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The Anatomy of the Solemn in Ezenduka's "Lee Nnukwu Ukochukwu" (Pp. 95-107)

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Abstract

Among Igbo liturgical music composers of the last fifty years, Ezenduka has stood tall like a mountain peak in a range of many mountains. The popularity of his compositions has provoked unusual interest among sacred musicologists and ethnomusicologists. The search for the basic and unique elements of his compositional style has inadvertently led to the isolation of solemnity as an overriding characteristic. This work is an attempt to analyze both the intra-musical qualities of one of his best, "Lee Nnukwu Ukochukwu" as well as the extra-musical components and endowments that have shaped his style, transforming it into a veritable model for Igbo liturgical music.

Introduction

In the past, I had written about the musical genius and contribution of Ezenduka to Igbo liturgy before I came across Ozigbo's (1985:34) succinct summary of the man in his historical masterpiece 'Igbo Catholicism: the Onitsha Connection 1967 – 1984'. He stated clearly that:

The 1970 – 75 period was, perhaps, the most fruitful and innovative years of Father Cyril Ezenduka who presided over the Archdiocesan Liturgical Music Commission. His new tunes for the Common of the Mass became instant successes in many Catholic parishes in Igbo land. His MISSA CHUKWUEMEKA and MISSA IHUNANYA come readily to mind. His classic products, LEE NNUKWU UKOCHUKWU and I BU UKOCHUKWU EBEBE, have gained popularity throughout the length and breadth of Igbo land. Igbo Catholicism will, for a long time, be indebted to him.

This observation by a celebrated historian underscores the importance of Ezenduka in Igbo liturgical music. It equally corroborates a host of similar views about the man who believes that writing music for the Igbo liturgy should be guided by a sound knowledge of both what the church wants for the liturgy and what the tradition of Igbo language can possibly offer to Catholic spirituality. Of course, it has to be pointed out that the faith of a Catholic composer as well as the devotional inclinations of his spirit has a way of manifesting in the different aspects of a work.

The problem

There is no doubt that *Lee Nnukwu Ukochukwu* is a very solemn song in Catholic liturgy, usually sung before the introit to announce the procession of the Bishop led by other Eucharistic ministers. As an entrance song, it has become associated with a form of holy disposition which it injects in the congregation. With a full choir singing and the organ supplying a sublime accompaniment, the abode of a once hidden God becomes immanent. How does this happen? What are the components which give this song its holy and sincerity of form while flowing with its uncommon majestic vivace? An attempt to answer this brings up the issue of solemnity. What does it mean and in what does it consist?

The idea of solemnity

We need to understand the many nuances of the word ‘solemnity’. Its Latin root ‘sollemnis’ simply means *stated, established, appointed*. In relation to ecclesiastical calendar, it refers to the highest liturgical rank of a feast besides the moveable ones such as Easter and Pentecost. Fourteen solemnities are celebrated in the universal Church : they include,

Motherhood of God (January 1), Epiphany, (January 6), St Joseph, (March 19), Annunciation, (March 25), Trinity Sunday, (Sunday after Pentecost), Corpus Christi (Thursday after Trinity Sunday), Sacred Heart (Friday after the second after Pentecost), St John the Baptist (June 24), Sts Peter and Paul (June 29), Assumption of the Blessed Virgin (August 15), All Saints (November 1), Christ the King, (last Sunday of the Church year), Immaculate Conception, (December 8) and Christmas (December 25).

In relation to the Mass or liturgy, the idea of solemnity refers to the serious function of re-enacting the Calvary experience of Jesus Christ on the altar of sacrifice by the priest, bishop or pope, assisted by deacons and the ministers in an act of public worship involving prayers, forms, symbols, rituals and music. Solemn in this sense carries with it, an evocation of divine presence in the midst of God's assembly. This image of God among his people is necessary in understanding the composer's disposition towards the kind of material that is brought to bear on the liturgical function.

The general traits in Ezenduka's works

The choral form:

Ezenduka basically wrote for the congregation and the choir with the choir (usually, soprano), taking the verses. His works show a variety of forms some of which do not conform strictly to the five major structural forms of African music outlined by Agu (1999). Of the twenty pieces once selected (through random sampling) from his seventy-four works in the *New Catholic Igbo Hymn Book*, and analyzed, the following forms are established

- (a) The chorus and Verse
- (b) The Refrain and Verse
- (c) The Hymnal Form

(a)The chorus and verse form

Some of them in this category include *Lee nnukwu ukochukwu*, *Oru, ebere*, *Obi Jesu di aso (no. 1)*, *Agam Ekuli*, *O Chukwu biko nara aja*, *Anyi na ekele gi Virgin Maria (No 2)*, *Obi Jesu di aso (no.2)*, *Unu ncha bu ndi kwelunu*, *Agaba ibulu ozu apu n'ulo uka*, *Christi Ukochukwu ebebe*, *Bilienu kwerenu ukwe anuri*, which has a characteristic alternative chorus "Alleluia". The verses of these works are usually different musical lines having a logical relationship of time, rhythm and cadence to the chorus. The chorus is repeated after each verse. The act of going back to the chorus reinforces the

ritual form of the song and makes it easy for the congregation to join in the experience.

(b) **The refrain and verse**

This form is related to the chorus and verse format except that the return to the chorus, which does not exist here, is directed to the point where the refrain begins. An example of this form is *Ukwe laa mma*.

(c) **The hymnal form**

This has the form of simple hymns, having neither chorus nor refrain. It is usually run through. Some examples are *Ka odibo Gi labazie na ndokwa* (Lk 2:29-32), and *Ledu achich n'enyenu*. Another form of it has more verses sung in the exact fashion as the first. *Kpakpando na-amuke* and *Nni ndi na-eje n'eligwe* are typical examples.

The melodic structure

The melodic structure of works by Ezenduka is characteristically simple and tone friendly. By being tone friendly is meant that the words guide the melody. Honest effort and discipline is required to maintain fidelity to the tonal demands of Igbo language. This, rules out the flamboyant style that could easily be found in art music of some Igbo composers. Indeed, it appears that syllabication was a compositional rule. Igbo is a syllable-timed language and the melodic forms of Ezenduka's works followed a note-to-a-syllable format. There are few places where a syllable received more than a note or undue value in duration.

In *Lee nnukwu ukochukwu*, the gradually ascending form of the melody is noticeable. In the sixth bar, a descent is noticed to the mid-range, and then it goes up in this second stage striking the highest note on F from where it comes down to end on the tonic (B^b) of the second octave.

The harmonic structure

A general trend of harmonizing only the chorus or refrain is observed. Only a few works have harmonized verses, which are usually duets for soprano and alto. This is a typical primary and secondary harmonic principle. The general harmonic approach to the chorus or refrain is the basic principle of four part harmony including octave. There is a strict observance of the Western harmonic principle and a careful avoidance of the parallels demanded by the tonal features of African music. The harmonic intervals of all his works are

carefully restricted to the intervals of the major scale and their inversions. In the interview with him, he said he did not write any work for the minor scale.

Rhythmic structure and phrasing

The durational values of notes used are a good mix of predominant crotchets, minims and dotted minims. A few quavers and much fewer semiquavers are observed too. These provide good metric organization. There is the presence of a basic regulative beat, which makes accompaniment with local instruments an artistic delight. Ezenduka's works are usually time conscious. They come in simple, duple, triple or quadruple times (2/2; 2/4; 3/4; 4/4). This makes the learning and teaching of his works easy to follow.

Another reason for this may be his belief and experience that many choir directors and conductors find it a lot easier to handle and teach these common times better than say the 3/8, 6/8, 6/12, et cetera.

The scales and tonal organization

According to Agu, "the African composer is ... very free while creating a melody. He simply chooses the scale which suits him best". (1999:33). The piece under study is no exception to the observation. The work is based on the diatonic scale. Again the restriction to the diatonic scale alone is seen as an effort to compose on the scale which does not require great numerical training to sing or learn among the local choirs and congregation, Ezenduka's immediate audience.

The tonal organization of his compositions follows the rules of proper placement of words to achieve intelligibility. Respect for the tonal inflexion of the Igbo language is strictly observed. This means that both the intervallic range of note and the ambit of, especially the melody follow the speech-tone patterns of the chosen texts.

Speech-tone and melodic contour relationship

Igbo is the language of Ezenduka's works. The Igbo language belongs to the Kwa sub group of the Niger Congo or the Niger Kordofanian language family, which presupposes a correlation between the speech mode and melodic contour. It is a language that has three tonal levels according to Igbo phonology as low, mid and high.

Examples: The word *ora* could be variously used to mean different things, thanks to tonal accents.

The widest interval here is a fourth. Large intervallic ranges are consciously avoided unless the Igbo language allows for the use of the word in such manner without affecting its meaning.

Melodic ranges and intervallic preferences

In the structure of African songs in general, melodic movements of most songs are said to be “limited to the frequent use of small intervals between seconds and fifths” (Agu 1999:34). This is simple because the melodic range is limited to and within the scale on which it is built. Pitching, as we know, is a free enterprise in African traditional songs and singing. The reason has been suggested. African songs are not scored and so, are not determined pitch-wise before rehearsal or performance. Ezenduka’s compositions are all done in tonic solfa notation. Of the seventy-four works under review, thirty-nine have no defined keys. The freedom of pitching, characteristic of traditional singing in Africa may have been the reason for this. This is equally reflected in the choice of key for some works, such works have no fixed keys and some have two possible keys left to the discretion of the singers or director. The melodic ranges and intervals are clearly guided by the speech mode of the Igbo language. Flamboyant or outlandish intervals that affect the meanings of works as well as their diction are carefully avoided. Ezenduka never composed for the theatre. His focus was on the liturgy sung with solemnity by the whole congregation.

In *Lee nnukwu Ukochukwu*; some interesting features are revealed especially in the melody.

Shape: The general shape of the piece is a gradual ascension of pitch especially in the first and third bars. In that ascension, bar two, which is repeated in bar four, behaves like a landing constant. The ascending movement is completed in bar five after which a development follows with a further ascension in bar six. Bar seven is a descent to the dominant. Something that looks like a second development begins in bar nine. It is a descending move from the mediant of the second octave to that of the first octave. The highest point of the music is in the eleventh bar and it completes the second development on the tonic, giving the music its characteristic perfect cadence at the end.

Range: The gradual rise in pitch and the eventual fall in the music establish a striking balance. The music has a wide range - from middle C to the octave C¹ and to the perfect fourth (F) and this range is not covered until the eleventh bar. What remains after this is found within the compass of an

augmented fifth. An aesthetic contrast is observed in the small intervallic leaps of Ezenduka's style in general and the sharp ascent in the 11th bar. The high F which establishes itself as the fortissimo comes both with reinforcement of emphasis on the text and an idiomatic balance of words and feelings.

Phrases: The chorus of this song has about seven phrases. The first four phrases rests on the dominant note, which is F. The fifth phrase rests on the mediant, which is D while the last two phrases rest on the tonic, B^b.

The first verse has two strong phrases the first resting on D and the second on B^b. The second is like an imitation of the first, short of being a separated parallel harmony. The first begins with a major third; the second begins with a minor third.

The second verse is another demonstration of balance between the moderate and high ranges of the music as the highest note (F) is hit in the 4th bar. Then third verse is styled within the range of a perfect fifth.

Text: The words of the music are captivating, "Behold the high Priest", which is consciously repeated as though to establish the fact that the song is for the Bishop's Mass alone. The emphasis on the tonal demands of the language is supreme.

This four-part song is a majestic expression of the position of the high priest among the people of God to whom he is a shining example of obedience to God's commandments.

Translation of text to English

Lee Nnukwu Ukochukwu (Behold the High Priest) Ex. 1

	<i>Igbo</i>	<i>English</i>
1.	<i>Lee nnukwu ukochukwu</i>	Behold the high priest
	<i>Lee nnukwu ukochukwu</i>	Behold the high priest
	<i>Lee nnukwu ukochukwu</i>	Behold the high priest
	<i>Onye mer'ihe n'aso chineke</i>	Who pleased the Lord
	<i>Mgbe o na-achi</i>	While he ruled
	<i>Onye mer'ihe n'aso chineke</i>	He pleased the Lord

	<i>Onye mer'ihe n'aso chineke Mgbe o na-achi</i>		He pleased the Lord While he ruled.
1.	<i>A hughị onye di ka ya n'idebe iwu nke onye kasi elu (2ice)</i>	1.	There is none like him, in keeping the commandments of the most high (2ice)
2.	<i>Onye nweanyi jiri ihị ya nuo iyi mee k'ugwu ya di ebighebi n'etiti ndi nke ya.</i>	2.	For his sake, the lord swore an oath: that his integrity shall last for ever in the midst of his people.
3.	<i>Otito diri nna na nwa na muo nso kita n'uwa ebighebi.</i>	3.	Glory be to the father and to the son and to the Holy Spirit now and for ever

Conclusion

The holy majesty that usually accompanies a good rendition of the liturgical masterpiece, "Lee Nnukwu Ukochukwu" cannot be accounted for by any one feature of the piece. It is not rooted in any careful articulation of structure as found in say, Baroque polyphony. It is not even in the mere analysis of the melodic or harmonic resources that were available for the composer. There is, however, a way of viewing solemnity within the context of a liturgical action. The public worship of God by the church which is liturgy is a sacred duty that moderates both external conditions and internal dispositions of the worshipping community. This attunement of environment, hearts and minds towards the sublime is the launching pad that played a role in the religious character of the composer. The devotional piety of Ezenduka, no doubt, finds its way into all his works. And for him, the music of the liturgy must serve and not dictate or dominate. But over and above this, the nature of the melody shows class. It is founded on the principle of call and response, repetition of words and imitation the principal motifs and phrases at different pitches of the same key on the diatonic scale. There is equally a melodic behaviour that can rightly be called Gregorian. This is because of the affinity between his use of very close intervals such as is found only in the Gregorian Chants and indeed, most religious chants that have been described as solemn. The absence of many distant melodic leaps is a key factor in the solemnity of

this piece. There is also the use of homophonic texture which allow all the blocks of chords to move in a hymnal style characteristic of church worships.

We cannot leave out the simplicity of this work which the composer regards more highly than all the complexities of chromaticism, modulation, melisma and dramatic dynamics. The essence of his delicate approach to simplicity of liturgical music is based on the specification of the Council Fathers concerning the 'active participation' of the worshipping community. Still in the spirit of active participation, the use of Igbo language is worthy of note. It makes it easy for the worshipping congregation to connect to a symbolic aspect of their lives couched in a mix of Igbo traditional idioms and Western melodic and harmonic features. The attempt to locate the solemn in the composition under survey is like a journey into the anatomy of the human body in a bid to find the essential spirit that animates human life. It is not one but many. And like the old philosophical problem of one and many, the solemn only reveals itself as appearances under the guise of musical and liturgical components.

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Appendices

LEE NNUKWU UKOCHUKWU

EZENDUKA

LEE NNNU UENWU KO CHU KWU LE E NNUKWU U KO CHU KWU

LE E NNNU KWU KO CHUWUO NYE MERIHE N A SO CHINE KI M ORE O NA CHI

ONYE MERI HENA SO CHINE YE O NYE MERI HE N A SO CHINE YE HAREO NA

A HUAH O NYE DI KI YA NI DE BEI WU NKEO

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CHI

LEE NNOKWU UKOCHUKWU

NYE KASIE LU A HUQWO NYE OIKA YA NI DERE I NUU NKEO NYE KASIE LU

ONYE HUNEANYI SI O'I HI YA NUO IYI HEE K'OGWU YA DIE BI QHE BI N'ET ITI NOI NKE

YA O TI TO OI BI NNA NA HWA NA MUO NGO VI TA NU WA EBI QHE BI

The Anatomy of the Solemn in Ezenduka's "Lee Nnukwu Ukochukwu"

The image displays a handwritten musical score for the piece "Lee Nnukwu Ukochukwu". It is organized into three main sections: Chorus, Verse 1, and Verse 2. Each section is written on a grand staff consisting of a treble clef and a bass clef. The Chorus section is the longest, spanning approximately 12 measures. The Verse 1 section spans about 8 measures, and the Verse 2 section spans about 8 measures. The notation is handwritten and includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and clefs. The word "Chorus" is written above the first staff, "Verse 1." above the second, and "Verse 2." above the third. The score is presented on a white background with a yellow border on the right side.

The Anatomy of *Lee Nnukwu Ukochukwu*