

THE ORIGIN OF CONCERT MUSIC IN NIGERIA, 1850 - 1920

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ABSTRACT

Studies on the origins of concert music in Nigeria often dwell on aspects of the phenomena without little attempt at situating the discussion within the social conditions that led to its emergence. Their approach has denied the academic community the benefits inherent in a decidedly holistic approach. This paper, drawing on existing studies and recent findings, reconstructs the history while situating it within the social conditions of the time. The investigation necessitated the study of secondary sources of data such as newspapers of the period and more recent scholarly writings relating to the subject. The paper demonstrates that concert music was introduced into Nigeria as an elitist pastime by ex-slave returnees from Sierra Leone during the mid 19th century. Right from the beginning, concert music inadvertently maintained close relationship with the church. To further interest in concert music, several associations were formed and they held concerts consisting of works of western composers. Caught in the crest of the cultural naturalism that engulfed Lagos society in the 1890s the cultural elite among the returnees questioned the relevance of European concert music and advocated the cultivation of African forms of entertainment. This ultimately led to decline in concert entertainment in the early decades of the 20th century.

INTRODUCTION

The availability of instant and ubiquitous musical entertainment foisted by technology on contemporary society has tended to becloud the fact that it was not the case some sixty years earlier. The remarkable progress registered in electronics especially in the area of sound recording and telecommunications has enhanced the quality of life of contemporary society in several ways of which ameliorating boredom is significant. It is note worthy that before the invention of sound recording and reproduction devices beginning with Thomas Edison in 1877, musical entertainment was always performed live and because of its importance in the life of individuals considerable efforts were made to ensure it is available. Indeed it was a compelling concern of all segments of society. This was the case with the Sierra Leonean returnees in the mid 19th century, hence they became involved in various types of musical entertainment especially parades, dances, concerts, etc in an effort to ameliorate the boring conditions of life in 19th century Lagos. Their collective efforts led to the introduction of concert music in Nigeria. Although concert music has been practised since the mid 19th century very few attempts (Leonard 1967, Aig-Imuohuede 1975, Echeruo 1977, Omojola 1995) chronicle

its entire development albeit modest. Therefore the need remains of studies that chronicle its development from its earliest beginnings to the present. This paper, in response to this oversight, surveys the evolution of concert music in Nigeria from its earliest beginnings up to the end of the 20th century with a view at highlighting the major forces that were at play in its origin, emergence and adoption as an artistic form in contemporary Nigeria. During field work from 1988 to 2000 data were obtained from primary sources through observations, interviews and secondary data from both published sources such as books, journals, newspapers and magazines, government gazettes, calendars, and other publications, and unpublished sources such as official papers, files, diaries etc.

The spectrum of concert music in Nigeria falls under four distinct periods. The first period, 1866 to 1920, covers the period of its introduction and golden age of performance. The second period, 1920 to 1945, is characterised by intense nationalism and attempts at creating distinct national musical identity. The third period, 1945 - 1970, marks the emergence of Nigerians as composers. The fourth period, 1970 – present, represents the emergence of a Nigerian concert music tradition, a period marked by significant increase in the number of active composers, and experimentations in styles and idioms. However this paper concentrates on the first period.

THE BEGINNING

The European presence in Nigeria led to the introduction of several types of western music. Initially it came as church music in the form of hymns, canticles and anthems¹ following the introduction of Christianity in the 1840s and later other types of western music such as brass band, concert, opera, dance music. The emergence of concert music in Nigeria resulted from the activities of two groups of returnees from Latin America and Sierra Leone following the worldwide abolition of the slave trade. Of these groups it was the later that was responsible for the introduction of concert music in Nigeria. Sierra Leone provides the background to understanding the social conditions that gave birth to concert music in Nigeria. In the early 19th century the British navy used it as a haven for setting liberated slaves. According to Ajayi (1965:24) ‘on their arrival in the colony some enlisted in the West Indian regiment, some were apprenticed to artisans

and traders in Freetown... the younger one were mostly sent to mission schools. Many became Christians.' A few became very successful and were 'seeking good education for their children, trying to live as much as possible like Victoria gentlemen.' (Ajayi 1965:26). There were several ethnic Nigerians in Sierra Leone - the Yoruba (known there as Aku) Ibo, Nupe. By 1827 the Oyo Yoruba became the majority however during the 1830s, the Egba had become more numerous (Ajayi 1965: 20). They had received western formal education and had assimilated English culture visible in dress, culinary and concert and theatrical entertainment. The first group to arrive in 1839 were predominantly Yoruba and initially settled in Badagri and thereafter those of Egba extraction removed to

Lagos, Ibadan and Ijaye in towns and villages as far away as Ede, Iragbiji and Ilorin. Two years later, (i.e. 1853) emigration from Sierra Leone received a fresh impetus with the establishment of a British consult at Lagos and the mail packets of the African steam company (Ajayi 1965:40).

Following improvements in economic and security conditions in Lagos it gradually became the preferred destination of most repatriates. The continued arrival of repatriates from Sierra Leone saw their population increase that:

by 1842 an estimated 200-300 had settled in Abeokuta by 1850 an officer of the royal navy reported a total of 3000 Sierra Leoneans in Abeokuta. By 1866 there were 1500 Sierra Leoneans, 1200 Brazilians, 42 Europeans and 25,000 indigenous population on the Island (Leonard 1964:4-5).

Cole (1975:42) states that the population of Lagos in 1888 was made up of Brazilians 3,221, Sierra Leoneans 1,533 and Europeans 111, out of a population of 37,458. From these figures, it is evident that Abeokuta was initially the preferred destination for returnees because the *Egba* were more accommodating to the returnees and Abeokuta was relatively safe. So between 1842 to the *Ifole*⁵ in 1867, Abeokuta registered a steady growth in the population of returnees. In 1859 there was 3,000 Sierra Leonean returnees (referred to as Saro as they were locally known) compared with Lagos, which in 1866 and 1888 had 1500, and 1,533 respectively. Thus before *Ifole* Abeokuta

had more *Saro* than Lagos. Given the conditions of the time, it is most likely that between 1850 and 1956 the returnees organised concerts in Abeokuta thus making it the birthplace of concerts in Nigeria. It is surmised therefore that the first concert in Nigeria held in Abeokuta in about 1852 much earlier than the 1961 date when Lagos had its first. For Abeokuta had all it took to organize the concerts – the musical intelligentsia, instruments, instrumentalists and singers, and an enthusiastic audience for such entertainment.

While surmising Abeokuta as the likely birthplace of concerts in Nigeria, it is also possible that it could have begun in Badagry. For it was Badagry that the returnees first settled in 1839 until they removed to Lagos about 1850. Considering the place of entertainment in the life of the returnees, it would have been impossible not to hold concerts at least at Christmas in eleven years. So Badagry contend with Abeokuta as the birthplace of western concert in Nigeria. While this is plausible it was definitely in Lagos that concert music was nurtured, developed and established as an artistic form in Nigeria.

Generally the practice of concert music in any society is usually in performance after which the creative or compositional follow. This was the case for the first sixty years of concert music in Nigeria. As a result the term ‘Nigerian composer’ was unknown for several decades into its history because the concert was not yet indigenised and activities was only in the performance spectrum.

The presence of concert music began in the 1840s as ‘levees and soirees and private parties’ (Echeruo 1977:26) pioneered championed and patronized by the *Saro* as they continued to practice the European culture to which they had been introduced while in Sierra Leone. As Cole appropriately notes:

The *Saro* were culturally closer to the Europeans than to either of the two other groups... they lived like Victorian gentlemen, their entertainment consisting of numerous ‘conversaziones’, ‘soirees’, ‘levees’, ‘at home’, ‘tea-fights’, and concerts of the works of back, Beethoven, Handel and so on (Cole 1975:43).

Leonard (1967) notes that the performers and audience of concert music practice in Lagos was made up of the expatriate colonial civil servants, the missionaries, Brazilians, Sierra Leoneans and some educated Lagosians. The Brazilians/Cubans or

Latinos while being mostly involved in popular musical entertainment were not unmindful of happenings in other areas of the musical spectra. Indeed they participated in other forms of entertainment especially concerts. There was the Brazilian Dramatic Company and the Mechanics Amateur Dramatic Association that organised concerts one of the series held at the Phoenix Hall in 1884 (Omojola 1995). Apart from direct participation they were instrumental to the introduction of tambourines, guitar, flutes, clarinets and concertinas into the Lagos music scene and indeed Nigeria (Waterman 1990:31-32). They performed on European instruments such as the harmonium, piano, organ, guitar, clarinet, flutes; etc that they brought from the country of their sojourn and through private tuition introduced these instruments into music practice in Nigeria. As accomplished performers these early music teachers also served the community as schoolteachers, church organists, choirmasters, band leaders and music consultants among others.

Adedeji states that

The first theatrical form of entertainment indulged in by the so called elite is a concert modelled after the Victorian Music Hall. In England at this period this type of entertainment was frowned upon by the Church and regarded generally as a 'pop art' patronised by the lower middle class (Adedeji 1971).

CONTEXT AND CONTENT

Between 1866 and 1890s concert music had developed to the extent of founding musical associations: The Philharmonic Society (1873), Lagos Espirit de Corp Society (1876), Flowers of Lagos Society (1878), The Academy (1866), Lagos Grammar School Entertainment Society (1872), The Philharmonic Society (1873), The Methodist Boys Entertainment Society (1880), Melo-Dramatic Society (1881), The Mechanics Dramatic Association (1884), Rising Entertainment Society, The Anglo-African, The Brazilian Dramatic Company. Concerts were organised frequently to engage participant in meaningful leisure, promote the cultivation of western music and to sustain the musical entertainment of their preference among others. The 1880s climaxed western musical entertainment in Lagos. There were concerts and operatic performances. Of concerts there were three types: the private concerts that held at homes and were non-fee paying

but restricted to invitees. There were also the school concerts the first being that organised in 1872 by the Lagos Grammar School under the auspices of T.B. Macaulay, then principal of the school. This and the subsequent concerts were held between November and December with the aim of releasing tension from examination and to celebrate the end of term. After a while, they were being used to encourage parents to educate their children by sending them to school. The third type were public concert that were usually fee paying events open to the general public. Initially they were organised to ameliorate 'the sad condition of Lagos society in the 1880s' (Cole 1975: 44), as 'appendage of the evangelical process' (Aig-Imuokhuede 1975:222), 'to aspire to the refinement of the English society' (Aig-Imuokhuede 1975:216), but later they were used for fund raising, recreation, and social networking (Leonard 1967). Hardly were they solely for aesthetic enjoyment.

In the 1860s there were no proper venues for holding public musical or theatrical entertainments in Lagos so that organisers made use of school halls and auditoria, court premises, churches and private premises until the early 1880s when the Anglican and Wesleyan missions expressed reservations about the continued use of their hallowed buildings for secular entertainment. The need for an appropriate place for such entertainment began in 1822 the movement for a public hall that bore fruit in the building of Glover Memorial Hall in 1893. Other venues in which concerts were held included Philharmonic Hall owned by the Philharmonic Society, Phoenix Hall, and Tom Jones Hall. Concerts programmes were made up of

songs, vocal duets and quartets, religious plays and musical arrangement of English folk songs and excerpts from cantatas and oratorios, especially the music of Handel and Mendelssohn. Instrumental performances were generally restricted to those on the harmonium, the piano and the violin, with occasional appearances of the police band. Musical items were often performed along with plays and poetry that showed a particular fascination for Shakespeare (Omojola 1995:14).

Apart from concerts, there were also full operatic performances apart from operatic excerpts within a concert programme. Some operas performed during the period are HMS Pinafore, Trial by Jury, 'Dick Whittington and his Cat' by Booth and Fox,

‘King Elejigbo’ by Egbe Ife, ‘The Jealous King Oya’ by Egbe Ife, and ‘Princes Briar Rose’ (Omibiyi-Obidike 2002).

Concerts grew rapidly that by the 1880s there were dedicated concerts. In this regard there were the annual Coker Concert that was inaugurated in 1882 and the annual Handel festival instituted by Dr. N.T. King a notable figure in the Lagos concert circuit. Concerts were of such importance that the press especially the *Lagos Observer* reported and wrote critical reviews on them and in so doing initiated the practice of literary music criticism in Nigeria.

PERFORMERS AND AUDIENCE

Most of the performers during this period were women and who had been trained at the C.M.S. female institution where music was emphasized under the supervision of Rev. and Mrs. Mann. Generally the few schools that existed took music seriously to the extent that most secondary school leavers were informed about concert music. Thus the liberal concert education provided by the schools led to abundance of skilled performers and an appreciative and critical audience. Indeed the prime movers of the concert movement during the period had acquired their taste for concert music through the school system. These include

S/ N	NAME	ROLE
1.	Mr. Joseph Samuel Crowther	Co-founder of the Academy
2.	Mr. Dandeson Crowther	Co-founder of the Academy
3.	Mr. Robert Campbell	First President of the Academy, Founder of the Anglo-African, Entertainment Patrol.
4.	Mr. J.A. Otunba Payne	Original member of the Academy. Founder and Music Director, the Lagos Esprit de corp.
5.	Mr. J.P.L. Davies	Member of the Academy
6.	Mrs. Davies	Singer and Pianist, Member of the Academy

7.	Rev. (Later Bishop) Samuel Ajayi Crowther, 1806 – 1891)	Patron of the Academy
8.	Mr. Hurbert Macaulay (1864 – 1946)	Pianist, Conductor and Concert Impresario from 1878 – 1905.
9.	Mr. Robert Coker	Teacher, pianist, Composer and concert impresario. Founder of the Annual Coker Concerts.
10.	Dr. Nathaniel King (1847 –1884)	Choirmaster St. John’s Church Aroloya Lagos. Patron, organiser and conductor of concerts. Founder of the Annual Handel Festivals.
11.	Mrs Charlotte Olajumoke Obasa (Nee Blaize),	Singer, Pianist, Violinist piano teacher, opera impresario and sponsor of concerts and cantatas.
12.	Miss Elfrida Esther Thomas	Pianist.
13.	Miss Oyinka Ajasa	Singer and music teacher.
14.	Dr Obasa	Singer, Pianist choir director and sponsor of concerts and cantatas.
15	Mr Claude Pratt	Concert enthusiast.
	Mr Lufadeji	Composer and singer. One of earliest Nigerian composers. One of compositions is ‘Fantasia on native airs’

It is worth noting that concert music was an elite pastime and did not affect and could not have impacted on generality of the populace. First it was a foreign musical tradition that was at variance with the musical sensibilities and practice of the host community thus posing serious challenge of acceptance and patronage. The concerts were far removed from the traditional concept of music therefore did not impact on the generality of the indigenous Lagosians (Brown 1964). This was and remains a daunting challenge for concert music in Nigeria. Conjoint to the aforementioned is that ‘traditional Nigerian pieces were rarely performed even though most of the performers were African’

(sic) (Omojola 1995:14). Furthermore the concerts were also held along socio-economic lines and saw the entry tickets beyond the reach of most of the indigenous segment of the population had they wished to attend.

Although concert music practice was initially limited to the Lagos-Abeokuta Axis it gradually spread to the adjoining areas as the missionaries expanded their activities into the interior. In their teacher training institutions the student teachers were exposed to some degrees of concert music and on being employed those material that they have learnt were often replicated in the concerts that they organised in their schools. The mission schools were noted for this practice as they took advantage of their schools to recruit pupils into the church choir. At festive times the choirs put up special performances akin to concerts and the repertoire included cantatas, oratorios, masses etc. It grew into a vogue whereby churches with the where withal sought to undo each other in the grandeur of their performances. Through this means western concert music dispersed albeit slowly across southern Nigeria. Following the path set by the church and school it was that by the second decade of the 20th century concert music was being performed in other towns outside the Lagos-Abeokuta axis such as Ibadan, Calabar, Sapele, Port Harcourt, and Enugu.

THE RISE OF MUSICAL NATIONALISM AND THE DECLINE OF CONCERTS

In Nineteen century Lagos westernisation was considered a mark of civilization that the westernised Africans aped European mannerisms and culture to the extent of regarding themselves as 'black white men and expected to be considered such in delusion of their place in society (Ayandele 1974:9). This was consequent on their education, position in the civil service and success in business. This attitude put them at loggerhead with the indigenous population on the one hand and the returnees from the Americas on the other. At best the earlier regarded them as interlopers while the Europeans treated them with contempt and regarded them as undeserving of the respect and recognition they craved.

Therefore the Saro nursed some misgivings that seethed under a respectable reticence. It however came to the fore after the white missionaries opposed the consecration of Samuel Ajayi Crowder as Bishop on the grounds that it wad divinely

ordained for whites to superintend over blacks and not the other way round. This issue provided opportunity for the aggrieved returnees to vent their anger at the 'white'. To register their resentment they mobilized the entire African sections of the community in a united stance against racial discrimination. Consequent upon this the immigrant population, the *Aguda* and the *Saro*, moved to shed the trappings of European civilization for which they were once arrowheads and reverted to their African heritage that they had disdained. The discontent that the 'bishop statement' generated continued and deepened even after the issue had been resolved and resulted in calls for the establishment of an African church which eventually brought about the schisms that rocked the evangelical churches producing in their wake independent African churches in Nigeria. The event in general, the movement was a renaissance that advocated the practice and promotion of African culture as manifested in bearing of African names, wearing of African clothes and adornment, cultivation of African cuisine and patronage of African expressive and performing arts of which music was pivotal.

By the early 20th century, concerts began to decline following some social changes. There was the coming of Cinema that ironically was managed by Herbert Macaulay on the 12th of August 1903 and by November; Cinema had become more regular in Lagos. In 1905, he retired from the musical scene in order to concentrate on political activities. This decision delivered a fatal blow on concerts as it lost his musical abilities, organizational skills and towering personality. However at the end of the World War I, concerts had declined considerably. This period can be summarized thus:

The end-product of this era which spanned some six decades were several oratorio works and compositions for organ whose character was definitely European and reflected little of the richness of local music forms and practices. This was the situation for the whole of the country until the 1920s when traditional tunes began to be composed for special events like harvests, Easter and Christmas (Aig-Imuokhuede 1975:216).

Just as Nigerians were performing European concert music they also craved to be able to create music of such renown. In fact, when the Brazil and Sierra Leonean

returnees introduced music notation in the mid 19th century it stimulated the desire to create music but they were hampered by lack of education. In fact 'a local musical composition titled, 'Souvenir de Lagos' by R.A. Coker 'featured at Coker's Handel festival of 1882' (Aig-Imuokhuede 1975:217), the German consul, Herr Johannings's composition *Jebu March* was performed in the first concert held in Glover Memorial hall in 1893 while Herbert Macaulay incorporated locally composed materials in his numerous concerts that held between 1880 and 1905. The move toward indigenising musical local entertainment received a boost in 1886 when D. Adolphus Williams in 1886 translated several popular English tunes to Yoruba to interest the non-English speaking members of the audience in the concerts at the *Ake*, school in Abeokuta. Later such songs became part of the regular concert repertoire of the era. In fact in a concert organized by Rev. Olubi in Abeokuta in 1898, one Mr. Lufadeji sang his composition 'Oye ka fope f' Olorun..' Between 1900 and 1903, innovations at Abeokuta re-echoed in Lagos and Mr. Emmanuel Sowande, organist at St. Jude Anglican Church and conductor of the *Ebute Metta* Choral Society began experimenting with indigenous materials (Leonard 1967).

CONCLUSION

It has been shown that concert music was an elitist entertainment that was introduced in the mid 19th century. It was well patronised that it became part of the trappings of the elite culture the time. Arising from the cultural nationalism of the period emphasis shifted towards indigenous forms of entertainment that activities connected with concert music especially concerts declined but the experience that Nigerians had gained in their exposure to western concert music put them in good stead to develop a unique artistic musical tradition that will be recognised internationally as Nigerian However it born fruit in the emergence of a Nigerian concert music tradition in the 20th century.

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