced into Nigerian music architecture and since then has remained a distinguishing feature in Nigerian popular music.

As a derivative of African musical heritage, Soul maintains some features of this heritage, for example, the use of costumes for specific dances. In African traditional dance-music practice, the dancer is usually clad in costumes specific to the dance. This was transposed to Soul but reinterpreted in a new light that it was able to impact the fashion trends of the time. Prior to Soul vogue, the trending fashion among youths was the skin-tight trousers reminiscent of the Beatles era. With Soul the trend changed to wearing bell-bottom trousers that were associated with James Brown. It is noteworthy that Soul became protest movement as it was used by the black power movement to draw attention to the race issue in the United State. However in Nigeria, the youths came to identify with the movement and appropriated and reinterpreted the visual

components and to some extent the aural aspects of Soul within the sensibilities of the time. The visual symbols were in dress and coiffeur that Soul impacted the fashion industry in Nigeria in two aspects, namely: clothing and coiffure. For example, the 'Afro' curfew, a symbol of the racial question, became a vogue particularly among the youths.

### **The Social Impact**

Soul essentially impacted the Nigerian society at large. As was mentioned earlier, it was equally the product of a social structure that denigrated a race and in that respect resulted from a movement that was in psyche with and depicted the prevailing mood of the Nigerian society of the 1970s. Specifically in this respect, it impacted music fandom, social behaviour especially fashion and manner of speaking.

Fandom is not a new experience in African music; for in most cultural situations, music was cherished and supported in various degrees by the community that lay claim to it. Because the arrival of Soul coincided with the sentiments of the time, it came to represent deep seated disgust by tan skinned people against racial discrimination. The people, on their part, came to regard Soul as a vehicle that represented their longings and sensibilities thus they identified with it as their music just like they would their indigenous music. The favourable reception that Soul was accorded was unparalleled in the annals of popular music in Nigeria because prior to its arrival, music was age-bound. However, Soul broke through the generation gap and was patronised across all segments of the Nigerian society that it came in contact with and in the process brought African-American music to the limelight in Nigeria. Although, Soul was not the first syncretic African music to have arrived Nigeria, it was the first to have monumental impact across the Nigerian social spectrum. Because Soul was used by most of its practitioners to



portray the condition of brown-skinned peoples in the Americas and to advocate for social justice and fairness for all races, it struck a sensitive nerve with Nigerians after it made them aware of racial discrimination especially in the United States of America, the need for solidarity against racism and the use of music to advocate social justice, resulted in mass acceptance of Soul as individuals showed solidarity with what it represents by patronizing Soul records.

Propelled by the excess liquidity that characterised the Nigerian economy from the early and into the mid 1970, Nigerians spent a considerable fraction of their disposable income on entertainment of which the purchase of records took significant part. This ultimately expanded the Nigerian record market and laid a solid foundation for a Nigerian music industry.

Following the growth of the Nigerian economy in the 1970s, the Nigerian records market opened up and more Nigerians came to own record players and it quickly became a household need and a status symbol for households. This resulted in massive purchase of sound reproducing equipment and Nigeria with her huge population, became a major market for record playing equipment that it attracted entrepreneurs to invest massively therein.

On the aural side, these records exposed Nigerians to American English as spoken by James Brown in his records that within a short while it became the vogue among the youths to speak in that fashion to signify urbanism. The African-American accent was also symbolic of the civil rights movement and all it stood for. However, in this case it was grafted into and re-interpreted within the context of popular music as a symbol of Africaness. Through these symbolic acts Nigerian youths identified with African-Americans in their struggle for social justice even when most of them did not fully comprehend the issues involved other than that brown skinned races were being discriminated against and oppressed in the United States of America. By the 1970s,

however, African-America music had totally eclipsed the influence that the Beatles had in Nigerian popular music since the early 1960s.

### **Decline of Soul Music in Nigeria**

It is a fact that popular music respond to change much more than other types of music. In fact, this is one of its characteristic features. However, as enterprise, popular music is subject to an intermingling of unpredictable factors that make it one of the most risky businesses known to man. It is however not sufficient for an artiste to be musically competent, or for a song to have been well crafted or produced for it to be commercially successful because there are other mitigating factors such as marketing, promotion, networking, distribution, timing of new record release and prevailing taste that determines its success. These fluctuating factors made it impossible for an artiste to perpetually dominate the music scene irrespective of his/her artistry. There is a perpetual state of flux at play such that a song can become a hit for a few weeks or an artiste becomes a star for a while and thereafter recedes into the annals of history. So, it was inevitable for Soul to decline haven come to the end of its tenure. The decline of Soul was predicated of several factors acting in tandem.

### **The Role of Motown Record**

As was mentioned earlier, the Nigerian recording industry was very competitive between the late 1970s and mid 1970s that record companies devised indigenous methods to maintain their presence in the ebullient market. In the case of Motown Record it flooded the Nigerian market with records of several artistes on its label many of whom were not Soul musicians all in its bid to have a foothold in the Nigerian record market. For example there was the ‘Jackson five’ and other famous music groups worldwide. As the music public is very trend sensitive, these new

groups diverted public attention from James Brown and indeed from *Soul* as a genre. Eventually the general public transferred their allegiance to other genres and band such as the Jackson five that had been in the offing.

Secondly, Soul music as a dance depended music was participatory, expressed and enjoyed through kinetic responses to the sound unlike genres that are conceived for solely listening purposes. Thus, Soul is best enjoyed within the context of gigs where camaraderie is best expressed. So gigs were frequent during the Soul vogue that it became imperative for Soul bands to undertake performance tours as a means of taking their music to their fans. However, at the end of the Nigerian civil war in January 1970, Nigeria experienced an increase in violent crime across the country and safety of life and property, especially, at night when gigs held, became a cause of concern for society that government was impelled to introduce the death penalty for armed robbery. With the prevailing insecurity gigs gradually declined to the extent that it inevitably affected the patronage of *Soul* music. Amidst these developments, James Brown, undertook a performance tour in 1970 that saw him play in Lagos, Ibadan, Benin, Enugu and Kaduna. Although the tour rekindled interest in Soul, it could not revive it as the genre had outrun its course.

With the end of the Nigeria Civil war the Federal and State governments turned their attention to developing critical sectors of the economy that had remained unattended to for several years as a result of the war. With a twelve-State structure in place, the states looked upon the media as a tool for reaching to the public to market their programmes and projects to the citizenry. Guided by this understanding, most of the states set up radio stations while a few established both radio and television stations but state governments established state-owned radio and television outfits.

States without a broadcast organisations, established theirs beginning with the Midwest State which established her radio and television station, a move that sets in motion what has come to be known as the second generation broadcast organisations in Nigeria. Within a few years, all the states had radio and television stations.

The death of gigs due to insecurity, did not extinguish the public's desire for them and Nigerians had to seek ways of satisfying that need, even when they were not as effective as desired. Amid this situation, Nigerians turned to television to satisfy the need albeit within the comfort of their homes. It is worth mentioning that in the early 1970s, ownership of a television set was not widespread as it was the practice to go to the house of neighbours who had a television set to watch programmes. In 1974 the issue of lack of television sets by most Midwesterners caused the State government to set up television viewing centres across the State in an effort to create more opportunity for more citizens to watch TV programmes and promote the habit of viewing television. On their part television stations produced music programmes in the liking of gigs. For example, there were programmes that featured bands performing live with an audience in attendance. It is relevant to mention some stations like the Nigerian Television (NTV), Lagos, which created entertaining programmes like 'The Bar Beach show' Midwest Television (MTV) Benin which had 'Band stands'.

### **Youth Rendezvous**

Viewing live television music programmes became a substitute to attending gigs. With time this created a group of dedicated viewers of music programmes who were passionate about watching their favourite music programmes such that excellently produced music programmes became subject of discussions and small talks in informal gatherings. With this development, television

became a promoter of music genres and musicians. Thus television introduced a new means of musical entertainment delivered directly to homes.

It is worth mentioning that Pentecostal Christianity which rose to prominence in Nigeria after the Nigeria civil war affected the fortunes of Soul. It espoused that music is divine and should not be put to mundane use. Based on this perception, it abhorred and discouraged her members from participating in secular musical events, especially, those involving mixed gender paired dancing. This adversely affected the futures of dance-music as the brand of Christianity spread across the Nigerian society at large. Given the fact that Islam, the prominent religion in Northern Nigeria, frowns at the excessive use of the conjunct arts of music and dance, Soul suffered a decline as it was replaced by music meant just for listening.

Soul with its emphasis on paired dancing lost out and this factor hastened its decline. After several year of being at the apex of soul, it was inevitable for decline to set in. It did and the decline in the career of James Brown affected the fortunes of Soul music as a genre in Nigeria. As the archetypal Soul musician, he symbolized and personified Soul music, attributes that earned him the sobriquet ‘the godfather of Soul’. So the decline in his musical fortune adversely affected the genre because there was none other to occupy the vacuum that his decline created within the genre. With this development the music public had no option than to shift their allegiance to other genres.

Nigeria’s first oil boom (1970 – 1979) was also implicated in the decline of Soul. Following unanticipated receipts from export of petroleum, there was massive economic growth accompanied by unrestrained importation of manufactured goods including music products such as from various parts of the world. With much disposable income, Nigerians gradually began

purchasing sound-reproducing devices for use at home, offices and vehicles at an unprecedented rate in her entire history. The record market grew and expanded that various types of popular music genres became available in the market. For example from South Africa came records by Miriam Makeba and Ipi Thombi. There were also records from the Congo and Nigerians bought them. Arising from this development, Nigeria became a melting pot of various popular music genres and there was intense competition among the genres for dominance of the sound scape until Afrobeat overturned the table and became the dominant vogue albeit for a long while. It is worth noting that the ascendancy of Afrobeat was largely due to the prevailing climate of Africanism that pervaded the 1970s. The interplay of these factors reduced the status of Soul in Nigeria and its patronage declined and it lost its prime position in the Nigerian music space.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the 1960s, Nigeria was besieged by several popular music genres arising from the explosion in popular music across the world. Despite the varieties of genres, only a few of them impacted the Nigerian music scene. Soul was the first foreign music genre that was widely accepted across ethnic and regional frontiers and it also made significant impact in Nigeria due to the catalytic roles played by the media, the recording industry, Africanist thought, and arrival of Nigerian repartees from Ghana. The reception of Soul by the Nigerian music public as attested to by the patronage that it received from Nigerians, affected Nigerian musical practice and society by introducing a new harmonic sequence, instituting creative song writing, spurred new dances, impacted youth behaviour as regards coiffure, speech mannerism and fashion.

Although the use of music in advocacy is age-long in African musical practice, it was during the Soul era that it was brought to the fore of contemporary popular music practice in Nigeria, thereby setting the stage for Fela Anikulapo Kuti and other activist musicians that came after.

Thus the presence of Soul in the Nigerian sound space re-invented the art of using music for advocacy. Since then, music activism has become an abiding feature of Nigerian popular music. Nigerian popular musicians should uphold this tradition and use the opportunity to draw attention to the myriad of challenges confronting Nigeria in her efforts to develop on several fronts. In doing so, popular music will retain its place as a catalyst in the development process just as it was the case in African traditional society.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud James Brown

*Uh! With your bad self!*

*[Hook]*

*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*

*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*

*[Verse 1]*

*Some people say we've got a lot of malice*

*Some say it's a lot of nerve*

*But I say we won't quit moving until we get what we deserve*

*We have been 'buked and we have been scorned*

*We've been treated bad, talked about as sure as you're born*

*But just as sure as it takes two eyes to make a pair, ha*

*Brother we can't quit until we get our share*

*[Hook]*

*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*

*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*

*[Verse 2]*

*I worked on jobs with my feet and my hands*

*But all the work I did was for the other man*

*Now we demand a chance to do things for ourselves*

*We're tired of beating our head against the wall*

*And working for someone else*

*[Hook]*

*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*

*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*

*[Bridge]*

*Ooh-wee, give it to me*

*All right, you're out of sight*

*All night, so tough*

*You're tough and rough*

*Ooh-wee, uh, you're killing me*



*[Hook]*

*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*

*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*

*[Verse 3]*

*We demand a chance to do things for ourselves*

*We're tired of beating our head against the wall*

*And working for someone else*

*[Verse 4]*

*We're people, we like the birds and the bees*

*We'd rather die on our feet*

*Than be living on our knees*

*[Hook]*

*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*

*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*

*[Bridge 2]*

*All right now, good God*

*You know we can do the boogaloo*

*Now we can say with the funky talk, and we do*

*Sometimes we sing and we talk*

*You know we jump back and do the camel walk*

*All right now, all right*

*All right*

*[Hook]*

*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*

*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*

*[Verse 3]*

*We demand a chance to do things for ourselves*

*We're tired of beating our head against the wall*

*And working for someone else*

*[Verse 4]*  
*We're people, we like the birds and the bees*  
*We'd rather die on our feet*  
*Than be living on our knees*

*[Hook]*  
*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*  
*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*

*[Bridge 3]*  
*Ooh-wee, you're killing me*  
*All right, you're out of sight*  
*All right, you're out of sight*  
*Ooh-wee, ah*  
*Ooh-wee, you're killing me*  
*Ooh-wee*

*[Hook]*  
*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*  
*Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!*

## NOTES

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<sup>i</sup> From a survey of the major newspapers of the era that are in the National Archive, Ibadan in . . .

<sup>ii</sup> The author, who was in secondary school during the 1960s, notes that this was the trend during the era. There was hardly any holiday when there was no gig with a touring band in attendance.

<sup>iii</sup> Lagos Weekend May 10, 1974 No 438.

<sup>iv</sup> An American based record company without recording infrastructure in Nigeria.

<sup>v</sup> The Nigerians were descendants of Nigerians who migrated to Ghana in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century during the gold rush. Many of them did not know their ethnic nationality and a large group of them who had a glimpse of being from the Midwest region were settled in what is now Ofofu in the border area of Edo, Ondo States.

<sup>vi</sup> By the Ramblers Dance Band and Rochia

<sup>vii</sup> There were several of them such as 'the camel walk'. 'the moon walk'.