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CULTURAL VALUES OF MUSIC AND MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN ICHICHA: AN IDOMA TRADITIONAL PERFORMANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Music in African is influenced by believe, tradition, culture and cultural heritage of humanity. At times it is inspired by social influence within the given community. Likewise are the musical instruments which accompanied the music. Though, these instruments come under general names, nevertheless, they serve different purposes from communities to communities. African with her robust traditional performances, some in form of worship, some in festival form and some laden with ritualistic essence have their performances under different cultural connotations. In Africa, especially in Idoma society, Music and musical instruments are treated as sacred medium and traditional tools that perform different traditional functions such as; communication, entertainment, mediating between human and supernatural spirits etc. Hence, musical instruments used during performances define the people and their culture. It is in this direction that this paper examines the intrinsic values of music and musical instruments in various Idoma traditional performances and the roles they play in the society at large for the sustainability of Idoma culture. Our finding reveals that Musical instruments, irrespective of their types or forms are of significant essence in traditional performances in Africa and specifically traditional performances in Idoma land. This paper therefore, concludes that musical instrument played

during Idoma traditional performances have their uniqueness and significant effects on the quality of Idoma culture and by extension life of the Idoma people. Consequent upon this, the paper recommends that younger generation in Idoma land should be taught the Idoma music and how to make and play the instruments, so as to sustain the culture and save the heritage that modernity is threatening with extinction.

Keywords: *Culture, Tradition, Performance and Classification of musical instruments*

Introduction

Just as music is of immense significance in African cultural performances so also are musical instruments. They are employed in performances to provide rhythmic sound that exemplifies the aesthetics and uniqueness of an occasion and also for communication. Music and musical instruments are used to aid better understanding and transmission of messages through the connection of the physical and metaphysical or spiritual dimensions of our being.. In most parts of Africa and the world, it is the musical instruments used that give the premises to classify the type of music. In many communities, musical instruments are also a means of identifying, defining and characterizing a people.

In Idoma, like in most African societies, some traditional musical instruments are played for spiritual, supernatural and entertainment purposes. Arom (1991: 8) confirms this when he submits that music is:

Woven into the cycle of individual, familial and collective existence to such an extent that they are an inseparable and indispensable part of the social and religious life of the community... a means of communication and an indispensable intermediary between men and the supernatural forces surrounding them, music serves to make contact with the shades of the ancestors, the spirits.

It is important to note at this point that for a musical presentation to be meaningful, it must be accompanied by musical instruments. When these instruments are properly used, they do not only make sounds that coordinate the rhythm but also inform, instruct and guide. They are also employed for the pleasure and appreciation of the audience. When a musical performance—a combination of lyrics and instrumentation to create rhythm—meets the aesthetic pleasure of the audience, they confirm by responding with dance. As Idoma music is of different genres used for different purposes such as worship, funeral, or other festive occasions, so also are the musical instruments used. It is axiomatic that the music produced and the accompanying musical instruments set the mood for the various occasions. For the purpose of this research, we have chosen to look at the cultural values of music musical instruments used in Idoma Ichicha performances from the premises of identity as well as understanding their cultural values.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Origin of Music and Musical Instruments in Africa

The exact time period that music as spectacle or phenomenon that attracts academic attention in Africa is not known. Campbell (2014: 220) tries to trace the origin of music to when man began imitating animal sounds like “natural phenomena like the songs of the birds, the whirl of the wind, the roll of thunder, the prattling of the rain and the cracking of fire.” Oludare (2014: 87) captures the essence of music in typical African society when he submits that: “Music serves as a way of life, encapsulating his [African] existence and day-to-day activities, from the cradle-with music as his first source of cultural initiation, to the grave-through a continuous celebration of life.”

Since time immemorial, Africa has integrated and infused musical instruments into performances thus elevating music beyond the perceived imitation of animals and birds. It is against this backdrop

that musical instruments sourced from within and around a given milieu highlights and underscores their cultural relevance and the ways of life of the users. Blench (1982: 42-43) in his efforts to identify musical instruments that are used during performances in Idoma land, did extensive work on the classification of Idoma Musical instruments, dividing them according to their common generic terms.

Pratt (1907: 31) stresses on the physical benefits that are derived from use of musical instruments. This is in his submission that displays the good skills and artistic ingenuity that give rise to music and dance, thus: "...derived from some attempt to work off surplus energy through bodily motions, to coordinate and decorate which rhythmic sounds, vocal or mechanical, are employed." This we also observe as one of the reasons why drummers want to play musical instruments.

Drawing from the above, one can say that musical instruments used for performances in Africa are the combination of creative elements, coming from instruments derived from natural materials, which produce sound in a rhythmic balance, valued by the creator and appreciated by the audience as well as personal benefits derived by players. If it does not appeal to, identify with or classify the users, then it does not fall within the cultural demand of that society. All over the world, music has an oral-aural appeal that gives one a sense of belonging; so also are the musical instruments that accompany the music.

1.2. History of Idoma people

Oral history has it that Idoma people migrated from their ancestral homeland called Apa in the present North Central Nigeria and came to settle in the present location in the lower Benue, an area that was carved as a state in 1976 by the Nigerian government. In their present location, these people are bordered by the Igbo in the South,

to the West by the Igala and to the East by the Wukari. The community shares the state with Tiv who are their northern neighbours. The State has nine Local Government Areas: Ado, Agatu, Apa, Obi, Ohimini, Ogbadibo, Oju, Okpokwu and Otukpo. The residents are predominantly farmers who produce foods like: yam, soya beans, maize, and cassava. The Idomas are also found in the State of Nassarawa, Kogi, Enugu and Cross River states.

The Idoma people believe in the existence and the power of the almighty God but also have strong faith in the Alekwu, a deity of an ancestral masquerade believed to be the link between the living and the dead and has power to solve problems. The Idoma people celebrate life, death, and Alekwu using rich cultural elements of music, dance, and chants, accompanied with relevant musical instruments (Okpeh and Ochefu, nd.).

1.3. Classification of music in Idoma Land

It is clear that we cannot discuss music in isolation of musical instruments in any African performances, and vice versa. Therefore, we shall enumerate and expound on categories of music performances in Idoma land as below:

(i) *Spiritual Music*—this type of music is played to entertain the ancestral spirits. These spirits are realised through masquerades that are believed to be reincarnated ancestral spirits who come to live for a short period to socialise with the people with a view to mediating between the living and the dead. Spiritual music can also be played as part of a final burial rite in honour of a departed great warrior or an illustrious son. It is highly restrictive and instructional, usually meant for male initiates.

(ii) *Religious Music*—it is played to appease the god of the land

either for the cleansing or blessing of the land and people. It used to communicate to the gods the message from the people on their demand. It usually has its fixed venue and rituals, and has a priest as the custodian.

(iii) *Royal Music*—this music is purposely for the entertainment of a new King at a coronation ceremony, or during the passage ceremony of a departed King. It is mainly restricted to the palace and in the royal entourage whenever the King is outside the palace.

(iv) *Social/ Entertainment Music*—this music is played for social entertainment. It is used for the purpose of socialisation and to forge bonds of age, sex and cultural identity. It is performed within and outside the community.

2. Musical Instruments and their Functions

In the same vein, we also have varieties of musical instruments used for the performances in Idoma culture. We noted that some of the Musical instruments are played not only for rhythmic enhancement or the aural pleasure for the audience, but in most cases as a means of communicating directly to the initiate, masquerade or to complete the spirituality attached to the performance. In traditional performance of the Idoma people, musical instruments are used with specification. However, on occasions where musical instruments are used in performances, for the purposes that are different from the ones earlier enumerated, they are for cultural and unique purposes. Some of the musical instruments that are played for occasion-specific purposes in Idoma land include: Enuba, Ulaga, Ikpikpli, Ajigo, Agidigbe, Agogo, Ichaka, Oke, Ekpo, Iyoyo, Opo, Ukpe, Emla to mention just a few. They are played during the Ibo, Alinga, and Adumayi masquerade performances as well as Ichicha performance, the performance that we examine in this paper.

Idoma musical instruments may be classified into the following categories: **Membranophones** through which sounds are produced by vibrating membrane, **idiophones, which are instruments that produce sounds by vibration**), and **aerophones**, which are wind instruments.

The Idoma **membranophones** include Enuba, Ulaga, Ikpikpli, and Ajigo. These instruments are made with animal skin covering a hollow cylindrical carved wood. They are struck either by hand or with a stick in the production of sound. They come in various sizes and shapes. They produce sound of various pitches. Some are double-faced, while others are single-faced with an opening on one end, yet others are covered at both sides without any opening on either end. They may all be used at the same time, from one or up to seven, depending on the performance. The sound and size of the drum determines the family it belongs to. There are three basic families; namely, the mother drum, male and the baby drum. The mother drum produces the deepest tone in production and is the largest in size. The male drum is next in size and sound. However, male drums produce the sharpest and loudest sounds and coordinate all the other instruments in performance.

Enuba is the mother drum. It adds a stronger voice and rhythm to produce the deep bass sound while Ulaga (male) gives louder, more cohesive and pleasing sounds. The Enuba dictates how fast the masquerade should move and when to stop dancing. **Ikpikpili is the baby drum.** It is the one that is first struck to usher in the masquerade into performance. The Ikpikpili is smallish in size but sharp in pitch. **Ulaga, the male or the middle drum,** is always struck after the Ikpikpili in concordance and rhythm to enhance the beauty, strength and aesthetics of the total output of sound. The Ulaga drum is the longest of all the drums, which is the reason for its hollow sound. **Another Idoma drum is the Okanga; this is the only drum in Idoma culture that has its two ends covered with animal skin.** It is used only for the royal performances.

Other varieties of Idoma musical instruments are in the family of **idiophones (instruments that produce their sounds by vibration)**. Many and different types of idiophones exist among the Idoma. These may include bells, wooden slit drums, rattles, pellet bells, ankle-jingles and scrapers. Woven straws containing plant seeds or stones are used to produce sounds; also small calabash gourd piers with holes with a stick through the centre containing plant seeds or stones may be used to produce various idiophonic sounds. All these instruments may be used singly or multiply, depending on the performance to compliment the drums, the performer skills and the general sound output. In more specific terms, these idiophones include the Agidibe, Agogo, Ichaka, Oke, Ekpo and Iyoyo.

Agidigbe, is a wooden slit drum of large size used in conjunction with the lead drum Enuba to enhance rhythm during masquerades and warrior performances. It is used to communicate to the masquerades and warriors on the dance floor. It is used to praise warriors by describing his prowess in the battle field and how many enemies the warrior has killed. It is only a tested warrior that can stamp his on sound of the slit drum to stop the person playing it in performance process. Therefore, because of its loud sound, it is used to communicate to the warrior on the battle field, telling them what action to take. At times, it is used also to call the community to an emergency meeting or warn them of an impending danger. **Agogo** – is a smaller version of the slit drum used to complement the rhythmic strength of the Ulaga.

Ichaka – is a rattle made of woven palm containing stones or plant seeds. It used to coordinate the movement of masquerades in the performance arena. Directing them where and how to move and who to pay homage to. It also adds to the rhythmic strength of the total musical played in performance arena and adds sound to the Ekpo ankle-jingle worn on the feet of the masquerade to add spice to a performance. It is not only used to punctuate dance notations to the

masquerade but also to the drummer and the spectators during performance. **Oke** is a metal bell struck with a stick to add to the overall sound output of the music. It also used to communicate with the gods in worship process and offering sacrifice. **Ekpo** – is tattle anklet worn on the feet of the masquerades to give a rhythm to movement of the masquerade and the music played. **Iyoyo** are small metal bells worn on the masquerade to give sound to its movement; the Iyoyo serve similar function as Ekpo but are not worn on the feet, but rather on the body of the masquerade.

The next category of the musical instruments used by the Idoma is the **aero-phone** (wind instruments). Aero-phones are in the varieties of flutes, made of bamboo or carved wooden flute with a v-shape mouth and holes driving through one side with an open base; horns, on the other hand, have a hole at the near end of the tip with an opening on both sides or a long calabash with a similar opening. They are Opo, Ukpe, or Emla. They are in different shapes and forms and they serve different purposes in achieving aesthetically and culturally pleasing performances.

Opo- is a horn instrument made of animal horn. It has two ends open with an opening at the side close to the smaller end. It is used to communicate to masquerades, praise warriors and title men, and may also be used to call emergency meetings, announce sad news and impending danger. It is used to give coded messages. Ukpe is a horn instrument made of calabash with openings at the two ends. It has an opening at the side of the smaller end through which air is blown. When used in performance, the Ukpe are usually four in number, each with a different size, and a sound peculiar to it. It is used by the Ogliye society and their masquerade. It is their major instrument of performance supported with two drums. Emla is a flute made from bamboo or carved wood with a hollow centre, having a v-shaped mouth with a perforated side and an open base. It is used to speak to the Owunekwu royal masquerade. It gives directives and controls the excessiveness of the masquerade whenever it is out to perform.

3. Ichicha, the Idoma Performance of passage

Ichicha is an old people's performance. Participants are male and female people whose ages are from seventy years and above; this age range is the only qualification for someone to participate. The performance is done when any of the aged mates passed on; usually the performance takes place in the compound of the departed colleague in the night. It is to be noted that during the passage rite in which an Ichicha performance is done, the departed elder is eligible to reincarnate as an Alekwu Masquerade (an ancestral spirit and a respected deity in Idoma land).

During the Ichicha performance, because it takes place at night, there is a bonfire. Significantly, the bonfire is to provide warmth for the old participants and to boil yams that are usually eaten as the performance runs through the night as well as warm the drums that may go soft and lose resonance in the course of the night performance. It is also to be noted that there is an orchestra of drummers who plays the Ajigo (also called *One* in Idoma traditional language) and singers. The female constitute the singers while the male are on the drums.

The major musical instruments played during the Ichicha performances are: Ajigo (a drum that has a closed end; also called the 'One'), Ulaga and Ojichicha (a hand held rattle). Ajigo drum does not sit because it has a round bottom, which is the reason why the drum is held between the thigh of the drummer. Again it moves from one death to another so it is not found just anywhere but where the death of an old person, male or female, occurs.

It is to be noted that even though the instruments are played during the performances, they can only be played by those who are initiated in that particular cult of the particular masquerade to which they are culturally attached. This in essence indicates that if you are not an initiate for a particular masquerade, you cannot play any of the

musical instruments that are used during the performance of the masquerade.

However, the drummers may not necessarily be old people; they are usually young so that their strength would be able to match the strong nature of the drums that are usually hard and strong. Substantially, the Ichicha drummers are initiates. The male Ichicha performance drummers are called *Achogwoone* ('One' players), this is because *Ajigo* ('One') is the major drum played during the performance, hence the players are called *Achogwo* (players) of 'One' (*Ajigo* drum).

4. Cultural Values of Music and Musical Instruments in Ichicha performances

Music and musical instruments in Idoma land are used as media of communication and control during performances. They also serve as a mediator between human and the spiritual world represented through the masquerades. When Ichicha performance begins, an elderly female singer leads in singing, while the rest follow though the chorus. The songs are proverbial with deep meaning, with a story that interprets each of the proverbs. The first song is usually:

Ewa ye ye, Ewa ye ye
Ewa jagba jagba yegbu bokwu
Okwe gele ugbu yegbu bokwua

Translation:

Ewa clever bird, Ewa clever bird
 Ewa bird has taken off from its resting place.
 The great Ewa bird has taken off from its resting place.

The above song is literally interpreted to mean that even though the *Ewa* bird is very clever and crafty bird, it cannot escape death of a fowler. Therefore, no matter how great or wise a man is, he will die someday and humans will gather at the burial to send forth the

deceased.

Another song in Idoma that is sung during the performance is:

Oyi gewa eeh, Oye gewa uya
Oyi gewa eeh, Oye gewa uya
Adam oyi gewa uya
Enem oyi gewa uya
Oyi gewa eeh Oye gewa uya

Translated to mean:

The child is coming, the child is coming in a loud way.
The child is coming, the child is coming in a loud way.
My father, the child is coming in a loud way,
My mother, the child is coming in a loud way,
The child is coming, the child is coming in a loud way

The song is a welcome song, which is sung to welcome the departed to the land of the dead. Literally, it is translated to mean that the dead is welcomed to the land of the dead in a loud way. The song welcomes the deceased to the land of the death and bids them farewell from the land of the living.

Yet another song sung at an Ichicha ritual is:

Oja baino baino, Eta eneta eeh, Onanu eeh
Okpo anamba yelakwu eeh gblagada
Opkainaba anamba yelakwu eeh gblagada

Translated freely thus:

When the sick person is moved from place to place in search of cure for an ailment, and if cure is not found, the supreme price of death is paid. He must be honourably buried.

The song means that the travail of man on earth is full of ups and downs; some of the journeys are full of adventure while some are unpleasant. When it becomes unpleasant and there seems not to be any solution in sight, the supreme price, which is death become the last option. When that happens, such an individual should be given an honourable exit, which is the Ichicha performance that is carried out for such an individual.

Accompanying the afore-going songs are the musical instruments that we have earlier mentioned, which are used to communicate to the performers, determine the rhythmic movements, steps and the kinds of dances to be performed at a particular point in the arena. The chief of the instruments in the performance is Ajigo drum.

The Ajigo Drum is the only drum in Idoma that has its other end sealed. Because of its construction, it has a unique sound. This solo type of drum is attributed to the Ichicha society; Ichicha is a group of elderly men and women, who are considered old enough to be referred as ancestors, reincarnate as ancestral spirits and masquerades. However, it is important to note that in Idoma culture, women do not reincarnate as ancestral spirit or masquerades. It is in view of the cultural nature of the Ichicha performance that Ajigo, the chief of the drums played at the event, is described and treated as a sacred and spiritual drum in Idoma society. It has no permanent place where it is kept; rather it is left in the compound of the last deceased person where the performance was held and it is moved to the next place where the next old one dies. It is a drum played only at burials. There is a saying in Idoma, which Akoja Garuba, one of the informants of this study, reverently cited in regard of the drum: "Ajigo is like death, for it does not visit only one compound."



Figure 1 traditional Ajigo Drum

*Picture courtesy of
Roger Blench (1982)*

The rhythmic value of Ajigo drum during Ichicha performance notwithstanding, it is bereft of abundance of cultural values. The drum, which has a closed end, signifies that no matter how long we live on earth, an end will come one day, hence the Idoma sayings that: "Ajigo is like death."

Ojichicha is a rattle made from calabash with stones or plant seeds inside. It is played in starting the Ichicha performance and also played when songs are sung in low tone without the Ajigo drum.



Fig.2 Ojichicha

*Picture downloaded from
web.prm.ox.ac.uk/southernsudan/details/1942.1.425/index.html*

Ojichicha is a musical instrument that is played at the commencement of an Ichicha performance with a low sad and gloomy tone showing lessening energy. At each of the occasions, it signifies that for every man or woman there is a beginning and a time when the strength will no longer be there to wax strong as it was in the beginning.

Uлага, the long drum produces a sound that can be likened to the guttural sound of the masquerades embodying the ancestral spirits. The drum is thus of significance when it is interfaced with the spiritual nature of the performance; and it is referred to as a sacred drum.



Fig.3 *Uлага drum*
Photograph courtesy of the researchers at
Upu-otukpo on 2nd November 2014

Apart from the musical instruments enumerated above, there are other kinds of musical instruments that are played in secret or private performances, in which case the instruments are not for the public view. All in all, Idoma musical instruments are used for entertainment, spiritual purposes and for the edification of the cultural ethos of the Idoma people.

Looking at these various musical instruments and the purpose for which they are played, their values are parallel to Arom's (1991: 26) description of the values that are inherent in musical instrument as enumerated below:

- That they serve as a modal and/or rhythmic support for vocal music; this is their most common use;
- That they are reserved for the performance of a purely

instrumental repertoire; this is the case with the horn ensembles;

That certain instruments, such as wooden slit drums, (horn and flute) can be used as a means of communication to transmit verbal messages;

That they serve as privileged and often indispensable intermediaries, in order to establish communication between a man or his community and the supernatural powers, and in this roles are very often subject to obligations and prohibitions; and that they are symbols of temporal or spiritual authority, and are therefore very rarely or never used.

Conclusion

The paper finds that in Idoma culture and performance, the quality of music determines the outcome of the performance. Arising from this, the instruments used for the performances are given special attention and care. It is ensured that they are in good condition to produce good music for the performances for which they are meant, based on the fact that good musical rhythm encapsulates the performers and the audience. It also stimulates the audience to take part in the performance, a norm that is common in African performances.

The employment of music and musical instruments in Idoma performances have cultural significant and values. Therefore, they are symbolic in all Idoma performances. They also underscore the cultural richness of Idoma tradition. The Idoma people may have musical instruments that are similar to other cultures but the context under which they are used gives credence to the uniqueness of the Idoma culture. Drawing from the foregoing, the paper recommends that this tradition and practices should be elevated beyond oral history and codified for posterity.

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