

NKWA MUSIC OF ACHINA TRADITIONAL SOCIETY IN IGBO CULTURE

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Abstract

Royalty in Igbo traditional society is accorded inestimable prominence that every community in Igbo culture enjoys to be identified with such celebrity-oriented fraternity. This essay unravels the suitability and functionality of Nkwa music of Achina as a type of royal music genre, taken into consideration its socio-cultural context, the formational procedure, the instrumentation, organizational set-up and the analysis (of the Nkwa music). These will go a long way to buttress the fact that Igbo or rather Africans as a whole do not just make music for music sake but their music is purely culturally-philosophically imbued.

Introduction

Echezona (1963) in Nwamara (2006:133) succinctly inferred that “before a person can understand the music of the Igbo people, he must fully understand the culture of the people and the relationship of music to that culture”. Similarly, Nkwa music can only be understood if aptly viewed from the point of culture peculiarities of Igbo people as divorced from the polarity of opinions enmeshed in the cultural diversity of African societies. The utility of any Igbo traditional music is highly dependent upon its functionality and suitability of purpose. Nkwa is such a music typology that has stood the test of time in royalty affairs in Achina community of Igbo extraction. The genre has a lot to tell about the culture of the owner, as Oguno (2006:90) rightly observed that, “the traditional music of a people is to a great extent, a mirror of their culture”.

Brief History of Achina

Information on the history of Achina was collected through oral tradition during one the writer's field works. For the nature of this article and for precision, the summary and not the detail will suffice. Achina which is popularly called Achina Idegwu egbe buru oku asoghi anwuru meaning the kite that picks smoky burning object without fear of the consequences is one of the towns in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State. It is located on the plateau of the hill, South of Aguata which can be expressed mathematically as lying approximately at 06 degrees north of the Equator. Achina is bound in the West by Umuchu, to the East by Enugwu Umuonyia, to the North by Oneh and to the South by Akpo (Okoye 2006). Being a densely populated town, they are sustained economically through subsistent farming, crafts and trading. They embraced western education and religion, but that, did not elude their cultural sensibility totally. They still have regards

for culture proven activities such as Kingship and Title taking with their associated music. In Achina community, there are titles like, Igwe, Okpala, Obi, Ichie, Eze, Nze, and so on, and these give prefix to most of their names. For instance Okpaluba, Obika, Ezeonuegbu and so on, are some of the common names in Achina. Ozo title is the fundamental and prerequisite for kingship in Achina community. Kingship in Achina is rotational among the villages that make up Achina town rather than ancestral lineage system. In the past the people of Achina used to regard their King as the sole administrator of the community as well as the arbiter of justice. The high regard reserved for royalty in Achina gave rise to several royal music and Nkwa remains an archetype.

The Socio-Cultural Implications of Nkwa Music

An Investigation into the functionality and suitability of Nkwa music as a royal music revealed that:

- (1) Nkwa is music for chieftaincy affairs only.
- (2) According to source Nze Okwuegbunem Udogu (2006) nkwa music takes precedence in any royal function in Achina before any other music.
- (3) Its performances are limited to ozo title taking, coronation of a king, the ofala festival of a king and the king's last Ofala. (last Ofala is a maxim depicting the burial and funeral ceremony of a king in Igbo culture, as it is a common saying that kings do not die but live for ever), so it is disrespectful to tradition for one to say that a king dies.
- (4) Nkwa music is sacred. It is only the initiates who dance it.

As a result, Nkwa music assumes the highest priority in chieftaincy matters in Achina community and nobody dares violating its tradition.

Formation of the Nkwa Music

Nkwa music is not a borrowed genre. It was traditionally instituted and continues to evolve from generation to generation within the same ancestral lineage. According to Nze Okwuegbunem Udogu who was then the beneficiary of the Nkwa music during the period of this investigation, he narrated how the Nkwa music had been in their lineage right from their great grandfather, then to his own father and finally to him. He informed the researcher of his effort to ensure that his successor who precisely must be one of his sons continues with the music in order not to allow the music go into extinction. This he does through exposing the son to different musical situations where the boy can observe him play and through guided participation.

The practice becomes quite different from what Nketia, (1974) said of the Akan master drummers who would not be willing to teach their successors so early in life for fear of the successors hastening their departure or for fear of being unduly displaced by their sons. Since it had been a tradition in Akan that the post of the master drummer must not be vacant, it must be taken over by the son at the death of his father. The story is quite different with the Chopi musician. Their ideology is much similar to that of nkwa musician of Achina. Tracey, (1948:108) observe among Chopi musicians that:

A father will take his seven or eight year old boy and sit him between his knees while he plays. The boy will hold the two beaters with his arms well flexed and pliant, while the father clips his hand over his sons and continues to play in the usual way.

So through practice, observation and guidance Nze Okwuegbunem Udogu teaches his successor to ensure continuity.

The Instruments of Nkwa Music

Nkwa music comprise of three different sizes of slit wooden drums, which according to them constitute what can be regarded as a nuclear family the father, the mother and the child. (oke, nwunye, na nwa) The biggest drum is the mother; the medium drum is the father while the small drum is the child. Nze Okwuegbunem plays both the father and the mother drums while Nze Clement Ezeokwuoha plays the child drum.

The drums (father and mother drums) are carved out of a tree called Ngwu tree. (Ngwu is similar to iroko tree) The two big drums are rested over a round pad rolled out from a banana stalk. The pad helps to keep the drums in position when playing. A short stick is pegged at the back of each of the drums in the pad, so that the drums will not roll back when playing. The pad not only protects the drums from touching the hard surface but also serves as good resonator to the drums. That is why the drums could be heard from a far distance. The beaters of the big drums are got from the mid rib of coconut frond. The choice is made to produce a soft and sonorous timbre when using them on the drums, and to prevent breaking and cracking of the drum lips.

The small drum is carved out from a tree called Akwa-ahia tree. (a tree similar to pear tree) The beating sticks are got from guava branches. It is placed on a bare ground when playing. This is as a result of the percussive sound required from it, in order to blend with the deep sound produced by the big drums. Due to its small nature, it produces high pitch sounds. The sizes of beating sticks are proportional to the sizes of the drums.

Organization of Nkwa Ensemble

The Nkwa music is a small ensemble of two performers. The performer of the father and mother drums (oke na nwunye) is the master instrumentalist. He introduces the music and dictates the rhythms of the music. He extemporizes at will. In other words, he controls the music. The child drum (nwa nkwa) complements the basic rhythms supplied by the other drums thereby enriching the texture of the music. The number of instruments does not affect the rhythmic complexity, which is the main characteristic of African rhythms. There is normally serious rhythmic dialogue between the father and mother drums. They send out messages, which only the members understand. There is no formal organization of dance pattern; it is a type of individualistic formation or free medley style. The music is instrumental all through. It has no vocal section. The Nkwa music ensemble has no special costume both for the drummers and the dancers. What is common in their outfit is the red cap which must be worn by every titled man while dancing. The music is performed only on serious occasions as mentioned above.



A photograph showing Nkwa ensemble

Analysis of Nkwa music

Form: The Nkwa music is an instrumental ensemble. It is a small orchestra of three different sizes of slit drum which perform in what may be called a quasi call and response pattern (precisely between father and mother drum).

Melody: The father and mother drums play melo-rhythmic roles in the ensemble while the child drum supplies percussive effect to blend with the bigger drums. This melo-rhythmic role is achieved through hocketing. Below is an excerpt of the musical introduction often performed by the ensemble's instrumentalists.

NKWA MUSIC

The image displays musical notation for Nkwa Music. The top section consists of three staves. The first two staves are labeled 'Nne' and the third is labeled 'Nwa'. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The bottom section consists of three staves, with the first staff starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp, and the second and third staves starting with a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp. The notation in the bottom section includes eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests.

Structural Features: The themes are presented in segmented forms with acts of variations. Though the points of variations are not clearly defined or demarcated yet there are evidences of structural changes or manipulations. The development of new themes is based on the already established tunes.

Harmonic styles: The three instruments that make up the Nkwa music produce different pitches, and for the fact that the instruments are played together, they have the tendency to overlap and produce harmonic effect. There is a good harmonious matching of tones as a result of different tonal qualities of instruments. Culturally, slit drums and other related instruments which have two lips are constructed at the interval of either a major or minor 3rd, or a fifth, so that the combination produces a harmony though not as outstanding as the vocal harmony.

Rhythm: The use of notes of short durational values resulted in strict rhythmic pattern of the music. The introductory section started in some how free rhythmic style, while it becomes stricter as it goes on.

Conclusion

Nkwa is a royal music that means a lot in Achina traditional society. It portrays the extent to which royalty is regarded in their community, just like every other community in Igbo culture and even beyond. The instruments that constitute the orchestra are not so extra ordinary, but their significance depends largely on their cultural implication, orchestrated by the tradition of Achina people. Not only that it is gender exclusive, it is strictly reserved for the titled men and can only perform during royal activities. All these qualities made it so outstanding in Achina community.

References

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APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPTION OF NIWA MUSIC OF ACHINA

Introduction: *in Quasi Free Rhythmic Style*

The musical score consists of three staves. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The second staff has a bass clef. The third staff is a single line with a common time signature. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as eighth, sixteenth, and thirty-second notes, as well as rests. Measure numbers 1 through 12 are indicated below the staves.

The image displays a musical score for guitar, organized into six systems. Each system consists of three staves: a top staff with a treble clef, a middle staff with a bass clef, and a bottom staff with a bass clef. The systems are numbered 13 through 24. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and articulation marks. The first system (measures 13-16) features a melodic line in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. The second system (measures 16-18) continues the melodic and bass lines. The third system (measures 18-21) shows a more complex rhythmic pattern in the middle staff. The fourth system (measures 22-24) features a dense rhythmic texture in the middle staff. The fifth system (measures 22-24) continues the dense rhythmic texture. The sixth system (measures 22-24) concludes the piece with a final melodic phrase in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef.

Main Rhythmic Pattern; In Strict Time

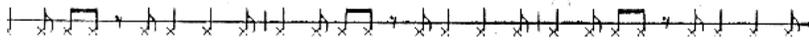
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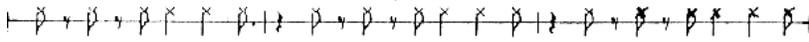
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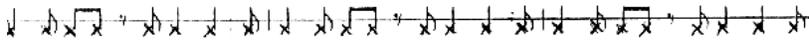
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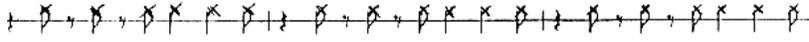
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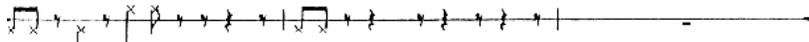
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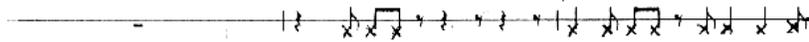
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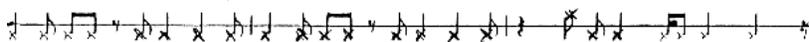
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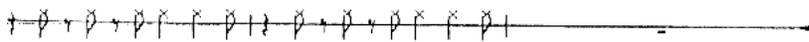
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THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIGENOUS NIGERIAN LANGUAGES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND PROFESSIONAL USE: THE CASE OF ESAN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This paper examines the issue of developing indigenous Nigerian languages particularly Esan for effective communication and professional use. The study adopted the survey research method while data collection was done using the questionnaire and informal interviews. A sample size of 1500 respondents was purposively selected from Esan people residents in their homeland. The findings show that 95.0% of the people could speak the language fluently without similar proficiency in reading and writing while only 15.0% could read and write scripts in Esan with a high level of proficiency. The dismal situation was adduced to attitudinal problem since the people find it more prestigious and acceptable to speak and study English language being the language of the elites. The paper recommends the teaching and learning of Esan in institutions of higher learning, training of teachers and documentation of the language among others.

Introduction

In contemporary world where information and knowledge have grown to become indispensable in human development and societal advancement, the development and standardization of indigenous languages have become imperative. The world is undergoing a global transformation in every facet of human endeavour. Inadvertently or otherwise the information gap that has developed between the advanced countries of the North and the developing countries of the South through disproportionate information and knowledge handling in the areas of generation, dissemination, storage, retrieval and use is being encouraged in Nigeria between the elites and the so-called non-elites. Today, the proficient use of English as a language of communication in the Nigerian media, be it in the print or electronic broadcast as observed by Omoera (2008) is central to effective communication whereby what is intended is what is received without any form of ambiguity. Can this be said of Esan and other indigenous languages in Nigeria? It is only within the purview of a language that is well developed and standardized, a language not lacking in terminology specialized or general, that the proficiency and effectiveness very much talked about in communication can be of interest.

Generally, language is a tool or resource of communication, an expression of personality, a signal of identity (Dominguez, 1998). Shared code as it relates to language and channels of communication linking people is an absolute necessity for the creation of information and knowledge so inexorably valued for socio-economic,