"NONSENSICAL SYLLABLE"? AN INQUIRY INTO ITS RATIONAL IN SUB-SAHARA AFRICAN MUSIC-MAKING

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ABSTRACT

In an interview for post of lecturer, one of the interviewers (Lecturer of History and International Studies) said: "As an African child I enjoy and value folk songs especially those that feature what I later found that people in music call 'nonsensical syllable'. What is your view of this terminology?" He asked me. This paper is an elaborate researched version of the author's response. It presents a new perspective towards rethinking and appropriating the erroneous term – "nonsensical syllable". The arguments are validated using relevant folksongs of Aniocha people of Delta State, Nigeria to elucidate the discussion. The result of this research paper is significant for discussing and developing contemporary analysis, theory, terminology that portray the rational of African music.

Keywords: nonsensical syllable, musical-syllabic, folksong, Africa, terminology

INTRODUCTION

Whatever that is considered 'nonsensical' cannot be reasonable, relevant or meaningful. Right from the era of Transatlantic Slave Trade in Africa (1440), the Europeans have thought of African music as 'noise', 'irrational' or 'cacophony'. As a result, when non-African pioneers on scholarly study of African music emerged, they were strongly influenced by some of such preceding assumptions, as well as their irresistible comparison of African music with that of European. However, other factors that could be alluded as cause of such error include: language barrier – some questions and answers may have not been well understood and articulated vis-à-vis the researcher and informant; illiteracy – even when the indigenous musicians orally understood the theory and rational behind their music, (see: Ofuani, 2014, p.

129) they may have not given precise or accurate answer to some of the questions that the foreign researchers raised; cultural background – researching and understanding musical practices of a distinct culture may require a lifetime experience, coexistence and apprenticeship with the practitioners or custodian of the music/culture.

In all, the author does not undermine the pioneering contributions made in scholarly study of African music by non-African researchers. Their works form the springboard for contemporary African researchers on African music. While African musicologists must continue to uphold their worthy assertions and authentic discourses on African music, frantic efforts are made to identify and appropriate erroneous assertions or discourses on the same. It is however worrisome that hitherto some African music students and musicologists use some of the erroneous terminologies and assertions in analysing, theorising, discussing and teaching African music – a neo-pioneering error. The so called "nonsensical syllable" which in this paper will be henceforth called "musical-syllabic"[11] is one of such musical terminologies. The following sections investigate and present some researched arguments toward appropriating the fallacious terminology.

DISCUSSION

"Musical-syllabic" is a veritable technique in music-making[12] among various sub-Sahara African societies. For example, it is one of the most dominant traits in much vocal music of

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[11]Until this discourse establishes its arguments and presents the various appropriate terminologies with which different types of "syllabics" could be referred, the writer shall continue to use the term "musical-syllabic" in place of "nonsensical syllable".

[12] "Music-making" is used in this paper to denote all the processes of producing music in traditional African societies. It spans from creation of musical work (oral composition) through to its performance. This paper therefore considers all the processes as holistic phenomenon in oral music practices.

Aniocha[13] people. Even in contemporary times, the technique is utilised in popular and art music composition/performance. Hence, the "musical-syllabic" continues to occupy indispensable musical, literary, expressive, contextual and psychoacoustic roles in African music-making.

Usually, syllabics are not commonly used in day-to-day spoken interaction. Rather, it is heavily utilised in music-making – using it to establish, balance and/or enhance the musical, literary, aesthetic, psychoacoustic, expressive and contextual values of the sung vocal music. "Musical-syllabics" are literarily created in relation to the text of a prevailing vocal music with the philosophy of encapsulating and summarising central idea/issue, subject matter or affirmation of circumstances and propositions enacted in a prevailing song text or oral narrative (folktale). "Musical-syllabic" is essentially created using figurative devices like onomatopoeia, imagery, allusion, undertone/connotation etc. It is cleverly crafted in quasi idiomatic and mystic manners that elude common-knowledge, spontaneous realisation and direct decipherability of the sung syllabic(s). Consequently, where "musical-syllabic" is not critically examined, it may be perceived and misinterpreted as 'meaningless'. Hence, we examine the: musical; literary; performance, expressive and aesthetic; psychoacoustic; and contextual rationales of "musical-syllabic".

1. Musical Rational

This section examines the rational of "musical-syllabic" in reference to musical logics of folksongs – that is, "musical-syllabic" as a strong factor in creating folksong. "Musical-syllabic" is rationally employed in African folksong performances as: balancer of melodic
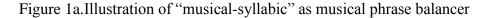
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[13] Aniocha is a society among the Igbo speaking people that occupy the region west of the River-Niger. The people speak dialects of Igbo language which they call "Enuani". Out of the twenty-five Local GovernmentAreas (LGAs) of Delta State, Nigeria; the Aniocha people constitute of two – Aniocha South and Aniocha North LGAs.

phrase logic; fill-in device; rhythmic motive emphasis; indicator of tonal level and resting point (cadence) of melodic phrase; contrapuntal and harmonic agent; contrasting device.

a. As Balancer of Melodic Phrase Logic

"Musical-syllabic" is a major factor that enhances completeness and metrical balance of musical phrase(s) of songs that feature it. In fact, it partitions and marks out the starting and ending spots of musical phrase(s). We are already aware that most sub-Sahara African folksongs are structurally "call and response" (Agu, 1999, p. 17). In reference to Aniocha folksongs, "musical-syllabic" technique is mostly domiciled in the responders' segment. However, there are sporadic cases where songs are enacted by the caller using the "musical-syllabic" technique. Vis-à-vis, the arguments and theories that unfold in this section are applicable to both situations. All the same, the melodic phrase of "call and response" structure progresses from the caller's motif into the responders' "musical-syllabic" motif in a connected manner using exchange technique – a kind of communal cooperation that characterised African traditional worldview of oneness. In other words, musical phraseology of such folksongs are characterised with two segments of dependent motifs that fuse together to form a holistic string-like melodic phrase:

Figure 1a. Illustration of "musical-syllabic" as musical phrase balancer

Forfeiting or omitting the responders' line of the above (Figure 1a) folksong will surely result to a wide unreasonable rest or gap that will always give way to boring performance. The best way to eliminate the wide unmusical rest would have been the option of merging bars 1, 3, 5 and 7 of the caller's line in consecutive other and eliminating the gap, thus:

E-be'm je g'a kwo-sha mi- li,   I -te m'a da -ba n'o mi,   O -nye g'e we-pu-sha ya,   O -ka - fo, we-pu-sha ya,

Figure 1b**.** The resultant melody after eliminating the recurring "musical-syllabic" motif

All the same, the musical outcome of singing "Figure1b" cannot be satisfactory. The distorted phrase pattern must make the singing shake or dangle and sounding unreasonable; all because the eliminated bars of the recurring "musical-syllabic" motif of the responders have left some vacuum that allowed the singing of the isolated caller's melody of "Figure 1b" incomplete and therefore unbalanced. If we may relate the ongoing discussion to communalism in traditional sub-Sahara African society, we will find that musical phrase of "call and response" structure in African music is similar to the principle of African communal practice where everyone in the society needs each other, otherwise one may lead an incomplete and unbalanced life pattern that contradicts the peoples' worldview on values of human existence. Thus, it is that the phraseology relationship between the caller's motifs and the recurring "musical-syllabic" motifs of the responders provide us with sonic and performance representation of communalism in Africa. This is captured in absolute music form in "Figure 1c" below:

Figure 1c. The resultant melody of "musical-syllabic" as musical phrase balancer

There are some Aniocha songs that provide good example of overlapping between the caller's motif and the "musical-syllabic" motif of the responders. Such situation does not in any way alter the arguments already established on "musical-syllabic as balancer of musical phrase". The only new thing being that the overlapping provides inherent harmony that does not distort the melodic progression of a prevailing phrase. In this case, a melodic phrase is simply identified by linking the last note of the caller's motif to the next available note of the "musical-syllabic" motif of the responders. Hence, the overlapping note/s of the "musical-syllabic" motif of the responders is/are usually not outlined as part of a melodic phrase-string. It is rather considered as inherent harmony. Indeed, that is how overlapping melodic phrase is established and aurally perceived in real time music-making.

b. As Fill-in Device

Some 'fill-in' traits of "musical-syllabic" are already evident in the discussion of musical phrase above. In addition, observe "Figure 1a" and imagine the spots of the recurring "musical-syllabics" responses empty. It will result to this:

Figure 1d. Unfilled gap left by the absence of "musical-syllabic" recurring motif

If sung this way (as in Figure 1d), the singer and listener(s) must aurally and psychologically feel unnecessary vacuums that require musical fill-in. By instinct, the African music-makers solve this problem using "musical-syllabic" response technique. It is just like a painter who fills-in holes in the wall/object before painting. This is done to get the painting quality smooth. Hence, without 'fill-in' in a song that provides opportunity for "musical-syllabic" response, the song will definitely lost smoothness, at least, in its phraseology, melodic and rhythmic progressions. If "Figure 1d" is sung, the listener will immediately realise that the indigenous musical aesthetic values that the "musical-syllabic" provides in the song are lost. Thus, wide spaces that would otherwise arise to unreasonable or unmusical rest are filled using the technique. Naturally, a melody that provides a very wide space will require multiple "musical-syllabics" like: "gbam gba mi go lo gbam gbam"; be ji li a na ge le de" etc. to fill the space, while short gap will require few "musical-syllabics" like: "n da"; "a se"; "a nu nu"; "tu lu zai"; "sha ma la" etc.

c. Rhythmic Motif Emphasis

I have not come across any Aniocha folksong where an established rhythmic motif of the "musical syllabic" changed to another pattern in the same song. Unless where another "musical syllabic" is introduced in the same song or there is a change of metre or time frame. With this fundamental repetitive trait of the "musical syllabic" rhythmic motif, the rhythmic

signature or rhythmic landmark of a song is easily learnt spontaneously and established in the performers', participants' and audience's memory and propelling its performance towards dance-like metric.

d. As Indicator of Tonal Level and Resting Point (cadence) of Musical Phrase

"Musical-syllabic" response technique is characterised with marking or stressing of tonal shift framework of songs that feature it. Thus, at the ending motif of a melodic phrase, the technique is used to mark or stress the tonal-home of each prevailing melodic phrase by pointing or settling on an ideal note(s) for cadence. As a result, repetitive "musical-syllabic" response in Aniocha folksongs endeavours to follow the tonal sequence order of a prevailing musical phrase, thereby indicating and enabling easy identification of the tonal progressions of such song. It also stimulates the singers' skill on aural perception of tonal shift and tonal resolution of the same. In "Figure 2", observe that the musical phrases of the song always settle on the 'ancestral home note' – 'F' mode. But that is not the case when the song tonally shifted to a contrasting tonal-level of 'C' at bar 9 - 14, which also called for contrasting note of phrasal cadence. Obviously, the contrasting tonal-level of 'C' mode brought about a secondary home-note –'C' and that is the contrasting home-note that the responders stressed at bar 10. Whereas, the relative-secondary 'home-note' – 'A' of the 'C' mode remains the best option for establishing the tonal-levels of bars 11-14 melodic phrases. This brought the melody back to its ancestral home of 'F' mode.
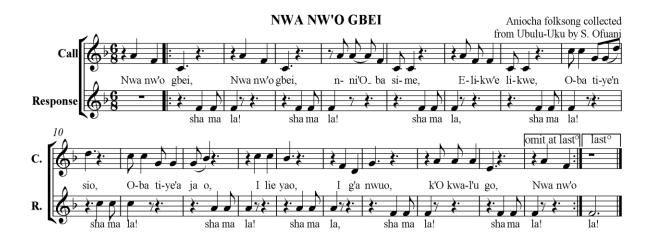
Figure 2. "Musical-syllabic" marking and indicating the tonal level of each musical phrase cadence

There are songs where such tonal shift is multiple because of prevailing multiple tonal shift in the song. Generally, the theory and analysis exemplified above are always feasible in deducing the tonal sequence of melodic phrases that end with different modes of recurring "musical-syllabics" response.

e. As Contrapuntal and Harmonic Agent

Sometimes, slight contrapuntal movements are encountered at the points of overlapping between the caller's lyrical musical motifs and the "musical-syllabic" motifs of the responders. At this point, the two vocal segments (caller and responders) in some cases appear independent in tone, rhythm and text, which results to a brief contrapuntal movement. Inherent from such incident is sporadic perception of harmony in otherwise antiphonal song.

f. As Contrasting Device

Through the contrasting traits of tonal, rhythmic and voice texture organisation between the melodic motifs of the lyrical text (of the caller) and the "musical-syllabic" (of the responders), melodic motif variety is enhanced in folksong. For while the tonal progression and rhythmic pattern that are associated with the melodic motifs of "musical-syllabic" are

predominantly stable on a particular or few pitch levels with a fixed rhythmic pattern and sung by a group of persons (chorus); the melodic motifs of the lyrical text (of the caller) ruminate around different rhythmic pulses and utilises many pitches that revolve around the tonal home and (usually) sung by a single voice (solo). Through these diversities, each melodic phrase of a song that features the two contrasting components provides some rich musical flavour that captures element of sub-Sahara African folksong aesthetics. The contrasting attributes brought about by the "musical-syllabic" melodic motifs are therefore considered very strong, sensitive, emphatic and affectionate in sub-Sahara African folksong making, so that, it contributes largely in elevating the general musical interest and performance aesthetic of a folksong that features it.

2. Literary Rational

Indeed, the disused term – "nonsensical syllable" originated from linguistic and literary considerations of the essence or meaning of seemingly unexplainable syllabics found in some African folksong lyrics/text. In this section, "musical-syllabic" is examined under literary rationale.

The finding of this research reveals that "musical-syllabics" were originally created with relevant coded meaning in relation to any song-text where it prevailed. But, being it an encoded connotation or subtext that is essentially obscured and deep in figurative construct, its interpretation or meaning becomes obscured or lost over time. Hence, such syllabics elude contemporary understanding of its intended essence. However, with in-depth inquiry (in terms of questioning and interview); deep mediation and analysis of the entire text of a song and putting to consideration the totality of criteria and variables in African music-making, which may include but not limited to the general song-text: theme, subject, message, context, purpose, performance technique, language, literary/figurative devices, typology, gender,
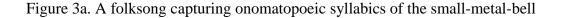
performers' age grade, idiomatic expressions etc. this researcher is able to decode and deduce the approximate or implied literary meaning of "musical-syllabics" used in the folksongs of Aniocha people.

Literarily, "syllabics" are deliberately encoded using figurative devises like: onomatopoeia, imagery, allusion, affirmation and emphasis, summation and exclamation connotations to create and shade syllabics from direct or immediate interpretation.

a. As Onomatopoeic

Onomatopoeia is simply imitation of sound associated with something using words and/or syllables. For example, in the folksongs below – 'Figure 3a' and 'Figure 3b': *"ke te ke te kpem gbu"* and *"ko ko ti ko ko"* respectively, imitate the unmistakable tone quality of *egede* (membrane-drum) and *agogo* (small-metal-bell) respectively. These infer that the songs are announcement in essence; hence inviting the people to listen to the information becomes necessary. The concept of invitation and announcement are therefore captured and initiated in the songs through imitative species of "syllabics". In accordance to announcement making in traditional Aniocha communities, the choices of the musical instruments imitated are not out-of-place. In diverse Aniocha communities, *agogo* and sometimes *egede* function as medium of announcement and telegraph. Therefore, imitating their sound quality and "orientation-rhythmic" traits (Ofuani, 2014, p. 163) in the songs denote: 'listen attentively to this information or announcement'.

Figure 3a. A folksong capturing onomatopoeic syllabics of the small-metal-bell

Igbo: **English:**

Ko ko ti ko ko: *Ko ko ti ko ko:*

Okonkwo zulu 10 kobo!   Okonkwor stole 10 kobo!

Figure 3b. A folksong capturing onomatopoeic syllabics of the membrane-drum

Igbo: **English:**

Ojiso, gbue nw'e fi ni   Ojiso, kill this cow

na nw'a di ne ya: for it is not pregnant:

Gbu lu ya, gbu lu ya, gbu lu ya!   Kill it, kill it, kill it!

Efi tal'o ka   A well fed cow

Na nw'a di ne ya: that could not get pregnant;

Gbu nu ya, gbu nu ya, gbu nu ya!   Kill it, kill it, kill it!

Ke te ke te kpem gbu!   *Ke te ke te kpem gbu!*

b. As Imagery

Imagery is a figurative language used in literary works to employ quasi metaphoric and simile undertones in capturing an imaginary picture of something and relating it to certain phenomenon or event. For example, in the festival folksong below ('Figure 4'): the syllabics – "*o do n ja*" are used to capture the scenario of somebody pounding something in a mortar

with pestle. The pounding imagery here represents 'sexual action'. While the mortar is woman, the pestle is man.

Figure 4. A folksong capturing imagery syllabics

Igbo:	**English:**
Asi m nwata nyem odo,	I asked a young girl to give me mortar,
O do n ja!	*O do n ja!*
Nwat'a fu'a shu nyem odo,	She gave it to me with annoyance,
O do n ja!	*O do n ja!*
M ji fu'a shunala ya	I took it from her with annoyance,
O do n ja!	*O do n ja!*
Odo n'i shu'o do n'a zu	Pound at the front, pound at the back.
O do n ja, mh, o do n ja!	*O do n ja, mh, o do n ja!*

c. As Allusion

This is an indirect reference to somebody or something. This could suggest elements of affirmation. The folksong below (Figure 5) features allusive reference to elegance of style and grace expected from young maidens who are gathered to make music and dance. The "musical-syllabics" – "*sa le le sa le sa le le sa le*" allude request for "elegant stylistic dance-

steps" from the maiden dancers while the "musical-syllabics" – *"a se"* allude agreement of the maidens towards the proposed "elegant stylistic dance patterns".

Figure 5. A folksong with allusive and affirmative syllabics

Igbo:	**English:**
Sa le le sa le sa le le sa le:	*Sa le le sa le sa le le sa le:*
A se!	*A se!*
K'ayi nene k'Uche si g'e t'e gwo,	Let us see how Uche is going to dance,
A se!	*A se!*
Sa le le sa le	*Sa le le sa le*
A se!	*A se!*
Sa le le sa le	*Sa le le sa le*
A se!	*A se!*

d. As Affirmations and Emphasis

While 'affirmation' is confirming, asserting that something is true or indicating agreement to something said or giving assent; 'emphasis' is forcefulness of expression to indicate the importance of something. In the "Figure 5" folksong example above, the *"A se"* are "affirmative syllabics" that connote agreement. Otherwise, *"A se"* could suggest such

statements: "we agree"; "o yes"; and "you are right". Observe also that element of emphasis is perceived through the repetitive occurrence of the syllabics.

e. As Summation

This is a summary of something that has been said or written. This technique helps to encapsulate the general idea/theme of the sung lyrical text and inducing them in a few syllabics, as well as re-echoing them in the song. For example, in "Figure 1a", the syllabics – *"gbam gbam gbam gba mi go lo gbam gbam"* encapsulate the massage and themes that the entire lyrical text exposes. Its approximate meanings are: 'unfortunate situation'; 'what a pity' etc.

Igbo:	**English:**
Ebe m je g'a kwosha mili,	When I went to fetch water
gbam gbam gbam gba mi go lo gbam gbam gbam	*gbam gbam gbam gba mi go lo gbam gbam*
Ite m'a daba n'omi,	My water-pot fell inside the well
gbam gbam gbam gba mi go lo gbam gbam gbam	*gbam gbam gbam gba mi go lo gbam gbam*
Onye g'e wepusha ya?	Who will help to bring it out?
gbam gbam gbam gba mi go lo gbam gbam gbam	*gbam gbam gbam gba mi go lo gbam gbam*
Okafo wepusha ya.	Okafor, bring it out.
gbam gbam gbam gba mi go lo gbam gbam gbam	*gbam gbam gbam gba mi go lo gbam gbam*

f.   As Exclamation

This is the act of crying out suddenly using syllables, word, phrase or sentence. Some factors that may bring about exclamation are surprise, anger, fear or excitement etc. For example, the burial folksong below (Figure 6) features exclamation syllabics that suggest surprise, grief and woe.

Figure 6. A folksong exemplifying exclamations syllabics

Igbo:	**English:**
Ha yo, ha yo, ha yo!	*Ha yo, ha yo, ha yo!*
Omene,	It has happened,
E e e	*E e e*
Ha yo, ha yo, ha yo!	*Ha yo, ha yo, ha yo!*
Omene.	It has happened.

In 'Table 1' below, some "musical-syllabics" prevalent in folksong performances of Aniocha people are presented. The author provides the relative function and/or approximate meaning(s) of the "musical-syllabics":

Table 1. The functional and approximate/implied meaning(s) of some "musical-syllabics" used in folksong performances of Aniocha people

S/n	Musical-Syllabics	Function/Approximate/Implied Meaning(s)
1.	A jam be ne	Allusive: Adventurer; explorer; exploiter; opportunist etc.
2.	A kpa mi go lo	Allusive: Good fortune; fortunate thing; good luck; fortunate event etc.
3.	A li ba ma	Exclamation: I am finished; I am in trouble etc.
4.	A nu nu	Instructive: Listen; lend me your ear; it is obvious; it is clear; a pity etc.
5.	A nu nu ge le le	Emphasised instruction: listen attentively; observe very well; very pity
6.	A se	Affirmative: We agree; O yes; you are right etc.
7.	A yo lo	Exclamation: surprise etc.
8.	Be ji li a na ge le de	Allusive: Avenger; we support your avenge; an eye for an eye etc.
9.	Do do li ma li ma do	Greeting or pleading gesture etc.
10.	Do do li mao tu lu zai	Greeting gesture: I greet/salute full stop
11.	E kpu kpu kpu le ge	A game: squat/bend down and pass through the narrow way!
12.	Gbam gbam gbam gba mi go lo gbam gbam	Sympathetic situation; unfortunate situation; what a pity etc.
13.	I ya de / I ya do	Pleading gesture: O please; yes please
14.	I yo lo / U yo lo	Imagery of: jingling/rattling cowries and objects placed on dreadlock hairs.

15.	Jan ja li ja nwam	Black skinned children; dark complexion child
16.	Ke te ke te kpem gbu	Onomatopoeic sound of membrane-drum
17.	Kpa la lu ma	Exclamation
18.	Kpu lu kpu lu ge ne	I command you; I conjure you; I demand etc.
19.	Kpu lu ge ne	I command you; I conjure you; I demand etc.
20.	Kpu kpu kpu le ge	A game: squat/bend down and pass through the narrow way!
21.	Kpu lu kpu lu kpu lu ma ni	A game: bend, bend, bend down; squat, squat, squat down etc.
22.	Ko ko ti ko ko	Onomatopoeic sound of gong in traditional Aniocha announcement
23.	Ku ku u u	Onomatopoeic sound of certain wild bird found in Aniocha.
24.	M bi li ko ko	Exclamation: big problem; alarming experience etc.
25.	M hm	Affirmative: go on; continue; more of it; o yes etc.
26.	N da	Plea; request; and sometimes it infers affirmative – o yes; go on etc.
27.	O do n ja	Imagery: of pounding mortar and pestle with reference to sexual action
28.	O lo lo	A game: puzzle or hide and seek.
29.	O zo gbo gbo ni gbo	Imagery: of the gigantic walk/movement of Chimpanzee
30.	Sa ma la / Sha ma la	Sympathy or command: quite a pity or listen to the instructions
31.	Ti li gban ti gba	Let us join together or cooperate to pound/beat it.
32.	Tu lu zai	Exclamation that denotes: period; full stop or simple!
33.	Yo go yo go	Very sweet; very pleasing; very interesting; very good.

3. Performance, Expressive and Aesthetics Rational

"Musical-syllabic" is very relevant in folk music performances. Since it is mostly situated in the response segment of folksongs, it aids audience-participation in performance and quite often, while responders and audience-participants sing the "musical-syllabic" the soloist finds opportunity to rest/take breath. "Musical-syllabics" conveniently aid audience-participation because it is usually characterised with short, repetitive and fixed rhythmic motif that are easily leant and committed to memory. Sometimes, it is used by the soloist to initiate repetition of entire song or a section of it – as connecting device, which Agu (1999, p. 23) calls "Short Leading Phrase (SLP)" technique.

Expressively, traditional music-makers are found expressing or interpreting their music using relevant syllabics that could elevate the aesthetic value and enjoyment of their performance. Even if they quite often create the syllabics spontaneously, the musical, performance, contextual and literary connotation rationales of the syllabics are underlined principles that usually guide them in different music performances and contexts.

4. Psychoacoustic Rational

Syllabics in sub-Sahara African music-making are not cultivated in isolation of the acoustic norms and values that enhance a performance as truly African. Versatile musicians know that every musical culture of the world has got its distinct acoustic orientation that is easily identified by instinct. Those of sub-Saharan Africa are essentially very percussive (even in singing vocal music) with ingenuity in imitation of organic acoustics available in the natural environment of each community. Sounds from animals, birds, objects, human activities and mystically inspired acoustics are adapted in form of "musical syllabics" in music-making of the people. Some others are inform of vocal effects involving ululation, fast rolling of tongue, yodelling, screaming/shouting, whistling, heaving, wailing and so many of it. With prior

obedience to these, diverse contextual indigenous music defines 'themselves' through their psychoacoustic identity.

The implication of these is that, more closely a musical performance reflects the acoustic norms and values of African peoples, more effective it is in stimulating the psychological response of the audience. This is one of the reasons why what some people may consider as noise may serve a good music to the other.

5. Contextual Rational

Some "musical syllabics" are by and large informed by a specific musically imbued context. The syllabics employed in the music/chanting of a native doctor during divination, devotional worship or therapeutic rituals can never be the same as that employed in the songs of open traditional marriage context. Different occult groups equally have special syllabics that they employ in their songs/chanting. Thus, syllabics that are induced by context are very hard to decode. In other words, it is never understood by those who are not conversant with the background philosophies and essences of the context itself.

Overview of "Musical-Syllabics" in Contemporary Nigerian Art Music Composition

"Syllabics" as vital element of traditional sub-Sahara African music inspires contemporary Nigerian art music composers like, Meki Nzewi, Chritian Onyeji and many others who elaborately simulate it in their personal ways. They employ it in their vocal music (solo; chorus etc.) using imitative/onomatopoeic and creative techniques.

Imitative or onomatopoeic "musical-syllabics" pieces simulate characteristic sound and/or orientation tone and rhythm of indigenous musical instruments, animals, birds, even human vocal effects like shouting, heaving, ululation etc. And so, there are compositions that may feature synthesis of "musical-syllabics" and lyrical text or the former alone. For example,

"Vote for Peace" by Meki Nzewi (see, Fig. 8) and "*Anyi Cha Bu n'o fu Nne*" by Christian Onyeji provide synthesis of "musical-syllabics" and lyrical text in the same piece. In the pieces, the "musical-syllabics" play more or less accompaniment role to the vocal lyrical text music. However, through allusive and onomatopoeic reflections on the songs, some impressionistic meaning could be drawn from the "musical-syllabics".

If "musical-syllabic" technique is lone basis of a piece, then, the piece is considered as more or less pure instrumental – where human voice is used specifically to produce syllabic musical sounds that do not necessarily depend on linguistic demands of text. For example, the "Figure 7" – *Ko No* by Christian Onyeji offer this trait. "The texts [syllabics] of the songs ['*Ko No'* and other such pieces in the book] say nothing. They are a collection of poem of sound syllables relevant to the theme of the work." (Onyeji, 1997, p. 10) This assertion infers that syllabics used in the music essentially play musical role and are creatively devised by the composer.
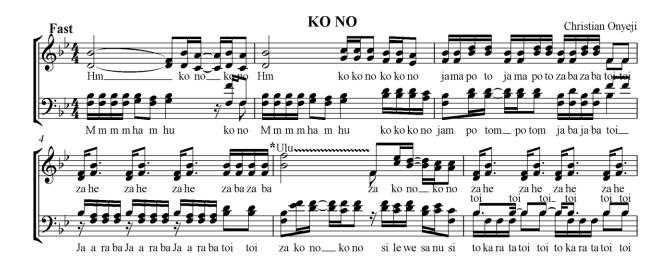

Figure 7. Utility of creative syllabics in a Nigerian vocal art music piece

Figure 8. Mixture of creative syllabics and lyrical text in a Nigerian vocal art music piece

CONCLUSION

Music-making (be it oral or written) is putting relevant musical elements together and achieving holistic musical goal that fulfils or justifies the essence(s) of the composed music. How and what the music-makers put-together varies according to different cultures, individual, group, setting, context etc. But one thing is common – music is rational

organisation of sound that one may otherwise refer to as noise if not organised. The implication of this is such that whatever that is considered "nonsensical" cannot be organised or necessary in fulfilling the quintessence of a musical work.

Given the diverse utilities and roles of syllabics in African music-making, it is indeed erroneous to call it "nonsensical syllable". From the outcome of this paper, this researcher suggests that it should rather be referred to as: (1) "musical-syllabic" – where its role is essentially musical; (2) "literary-syllabic" – where it is employed with literary undertone; (3) "performance/expressive/aesthetics syllabic" – if it is performance, expression and/or aesthetics oriented; (4) "psychoacoustic-syllabic" – in the realms of psychoacoustics; (5) "contextual-syllabic" – if induced by a specific context; (6) "creative-syllabic" – when it is adapted in contemporary African art music and used in personal ways of the composer's creative endeavours; (7) "untranslatable" – in referring to its translation impossibility. (I borrowed the term "untranslatable" from Onyeji, 2005, p. 97).

This paper essentially focused on the folksongs of Aniocha people in elucidating the arguments. Subsequent researches on this issue in other sub-Sahara African societies will further justify the arguments, findings, theories, analysis and suggestions of this paper.

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