

NIGERIAN HOME VIDEO MOVIES AND ENHANCED MUSIC INVOLVEMENT

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Abstract

The Video Film Industry in Nigeria has attracted much attention within the shores of Nigeria, Africa and beyond in Asia and in Europe. The popular acclaim trailing the industry notwithstanding, there has arisen in several fora, critical assessment of the contents of the work churned out in great quantum. One such area that has elicited comment is the area of music involvement which is seen by many as significantly ignored by producers or inadequately represented. The concern of this paper is to put in proper perspective the significance of music involvement in Nigerian video films thus opening windows of opportunities for film makers and users in a bid to fostering a better appreciation of the genre.

Introduction

The Nigerian Video Film Industry came into existence at the time it did due to demands to satisfy a social craving and to address some existing demands of the society, or the audience. Thomas and Richard (1975:170), believe that:

This critical role for film might be summed up with the term 'efficient dream building'. Efficient meant meeting production demands of cost and time while developing an intelligible visual narrative within the prescribed single - double or multi-reel length.

Dream building meant satisfying audiences' appetite for formula structure in comedy or melodrama with accepted standards of moral and philosophic thought.

This critical role according to Thomas and Richard (1975: 70) standardized film making procedures and finally defined 'what film had to say about the represented'. Nigerian Video Films had in various forms tried to present to the audience various aspects of Nigeria's life. The gory nature of some of these presentations especially in the realm of rituals has attracted vociferous condemnation and outrage in several quarters. As much as the film and video works in Nigeria have received battering for what many people see as flagrant display of barbaric attitude, it has not in my own opinion been accused of falsification of historical facts. The bottom line here is what the video films have to say about the world in which they exist. This, however, must be presented within the boundaries of acceptable standards and philosophic thought.

Nigeria video films have been used to address a myriad of existing and emergent problems. Because of the distinctness and popularity, they represent a veritable tool for the deflation of anti-social practices and the installation of approved etiquettes and philosophy. Film and video, as powerful communication media, possess the singular advantage of both audio and visual elements more than the radio. Examples abound of Film's communicative roles. The propaganda films in Nazi Germany during the reign of Adolf Hitler and the communist Russia represent the projection of state philosophy by the establishment. In the United States of America, the film Industry represented by Hollywood, worked in

close affiliation with the government establishment to project a particular government philosophy. The funding for the film *Green Beret* and the manpower for it was allegedly supplied by the United States intelligent services headed by the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A). The film was shot in the 1970's during the "Cold War" era between the U.S.A. and Soviet Union to ridicule the soviets war machinery and efforts.

The trust of the foregoing discuss further support the possible deployment of video and film towards the projection of agricultural revolution in a developing economy such as Nigeria. The battle for the support of Shehu Shagari's agriculture revolution in 1980 was won in the media but lost in practice (in the field). It was a popular opinion then that if half of the efforts committed to the media propaganda were extended to agriculture in real and practical terms, Nigeria would be self-sufficient by now in food production. The place of communication in the development of socio-economic ideology and strategy is to say, the least overwhelming. The cinema in the United States of America, supported and amplified American socio-political and economic posture to the outside world. Onookome Okome (1997: 440) posits that:

Through these means of mass communication, the American society is portrayed as exemplary of a progressive economy, for peaceful co-existence among its plurality. The U.S. media, gigantic and far-reaching, is never tired of telling the rest of the world of its democratic progress, of its strategies, the result a stable economy.

The capacity to goad the populace in a particular direction becomes

increasingly realistic when the mass media are postured from the onset in an uncompromising manner to pressurize the populace to embracing or accepting a government position or policy. Societies in the process of socio-economic renaissance formulate policies setting an agenda which establishes a new order. Owens-Ibe (1997: 468) establishes the role of the media in agenda setting thus:

First, is the notion of the social responsibilities of the mass media. Simply put, the mass media act as the conscience of the state by revealing bad things, commending good things and keeping the interest of the citizenry uppermost in their agenda. At the height of perceived good performance of social responsibility functions of the mass media is the great rise in the credibility rating and the enhancement of the opinion molding roles of the mass media.

The chances of success are in most cases very high, that is the position impact that video films have and finally impress on the mind and psyche of the people. The video film like its counterparts in other parts of the world contributes in no small way in determining societie's social behaviour, and the validation of what is considered good by the society.

The thrust of this work is to establish and bring to fore the communicative potency of Nigerian Video films as tools for socio-economic reconstruction. This is viewed from the backdrop of effective deployment of several information techniques within the context of well-packaged video films. Given the great descriptive and persuasive character of music in psychological and moral

regeneration, it is my considered view that communication for development will immensely thrive when peppered with well measured musical doses.

Sociology Of Music

Music from earliest times presented man with several loose-ends, a paradox of unanswered posers as to its nature, chemistry and form. Beyond the primary frontiers of definition, music has presented man with a bewildering spectacle given the illusive attempt to fully grasp its soul albeit it's diverse and often less understood character. Philosophers from Aristotle onwards were no less challenged. They wondered if anyone would understand its true nature. What was however not lost on the great thinkers was the power of music. In the mind of the philosophers music has left a lasting impression. To Aristotle, there exist a correlation between music and the universe. To Confucius, music is one big puzzle and the man who understands it, is best suited for governance. Confucius' conviction here can be seen in similar light as in the riddle posed by the sphinx in the Oedipus legend. Oedipus was made king of the city of Tebes because he was the only person that could solve the riddle presented by the sphinx.

A zealot in the sixth century believed that music was invented to enslave the mind. The fears of this reformer were almost proven true in the hands of Seneca who disregarded all established traditions to give a public recital on the harp. Music's greatest clout lies in its ability to speak to man in several subtle ways but in well established results. The socializing function of music is well acknowledged worldwide with varying degrees of assertiveness in scope and utility in different societies. In Africa perhaps more than anywhere else, there exists a great affinity between man and

music in the course of performing daily routines or chores. The socializing influence of music lies in its ability to facilitate conducive and convivial atmosphere devoid of tension or conflict.

Social felicitation in most cases provides the society a solid ground for social integration. An integrated society can easily be galvanized for developmental assignments as the society deems fit. To fully appreciate the true level of music involvement in African social spectrum, we must observe music in a holistic sense as it affects the African. Akpabot (1986: 40) is of the opinion that:

To get at the true involvement of music in an African society, we have to study closely the role of music in religion, government and the various secret and ceremonial societies which regulate the lives of the people; not forgetting the individual, and collective role of musical instruments.

The creative artist in the African context at every point of creativity lends himself to total involvement suffused in tradition which interminably connects the past, the present and the future: He connects with the past (ancestral tradition), imbues it with artistic currency and then provides the community with a functional musical dialectic on which the African social-spiritual dealings are transacted. Aesthetically speaking what is beautiful musically is not limited to the realm of tonal superfluity, but can only be realized totally in a continuum to include the end result of function intended. At this point its referential amplitude is widened or narrowed to specific characters as the occasion demands.

The potency of music in secular advancement is highlighted by Fela Sowande as quoted by Nketia(1982: 13) in a Fela Sowande memorial.

What-ever African music may or may not be, one thing about it is that it communicates ...Although on the social level it communicates with man and woman of the society, on the ritualistic and religious levels, it communicates with the gods and the goddesses of the group's pantheon... what makes this music what it is...let us call it the psychic energy of African music in its pristine state.

Perhaps because of the high level of refinement and flexibility of the African musical idiom, music continues to present the user an ever-expansive gulf of opportunities. It serves not only to validate corporate aspirations, but also to meet the needs of the individuals at the micro and corporate levels. Nketia (1982: 55) reflecting on the communication patterns in Akan music observes that:

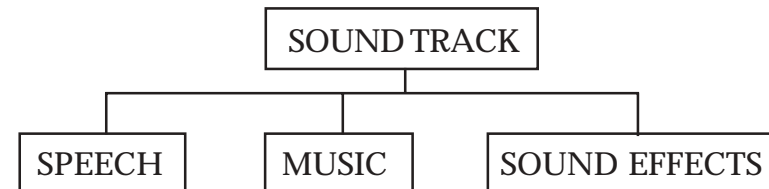
It must be pointed out also that for the Akan and indeed for other African societies, music making is essentially a mode of communication and a basis of interaction. By interaction I do not mean merely communicating feelings but also communicating values.

Art for art sake, an architectonic fixation of form that characterizes Western form of music is inconceivable in African music tradition. Thus, music creations are expected to address wide spectra of social, religious, secular and even mundane issues albeit in a burlesque manner.

Nature of Music Involvement

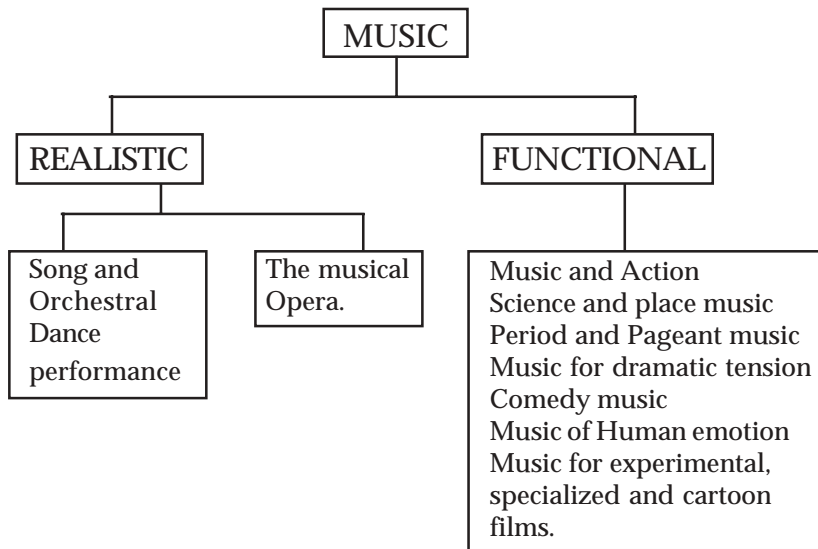
Although much has been written on Nigerian Video films, little or no mention is made of the music component of such films.

Traditionally, sound involvement in film is summarized in what is called the sound track. A breakdown of the sound track looks like this:



Technically, the three components that constitute the movie sound track, complements each other to achieve the desired communication impaction as required at any given moment. Speech "dialogue" is the lines or words said by characters in a film. Music is a specially arranged sound in an order and proportion to achieve a particular idea. Sound effects on the other hand represents in most cases artificially engineered sound which is recorded as part of an ongoing action to simulate a realistic portrayal of that event.

My primary concern here is the music component, which constitutes an aspect of sound track in home video movies. While it is not my intention to examine the whole gamut of the sound track, music shall be examined in the light of its diversity in the film and video idiom. Characteristically, the points of reference although similar, a gulf of differences exists both in terms of application and use when observed from the view point of African and Western cultural backgrounds. Music for the purpose of film development according to Arnell and Day (1975: 64), is broken down into various functional parts as follows:



Of the categories indicated above, clearly the least utilized is the functional component of music involvement, that is speaking of the Nigerian experience. The realistic component under which category falls dance is occasionally employed owing largely to the nature of our cultural involvement rather than as part of a carefully thought-out musical "effect". Song and orchestral performances also feature in some Nigerian video films. The purpose and function may not be similar to the role of same in the Western context. Whereas, in the Western context, music is constructively infused into the action to increase viewers empathy, their Nigerian counterparts at their best use sound effects which are haphazardly deployed.

Perhaps the essence of music involvement in film is best and in most cases realized in the functional component of music. Here, more than anywhere else, music is deployed for various carefully "thought out reasons". Here, music gives free reign to the director's

directorial concept and idealism. The communicative impartation of thoughts and ideas thrive within the boundaries as arranged by the producer and director. Here, converts are lost or won depending on the ability of music to present the audience a compelling emotional framework which they identify and are comfortable with. Arnell and Day (1975: 88) spell out the role of functional music thus:

Functional music has a more complex relation to the action than realistic music since it is more an overt part of it. Here music "points", underlines, links, emphasizes or interprets the action, becoming part of the dramatic pattern of the films structure.

Arnell and Day's observation above of functional music characterize most propaganda films which are strongly founded on the principle of conversion of mind and soul of the viewing audience. Arnell and Day further identify the character of functional music thus:

...Functional music must, by its very nature and definition, perform some necessary part in building up various kinds of dramatic effects, and the general rule might seem to be that the greater the economy with which music is used the greater the dramatic effect it will achieve(p.89)

By its nature, functional music helps the viewing audience to enjoy the actions and appreciate the undertones and overtones, which include the specific intentions of the director. Arnell and Day (1975: 90) agree in no less manner when they suggested that:

...Film music should not become complicated. It must enlighten, not baffle the audience (unless this is required for a deliberate dramatic effect). It must grip them, help them create the mood, which is most in keeping with the needs of the film, in doing this, it will have to stress now, one another element in the drama.

The most revered or remembered films in most cases are those that have a well coordinated balance between the acting and the sound and music embellishment. Well composed film music is capable of provoking or bringing to the surface heartfelt empathy to the characters on screen. The capacity of music to describe or create mood appropriate in a given scene is note worthy. Thus, music can create in the viewer a sense of foreboding terror, peace, anger, triumph etc as the director desires.

Many Nigerian video films are however, deprived of that sensorial delight which music message impacts on films elsewhere. What carries or inspires the limited success witnessed by Nigerian video films is the level of individual acting and the plot thus restricting the ingredients to one or two instead of several ingredients as is the case in the Western world.

Conclusion

A cursory observation of the Video Film Industry in Nigeria reveals an emergent art form in a hurry to develop. In just about twenty years when the first Nigerian video film was introduced into the market (the pioneer effort being *Living in Bondage*, 1992), Nigerian video films have continued to attract attention around the world. The attraction according to practitioners elsewhere, (Hollywood) is founded on the cultural vibrancy of the Nigerian

traditional setting. Show business, whether in film or music usually provides the society with some challenges which are both economic and social in nature. The success that attended the pioneering efforts in the Industry drove all and sundry into video film making business with dire consequences. Ayakwoma (2006, P.40) observes that:

As with every business opportunity, the success of *Living in Bondage* (1992) saw all Idumota (Lagos) and Upper Iwaka Road (Onitsha) traders-electronic cement and spare-parts dealers-abandoning such business and pooling their resources into Igbo language video film production.

The bane of the Nigerian video film is the lack of trained manpower; trained actors, directors, producers, specialized technical inputs to poor or outdated equipment. Those who provide the funds dictate what should be done even at the expense of professional decency. This has also affected the music components of these video films. And as it were, it is a case of an uninformed producer taking advantage of an uninformed public. The trend is reflective of the popular axiom that you can only give what you have. Ninety percent of those who manage film making affairs in Nigeria today have little or no knowledge of cinematographic art, nor do they possess any analytical or critical ability. There is however a desire on their part to learn as the audience is getting informed intelligibly from viewing well made video films.

Nonetheless, the Nigerian Video Film Industry has impacted positively in several ways on the lives of Nigerians. Beside its primary functions of entertainment, education and information, the genre has created a new social class of film actors, producers

and directors. The industry now accounts for a significant foreign exchange earning into the Nigerian economy. There is an increasing likelihood that current earnings will increase in several folds if the stakeholders take the necessary professional steps to advance the technical imprints than otherwise done presently. Music is one of those specialized technical input, which should be reviewed upwards. Filmmaking is like cooking a special delicacy or soup. For the soup to be palatable, one must possess the right ingredients and also know how and when to add the various ingredients. The right knowledge in filmmaking will certainly increase the communicative powers of these films.

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