

AVENUES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSICAL ABILITIES IN AFRICA

BRUNO DAFE EKEWENU

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the potentiality of musical practices in Africa. It contends that the curriculum of general education in Africa has dealt a severe blow on musical practices on the continent. Therefore, the paper identifies and suggests avenues, both formal and informal through which Africans can develop their musical potentials and enjoy the opportunities therein.

INTRODUCTION

Every African is a potential musician capable of creating music with many parts of the body such as the voice, feet and palms resulting in singing, dancing and clapping. These experiences and responses to musical stimuli are results of long interaction with and participation in African musical practices. Pathetically however, it has been observed that some people grew without notable exposure to music in spite of various opportunities in their environment. This situation in the scheme of general education of the African has its negative toll on their level of awareness of common musical practices in their societies.

There are contexts within the society through which these musical abilities can be acquired and refined to the level of vocation and profession. It is the responsibility of parents and career counselors to identify the learner's area(s) of interest and strength for subsequent development through various training opportunities available in the society.

INFORMAL AVENUE FOR MUSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Musical acquisition through this avenue has no literally designed curriculum, neither is the learning strictly structured in term of specified roles, rules, location, time frame and venue for learners and teachers to adhere to. The traditional instruction otherwise known as the *Mother Tongue* is not organized on an institutional basis. Within this avenue, are various tried-out systems in African musical practice.

APPRENTICESHIP

This is where the trainee understudies a professional. Miller (1993) sees it as lessons carried out by the gifted musician or professional to a learner. The professional (trainer) assists the apprentice to sing, play and lead in performance roles. In support of

this opinion, Olaniyan (1993) notes that expertise on *Dundun* drumming in Yoruba can be acquired through understudying a professional. Chernoff (1979), from his experience with a Dongoba instructor states as follows:

So as I am teaching you, I put my drum under my armpit; it is because the teaching with the hand is more than teaching with the mouth. As you are watching me and playing, the sound of the drum will let you know. If your heart is there and you are interested, what ever you are learning, you will catch it and your arm will do the work you want it to do (Chernoff, 1979).

Like the Annang wood carvers in South South Nigeria (Messenger, 1973), Hausa musicians in Zaria (Ames, 1973) and Okpe Disco musicians in Delta State (Idolor, 2001) also practice the apprenticeship system. Training is carried out through listening, observation, imitation, practice, interest, motivation and determination, The progress of the learner is assessed regularly by the professional while the duration of apprenticeship is determined by factors such as the instructor's disposition to the apprentice, the apprentice's level of intelligence, devotion to practice, participation, self motivation and determination. The fact that this process of learning is natural, gradual and less mechanical qualifies its validity in the development of musical abilities.

PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL GROUPS

Nketia (1974) observes that professional groups consist of people either of the same age or sex or mixed. However such groups may comprise of recreational bands, choir groups, occupational associations, cult groups or religious associations among others. These groups practice their secular music through rehearsals and performances. Identification with choral groups like the University of Nigeria Chorale and Orchestral Society; Music Society of Nigeria (MUSON); Port Harcourt Arts Society; Radio Nigeria Choir Enugu; and the Warn Choral Society, equips learners with knowledge of general musicianship, music-sensitive ears correct pitching, good sense of tonal centre and skillful singing. In stage band and cultural troupes, individuals, in addition to the above, learn body flexibility in dance, stage management and play musical instruments. Besides these technical aspects of music, learners are trained to imbibe good discipline, team spirit, punctuality and regularity. Thus, individuals use this opportunity to refine their musical talents and aptitudes for leisure or vocation.

GENEALOGICAL HERITAGE

Opportunities for acquisition and development of musical abilities are possible through genealogical heritage. This is by virtue of being a member of a specific family lineage. While referring to the Holy Bible, Miller (1993) notes that only the Jews from the priestly family of Levi, function as music ministers in the Synagogue. Supporting this view, Olaniyan (1993) observes that by virtue of birth into a *Dundun* drumming family among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, an individual automatically qualifies to be trained as a drummer. Aluede and Ekewenu (2003) also note that in Africa, there is a control on who plays a particular musical instrument or music type with particular reference to the Unuwazi lineage in Uromi who solely has the responsibility to perform the *Ayele* music at the King's Court.

According to Nketia (1973), specialization in playing particular musical instruments is associated with certain families or households. Children learn — through slow absorption - to play the instruments played by their fathers, brothers or near relations. Where the instrument played by the father is in fulfillment of a special role or obligation which may have to be fulfilled by someone in the family or household, then the child is encouraged to start learning early by slow absorption. Consequently, to ensure musical continuity, parents intensively groom their children with the deserved concern as early as possible for the inherited task. The level of difficulty of the musical task notwithstanding, the learner develops the skills gradually.

EXPOSURE TO MUSICAL SITUATIONS

The responsibility of parents in children upbringing demands that they (children and even adults) should be exposed to both tangible and intangible components of the immediate culture including music. This is actualized at various communal games, parties, moon-light games, story telling, retreats or outings, music workshops and seminars. A lullaby for example, attracts, soothes and comforts the African child particularly with the accompanying rhythm of the arms. Through this activity, at such a tender age, the child interacts with music and shows signs of understanding and appreciation by either playing, sleeping, or stopping the cry.

In modern times, individuals interact with different kinds of music by watching on the screen, pro-recorded programmes such as *Sesame Street* and *Banney Series*

(educative Television musical programmes for children; *Tom and Jerry* (a musical cartoon series), *Lion King* (a musical cartoon on television), musical festivals from various cultures such as those recorded during FESTAC (1977), National Arts and Culture Festivals, among others. Musical situations can also be viewed on slides, pictures, museums and Internet. Watching Live performances is another perspective in exposure to music. Individuals have this opportunity in modern theatres, symphonies, opera houses, concerts, community music and music-related festivals. While narrating his experiences in the process of instruction Chernoff (1979) says a Dagomba drummer urged him to watch the playing of matured drummers. This visual mode of contact with music advances the level of performance precision of ideas learnt. Learners, through watching of musical activities, tend to have deeper appreciation of the music content and attempt to make impressive artistes or composers their model.

Listening to music is a frequent medium of socialization that leads to change of attitude towards music. Pierce (1959) and Lundin (1967), assert that listening is an avenue to music learning and musical activities. Pierce (1959) further states that to be musical is not solely performance but also the ability to hear, enjoy and discuss music. Given this background, it is clear that listening results in musical pleasure, understanding and acquisition of skills. Recorded materials, on tapes, cassettes, compact discs, video CDs, radio and television broadcasts, listening at live performances are all opportunities for listening.

FORMAL AVENUE FOR MUSICAL DEVELOPMENT

The formal avenue for musical development is synonymous with the formal educational system in Africa. Ajewole (2001) and Idolor (2003) see formal education as the organization of learning experiences in a system with clear and distinct roles for the teacher and learner. Idolor (2003) attempted the history of the teaching of formal music in Nigeria when he traced it to 1843 with the establishment of schools by Christian missions like the Church Missionary Society, Southern Baptist Convention, Wesleyan Methodist

Church, Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic. The formal education system in Nigeria comprises the pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.

Pre-primary schools have well educated teachers with some knowledge of music and instruments such as membrane drums of various sizes, triangles, cymbals, maracas, claves and recorders. Music permeates most of the teaching and learning activities to equip the child with the overwhelming presence of musical phenomenon in his environment. Holding unto this claim, Pierce (1959) notes that music is for every child and in all normal children, the latent musical abilities are capable of being aroused and trained. Such musical abilities include the potential to create, understand and to enjoy music. Glynne—Jones further observes that at pre-primary level, through musical exposure in the form of singing rhymes and clapping, children acquire and develop considerable skills in vocalizing and in making sound on an instrument and become creative through the imitation of sounds made by animals, machines, horns of vehicles and human beings. Music as an activity in the process of effective teaching and learning does not only facilitate learning but enhances the power of the child's mind to hold, bring back and recognize musical elements.

Given this background, the teaching of music in the pre-primary school is very important as it lays the foundations of formal music education in the child. The singing of rhymes and hand clapping accompaniment to songs at this age and level of education develop in the child the sense of rhythm and voice control.

At the primary school level, the teaching of music is included in the school curriculum. Idolor (2001) notes that in the revised 1981 National Policy on Education, the inclusion of music as a subject in the primary school was recommended. Similarly, Adegbite (2001) observes that in most private elementary and primary schools, music instructions are offered on an extra curricular basis such as story telling, physical education, games, among others. At the junior levels in the primary school (primaries 1 and 2), teachers make use of music in developing learning mostly in mathematics there children are made to recite the multiplication table with music. Apart from incidental use of music in teaching, singing as a lesson on the time table is regularly taught.

At the Junior Secondary School (JSS) level, music is made a core subject. Expressing the views of Femi Faseun, Ajewole (2001) notes that the music curriculum for JSS has the following segments:

- (a) Introduction/singing (b) Theory/music reading (c) Instruments
(d) Rhythm (e) Listening/History (f) Creative Music

The content of the curriculum exposes learners to more musical skills and knowledge than they had in the primary school.

At the Senior Secondary School (SSS) and Teachers' College (TC) level, music is an elective subject. Students who offer music are comprehensively taught beyond what they learnt at the J.S.S level. In the SSS music syllabus, students undergo (i) Aural Tests (ii) Rudiments of music (iii) Harmony and Composition (iv) Form and Analysis (v) History and Literature of music and (vi) Traditional and Contemporary African/Nigerian music. In the practical aspect, students are taught (i) Voice (singing), (ii) Western Instruments and (iii) One African Instrument. Given this analysis, the secondary school level is an opportunity that equips learners with contents such as music history, theory and practice.

At the tertiary level, some higher institutions such as Colleges of Education, Seminaries, Polytechnics and Universities have music as a discipline. Although, Idolor (2001) showed that there are seven Universities in Nigeria with music programmes, such as the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Delta State University, Abraka; University of Lagos, Akoka; University of Uyo, Uyo; Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; Lagos State University; Ojo, and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka to mention but a few. In the seminaries, music is a major component of the curriculum where specialization is approved in music studies.

CONCLUSION

Every human being has musical traits, potentials, skills and abilities. The aim of musical development is not to make everybody an artiste or musicologist but to sensitize individuals to respond to musical stimuli in their environment. An individual who is tone deaf or cannot sing or pitch correctly could be a good dancer or drummer. It is therefore, the responsibility of the individual, parents and teachers to identify areas of musical strength of young people and indeed, adults, and develop them appropriately. In a situation where the acquisition of musical knowledge is difficult due to physical deficiency, a concerted effort should be made to aid the individual through imitative

experience, participation or modern information communication technology such as CD, ROMs, internet facilities and other electronic media.

Thus individuals have the opportunities of developing their musical potentials, skills and traits through formal avenue, apprenticeship system, participation in a professional group, genealogical heritage and exposure to musical situations by watching and listening to music. Putting these music learning avenues in place for every African, will help to achieve the awareness of environmental music stimuli, ability to appreciate and discuss music intelligibly, and provide basis for objective value for music as an art and course of study.

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