

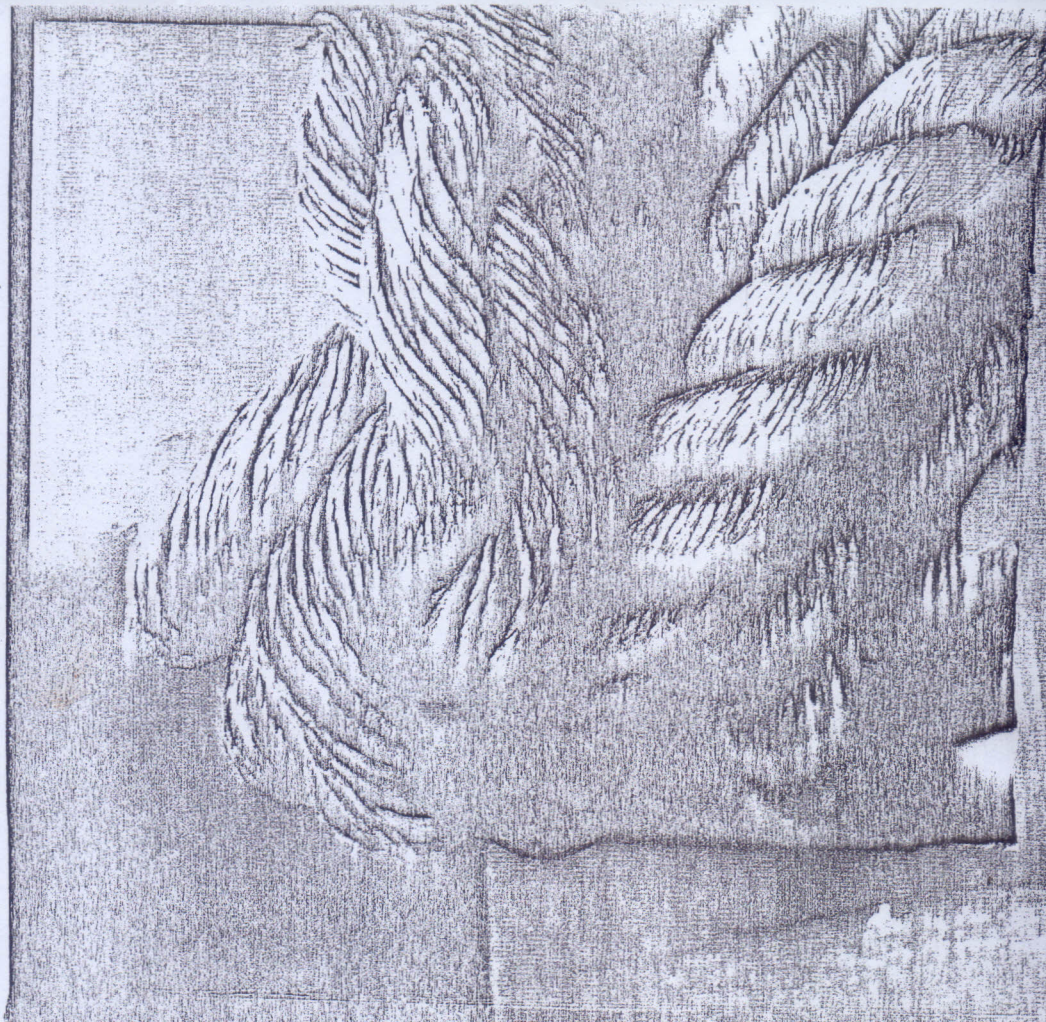


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ADAPTATION AND THE COMPOSER'S CHALLENGE IN OPERATIC DRAMA

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Abstract

Adapting drama to music, particularly in Nigeria, has received little attention compared to other aspects of the arts, e.g. drama itself. Yet adapting drama to music has remained a veritable tool in the hands of those who have discovered its potency. This paper focuses on adaptation and the composer's challenge in operatic drama, using Hutcheon's theory of adaptation. The paper employs the descriptive and analytical method through the analysis of some musical notations, as well as the description of some processes of adaptation. Findings show that the theory of adaptation has been hidden to many composers and that the aspect of adaptation from drama to opera has not been fully explored. The paper concludes by analysing easy ways and steps to adaptation.

Keywords: Adaptation, Operatic Drama, Composer, Music, Composition, Hutcheon's theory of adaptation.

Introduction

In the world of music, composition is an important tool that cannot be compromised, for it is indeed a sine qua non to the development and sustenance of musical practice. Adaptation in music greatly relies on the art of composition. Hence, adaptation theories such as those of Kneupper (1972), Zawidski (2000), Elvira (2003), Hutcheon (2006) etc, have been very useful and

their impact in the world, especially in Nigeria, is beginning to yield positive results. Being a process of change, adaptation has been an emblem of reformation, re-creation and reproduction and has also presented a way of revitalizing existing play scripts into new forms. Although the process is arduous and extremely challenging, the final result of its performance becomes fulfilling if the work has passed through the required process. That is why Thompson affirms that

Adaptation into an opera is a difficult task; it is a two in one volitional and compulsory hurdle that must be subdued. The challenge it poses is often enormous and sometimes seems unrealizable, especially when given a time frame. But when approached with utmost seriousness, interest and dedication, the result definitely brings satisfaction, fulfilment, achievement, etc. It practically confirms the adapter as a composer. (30)

Adaptation is not an escape route from the requirements of music as it applies to original opera. Rather, it presents an interesting way of introducing other styles of achieving and producing an opera. Adaptation scholars have offered insights on adaptation. For example, Hutcheon enlightens us that "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative, a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsest" (72). We can therefore see that even though adaptation is derived from another script, it is completely different from the pre-existing script. The theory of adaptation transcends the realm of

changing a script to another form. It has to do with a stepwise, careful and procedural way of putting the work into its new form through the technical know-how of the music director.

Adaptation as a Literary Device

While its definition is somewhat general, the functions, uses and application of adaptation in different situations, disciplines and areas are quite different, as adaptation is in the forefront of every aspect of human life and endeavour. There are several areas in which adaptation can be applied, such as biological, climatic, environmental, psychological, etc. The main concern of this paper is musical adaptation for the theatre.

The Encyclopaedia Americana defines adaptation as

The action or process of adapting, fitting or suiting one thing to another; the process of modifying a thing so as to suit new conditions; the modifications of a piece of music to suit a different instrument or different purpose; the alteration of a dramatic composition to suit a different audience. (151)

This definition further exemplifies it as a transition from one thing to another. It also establishes that it can be an action or process. This means that adaptation is an act which is supposed to undergo a process. In the same vein, *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* further clarifies that adaptation

is a shift in function or form, or both that ensures fitness in a certain environment on the part of living organisms;

it supposes an adjustment of requirements and tolerance and the achievement of a certain efficiency. The case of humans is hardly different even though social and psychological requirements may have precedence over climatic and physiological ones. (89)

This underscores the reason that in every facet of human life, animals, plant and even situations, changes occur to adjust for better options. Hence Orzack and Elliot observe that

The complexity of the total adjustment of plants, animals and even human beings alike, to all the elements of their habitat leads to this ultimate paradox; no species encounters in any one environment optimum conditions for each and every phase of its life cycle. (44)

Adaptation of drama to opera also follows this same principles. Thus, the choreographer Iyeh agrees that adaptation is "a word coined from the word 'adapt', which means to make something suitable for a new or different use or situation by means of changes or modification. Modification here may imply transfer from one medium to another" (139).

Adapting a drama piece into an opera is in fact a modification of drama into another medium, that is, opera. This new medium (opera) has therefore been implanted in another form of communication, thus implying that the spoken word as it were, in its dramatic form, will change into rendition of the lines as songs, with the accompaniment of different musical

instruments. Zawidski opines that "adaptation in music is an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works. A creative and an interpretative act of appropriation and salvaging" (28).

It is interesting to note here that adaptation can also be viewed from the angle of salvaging a situation probably due to lack of, or unavailability of ready-made opera scripts. Although the idea to adapt in our present system has an affinity with the purpose of salvaging, it will not be out of place to suggest that adaptation should also be approached from the angle of creating more opera typologies and creating more theories of adaptation.

Adaptation Process

It needs to be clarified that it is not only the music director who may do an adaptation, as the process involves a collaboration of music, dance, drama, acting, directing, etc. In order for an adaptation to be complete and successful, it must undergo some necessary processes. Hutcheon posits a step-by-step process for adapting a drama into an opera. The recommendations are to:

1. Source for script.
2. Study and read to be sure of its adaptability.
3. Edit, restructure and re-arrange, etc.
4. Study and read again to ascertain the compactness of the script in comparison to the original form.
5. Start your composition.
6. Search for possible areas of musical exploration.

7. See through for possible additions and subtractions.
8. Score your compositions.
9. Set your compositions into dramatic performance.

In furtherance of Hutcheon's theory, all these points shall be discussed to offer an insight into each level of process and ascertain when to move to the next stage.

1. **Sourcing for Script:** A script is a written working document in drama, prose or poetry etc, which is to be actualised on stage. Before an adaptation can take place, there has to be a script to work with. The adapter is saddled with the task of searching for a suitable drama script that will fit into his or her style. This serves as a first attempt at adapting.

2. **Read and Study to be sure of its Adaptability:** This is a very important stage because it is not all drama scripts that are adaptable, or suitable for adaptations. As such, adapters must be careful by understanding the possibility and plausibility of adapting a script. Kneupper advises that "in attempting the delicate task of adapting, adapters must recognize two essential points. The importance of adapting a script capable of effective presentation, and necessity of maintaining the integrity of the adapted work" (10). Kneupper thus suggests that the adaptability of a script has to do with its featuring effective presentation, while also staying in tune and in line with the original script itself. In fact, if it is not adaptable it might not be successful.

3. **Edit, restructure and re-arrange:** An adapter is at liberty to edit the original script to suit his purpose. This is because not every line in the original script is needed as he or she is re-

interpreting the work to suit his or her concept and framework. In operatic adaptation, there is a very vital need to restructure and rearrange some parts of the script so that they will fit into the singing style. Some lines have to be broken in bits in order to conform to the singing style.

4. **Read and study again to ascertain the compactness of the script in comparison to the original form:** After the script has been edited, re-structured etc, one has to be sure that some important aspects of the messages have not been edited or diluted. This will ensure that the script has not lost focus, and is not out of point as it is in the original script. At this point, Iyeh cautions that "adaptability to the new form is very important because it will be useless and annoying if at the end of the day, the new medium fails to communicate as much as the original form" (129).

5. **Start your composition:** Here, the music composer who is also the adapter starts his or her job. This is a dual role: that of music composer and that of music adapter. These roles may also be split in two separate portfolios to allow for convenience. Technically, the role of the music composer is to compose the lines in the dramatic work into music. Composition is considered the most important aspect of the adaptation process because it is basically concerned with the transfer of the lines into music. It is definitely not an easy task and usually takes a longer period than all other aspects. It demands concentration, time, focus, creativity and observation, etc. The adapter/composer must possess all the necessary musical skills and knowledge needed for this work.

The composer at this point has three options with which

using the tonic solfa notation
singing the lines directly as the tune
recording the songs on a tape or CD.

ation is the Western diatonic scale,
the easiest ways to do an effective
of it. This is because it is the tonic sol-
faccessible. Singing the lines is very
fact that these words are what we use
communication, and as long as we leave the
other things, the music in the lines
solfa notations are used, they stick and
the lines. Recording the songs on tape
of keeping the compositions intact.
The composition will be documented
the teaching of the songs by giving
to listen to.

Adapted work must make use of most
musical techniques in music, in order to
musical taste and flavour. Such
as that are usually common in
1, retardation, extemporization,
on, quotation, etc. Although these
when the compositions are scored,
start them as soon as he composes with
The user must also make proper use of
The dynamics are vital musical terms
compositions and include *forte*,

pianissimo, allegro vivace, moderato, a tempo, and andante sostenuto. When all this is done, the most sensitive part of the adaptation (composition) will have been taken care of.

6. **Search for possible areas of musical exploration:** This is an aspect which continues the composition by putting finishing touches to it. Here, the composer highlights areas where harmony is to be included, i.e., by giving different parts to some particular aspects of the lines known as chorus. These parts can be the four major conventional parts of **soprano, alto, tenor** and **bass**, or might include a few others. The essence of this chorus is to create emphasis and add more musical feeling to the opera. Exploring with the **duo, trio, quartet**, etc. is also very necessary as this will create variations in the patterns of singing. The collaboration of what the instrument will play with the entire opera will also come up here. Different instruments with how, when and what to play will also come to bear.

7. **See through for possible additions and subtractions:** After the compositions must have been completed, and the adding of the musical exploration, another cross-check is deemed important. The pattern of composition, especially in adaptation, is such that your compositions are never stagnant, as it goes through a continuous process of reformation which might involve removing some parts that may be considered an excess and adding another, all in the spirit of improvement and perfection.

8. **Score your compositions into staff notation:** This aspect has to do with the documentation of the composition in staff notation. This is crucial because there has to be a working

manuscript which will be given to the cast and will be used in teaching them the songs. Another important reason why this compositions needs to be scored is that it needs to be kept in the archives to serve as a reference material for the future. The essence of adaptation will not be complete without scoring the compositions because, apart from the performance, it is the only proof that a drama script has been adapted into an opera.

9. **Set your compositions into dramatic performance:** It is not compulsory for the music director to do the adaptation, but this is the final hurdle in the adaptation process. It is an aspect where all the musical compositions will be dramatized on stage. The music and the dramatic actions will be combined to give it an operatic form. Here, all the dramatic concepts, patterns and movements will be infused to give it shape, and to present the storyline just as it is designed. However, the adapter must be careful not to allow the music overshadow the dramatic content of the opera so that some detail will not be missed. Having gone through all these processes, the adaptation of a drama script to an opera will have achieved its desired aim.

Adapting Drama Scripts into Opera

Transforming a drama script into an opera requires a careful approach. Obviously, the intention of the playwright is to write for drama, and all the styles of writing will definitely portray dramatic aesthetics. The lines will also be written in form of speech renditions. Nevertheless, this originality remains dominant, as the shift from drama to opera still maintains some form of dramatic interpretations. One important feature that changes is the structure of the lines. The lines for drama are mainly in long sentences which are naturally intended for speech delivery. As such, it is the job of the person doing the adaptation

to break the lines into bits and small parts so that it will fit into the singing style. For example, if the original line in the drama script is

I already knew you are my love when I saw you from afar

it could thus be rephrased to fit it into operatic musical convenience:

When I saw u from afar, I knew that you are my love.

In the above example the line is reconstructed and given a punctuation mark, and this also allows for a pause in the musical phrase. After it has been reconstructed, it is then scored into the music staff, as in the example below:

[Title]

[Composer]

Voice

when i saw you from a far i kn ew th at you are my lo ve

As it is in directing where the director can interpret the script according to his concept, the music director is also free to edit some of the lines in the script, especially if he considers them unnecessary for his use. One major fact is that singing may not totally accommodate the level of emphasis as it is with drama; in fact there are usually fewer words to sing and more words to say. Thus, adapting the whole script as it is in its dramatic form will be like following the style of the Russian director Don Chenko, a style which may not be applicable in most contemporary dramatic presentations. Additions and subtractions can also be infused to suit the music director's intention of interpreting the script in an operatic form. There are other areas in which the

changes may occur from drama scripts to opera and this may depend on the individuality of the music director.

The Music Director's Technical Challenges

The production of a drama script on its own is usually challenging, most especially when the script has significant technical effects and settings. If this is so, that means that the challenges of adapting drama scripts into opera is extra challenging. Naturally, music is very technical especially when it is to do with the core theory of music and this technicality makes the process of adaptation a little more difficult and time-consuming. The processes of composition, arrangement, harmonising, scoring, and putting the whole structure into dramatic shape (opera) can often pose major technical challenges for a music director. These processes are briefly discussed below.

Composition: This is one of the most important aspects of music and one area of music which demands creativity and a thorough understanding of the theory of music. Apart from the dramatic movements, composition is arguably the most important aspect of adaptation because the transfer of the lines to music will not be possible except through composition. This process is technically challenging owing to the multifarious ways in which the music director needs to approach his compositions. The major challenge in this style of composition is that one is not just composing some sets of songs, but a whole drama script which is written in acts and scenes. Usually, most drama scripts have one or two major characters whose lines are many owing to the specialty of their characters and this may pose another challenge to the music director because there is a limit to how

these same lines can be adapted into music. Naturally, the amount of words an actor will render in two minutes will probably be rendered in music in about four minutes, if not more, because of the regularity in the time and beat of a song. All these and a few other constraints certainly pose a challenge to the music director.

1. Harmonising: This is one of the most important aspects of adaptation. After the compositions have been done, the next challenge is the harmonisation of the music into musical parts. This may be done on paper with the use of the tonic sol-fa at least at first, before setting it into musical score owing to the technicality of the process. But while harmonising on paper a number of things need to be put into consideration. First, the music director needs to understand his compositions and identify the particular songs he or she intends for the chorus to sing so as to know the quantity of the music to harmonise. Taking consideration of the voice parts and voice ranges is also very important because the range of the voice parts reflects the extent to which the harmony can go. As noted earlier, diversifying with the duet, trio, quartet, etc., will naturally give the compositions a sense of beauty and more harmonic flavour.

Below is an example of the harmonised version of the adapted work:

[Title]

[Composer]

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. Each voice part is written on a five-line staff with a treble clef (except for the Bass part which has a bass clef). The lyrics are written below the staves. The lyrics are: "when i - saw you from a - far i kn-ew th-at you - are my lo - ve". The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The Soprano part starts with a half note, followed by eighth notes. The Alto part starts with a half note, followed by eighth notes. The Tenor part starts with a half note, followed by eighth notes. The Bass part starts with a half note, followed by eighth notes.

The harmony is usually in the four conventional music parts, but may also feature some other music parts such as mezzo soprano, baritone, etc., depending on what the composer wants to achieve.

Arrangement: This mainly has to do with the fusion of the musical instruments with the voice. The music director has the challenge of blending the musical instruments with the voices, especially when there are two or more musical instruments playing, or even an orchestra. There has to be good collaboration between these two in order to achieve unity in the musical presentation. Intros and interludes are part of the instrumental arrangements which are very important to the production and a continuous accompaniment of the whole songs is also very necessary. The creativity of the music director will also bring

about the concept of the way he or she arranges the music of the production.

Scoring the compositions: This is one of the major technical problems of the music director because all the musical compositions are due to be set into musical score. Scoring a piece of music naturally may not be really challenging, but scoring several songs, especially as it pertains to adapting a whole drama script, is an enormous task considering the magnitude of songs already set into music. One advantage the music director has is the availability of some musical software that can ease the process of scoring a musical piece. Some of the other qualities expected of a music director is the understanding of the theory of music. As mentioned earlier, the music score is very important because of the need to show evidence that a drama script has been adapted into opera.

Putting dramatic actions on stage: This is like putting icing on the cake and it is the final hurdle in the process of adapting a drama to opera. After every other thing must have been done outside the stage, the real shape of how the final production will look like is the major duty of the music director. This will definitely be challenging, especially if the music director is a pure musician and does not have experience in directing drama. Here, he or she will need the services of a drama director who will help infuse all the necessary dramatic movements. It is much more of a challenging task to put dramatic actions into an opera because the movements of the action are precipitated by the timing and rhythm of the songs. Except in a few cases, and through the instructions of the director, the movement of the actors in an operatic presentation is usually along the pace of the song such

that if the song is fast, the movement will be fast and if it is slow, the movement will be slow. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the music director can succeed better in adapting a drama script into an opera if he has the necessary manpower, materials and time made available to him.

Conclusion

The alternative way of producing an opera is to adapt an existing quality drama script. Operatic adaptations pose technical challenges to the music director and this is as a result of the change of the medium of presentation. As difficult as these challenges may look, some major ways of tackling the challenges have been outlined to allow for a smooth transition in the shift from drama to opera. The process of adaptation as proposed by Hutcheon's theory also serves as a guide to the interested music director. Even though challenges will surface in this process, it is a feat that is totally achievable if the necessary materials and manpower are made available.

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