

AKIOYA, Innocent I. (PhD)iyakioya@gmail.com

THE USE OF FOLK MUSIC IN A TYPICAL (BINI) AFRICAN SOCIETY (Tapping into present reality for the achievement of set goals)

Abstract

This paper on the use of folk music in a typical African society examines the possibility of tapping into the content of folk-based musical practice for the promotion of socio-educational goals. It focused its attention on the Bini in Edo State, Nigeria. Using observation method and depending on his experience as a 'Bini man' to interview notable Bini indigenes, the study delved into practice of music and examined the extent to which music indigenous to Bini have deployed in propagating their socio-cultural values. With analysis of selected samples of folk songs, the paper noted the symbiotic relationship between the musical activities of the people and their societal values. A concerted effort of specialized groups like the Inneh Cultural Troupe was acknowledged for their promotion of folk music. The paper concluded that the practice of folk music among the Bini has contributed to the sustenance and propagation of socio-cultural values. It therefore recommends that the content of Bini folk music should be used as a foundation for the attainment of socio-educational goals. Cultural Troupes, Books, Journals and the Internet provided additional data for this work.

Key words: Bini, Edo, Inneh Cultural Troupe

Introduction

The African society as used in this paper is a condensation of different life-styles and groups of diverse people who occupy the south of the Sahara. As diverse as they are, there are certain traits that identify them as Africans. One of these traits is the preponderance of folk songs based mainly on folk tales that have been passed down orally from generation to generation. The Bini represent a typical African society. This study focused on how the Bini have been able to sustain these traits with a view to embedding them in the goals of Arts Music Education. In an effort to do this, the paper interrogated selected musical practices of the Bini people in order to harness all the positive content that can help to perpetuate the uniqueness of the people as well as entrench the progressive foundation of societal values.

Methodology

Observation method was used to collect data for this work.. The author also depended on his insider experience as a 'Bini man' in addition to interviewing notable Bini indigenes. Books, Journals and the Internet provided valuable data for this work.

The Bini people

According to Wikipedia, Bini 'is a Portuguese corruption, ultimately from the word "Ubini", which came into use during the reign of Oba (ruler) Ewuare, c. 1440.' Discoverafricanart.com describes Bini as 'the rural population...of the well-known Kingdom of Benin.' Benin is the capital city of Edo State. Edo is a word that refers to the geographical

space, ethnic coloration and the language of the Bini people. It is frequently used in place of Bini as a synonym. This is collaborated by Encyclopaedia Britannica which further describes Edo language as belonging to the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo language family.

The Bini are mainly located in seven local government areas of Edo State namely Oredo, Ikpoba-Okha, Egor, Ovia North-East, Ovia North-West, Ujunmwo and Orhionmwon. They have a rich and robust circle of social activities that are intertwined with music. They make profuse use of the idiophones and membranophones in their musical activities, especially during celebrations. Prominent among these instruments are the following; *Ema* (Drum), *Ukuse* (Maracas) and *Egogo* (Gong).

The rallying figure for the Bini is the Oba (king). The standard and values established by the Oba is what the people live by. This is reflected even in their practice of music. Most of their lyrics eulogize the Oba. Cultural Troupes are now a common site in Benin. They are a group of men and women organized to sing and dance folk songs for entertainment, often donning exotic traditional outfit.

African Music

This refers to music closely associated with Africans and practiced/appreciated by Africans wherever they live. According to pressbooks.com, rhythm which is a central element in this kind of music ‘plays a vital role in many traditional African music styles.’ A close look at the musical practice of the Bini reveals certain identifiable traits. In a write-up on African music, Akioya (2009) had this to say, “African music may be defined as the aggregate of activities (in concert or in exclusion) involving singing, dancing and playing of instruments (African indigenous instruments) for entertainment, preservation and transmission of the peoples’ heritage among others.” The aspect of preservation and transmission of the peoples’ heritage is of special interest to this paper.

Inneh Cultural Troupe

Inneh International Theatre Troupe is one of the popular cultural troupes that dot the landscape of Benin. This group was founded and directed by Mr Sunny Obasuyi entertains audiences, animating many folk songs handed over from generation to generation with life. Domiciled in Benin, the group has been invited to showcase its colourful outfit, choreographed dance steps and delightful Bini songs to the admiration of diverse audiences from different parts of the world where Bini people are to found.

The Oba of Benin regularly invites this group to accompany him and provide entertainment with Bini flare on his visits. This troupe has helped to spread the cultural values of the Bini to other parts of the world. The activities of the troupe have brought prestige to cultural dancers who at a point in time were perceived among the Bini people as ‘unserious’ people. Other troupes worthy of mention are Uyi Edo Theatre Troupe, Edo Cultural Group, Eguagie Cultural Group and Unuagbon Theatre Group.

Bini Culture

It can easily be assumed that one of the things that make a group of people feel they have a common identity is the collective experiences they have as members of the same society. These experiences help to shape their character, world view and the way they react to

emerging circumstances. A collective word that encapsulates all these is culture. This thought is aptly captured by Tylor (1871) when he stated that culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”

The Cambridge English Dictionary states that culture is “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.” The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2000) defines culture as the ideas, beliefs, and customs that are shared and accepted by people in a society while the Dictamp Oxford English Dictionary define, culture as the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society. All these definitions focus on the fact that culture is the expression of a people’s accepted code of social interaction.

This stand was emphasised by Pa David Ibizugbe (a personal interview with the Nonagenarian) he said that this has helped the Bini to remain one. According to him, ‘The individuals in the society share the feeling that what brought them together can be promoted by their combined strength.’ In his words, ‘this is our own (Bini people) way of affirming the saying that there is strength in unity.’ This affirmation is in tandem with the notion that ‘birds of the same feather flock together.’ is the foundation of human society which has led to the development of culture. The Bini live together in organized communities that guarantee the achievement of set goals. Such communities or groups include the *Ibiwes, Id’igun Eronmwon, Ifieto, Owina, Igbesanmwan, and Ogboka among others.*

Music

An exhaustive discussion of the concept of music is beyond the scope of this paper. However two points of view are highlighted. Akioya (2006) explains music as a combination of sounds and silence that pleases the ears. This definition brings into focus the element of time. He sees music not just in terms of sound but also of a proper management of time which includes silence. Ekwueme (2008) described music as “A phenomenon using the medium of sound which is organized and manipulated into socially accepted pattern that communicate intelligibly and meaningfully...verbally or non-verbally, ideas, feelings, emotions and events to people” (p. 28). This description emphasizes the communicative function of music. All the attributes of music alluded to in the perceptions above are found in abundance in the selected sampled folk songs in this study. For the purpose of this paper, music is posited as a sonic expression of the people’s culture, fully embedded with their goals and aspirations.

Folk Music Practice

In a typical society like that of the Bini, the birth of a child is heralded by the singing of songs and dances. The sound-rich environment of the new born baby starts with the baby’s cry which can be likened to a ‘call’ followed by a ‘response’ by the jubilant people around with a spontaneous burst into singing. The words that fill the air are ‘*Omo ogho*’ started by an individual and taken up as a chorus by several other people who render it in a chant form. The message conveyed here is that a baby has been successfully delivered and the baby is alive. Music among the Bini has a symbolic and symbiotic relationship that cements different activities in the society.

Bini Indigenous Musical Instruments.

Rendition of songs among the Bini without the playing of musical instrument is rare. If there is no instrument immediately available probably due to the spontaneity of the occasion, the hand clap comes into use. Bini indigenous musical instruments here refer to instruments made by the Bini, using locally sourced materials from the environment and used primarily for the accompaniment of Bini songs and dances. Such instruments include:

Ema (Drum), *Ukuse* (Maracas), *Egogo* (Gong), *Obo* (Hand clap), *Akpata* (Harp), and *Ekassa* (Rattles) among other musical instruments.

Ensembles in Bini Music

There are different kinds of ensemble expression in Bini music. *Ema* (Drum) and *Ukuse* (Maracas) ensembles consisting of three to eight musicians who play interlocking patterns have been found to be prevalent. The female drummers used a technique akin to the Hocket technique. In the ensemble, each drummer strikes the head of the drum to produce tones and timbres (tone colours) that are not easily distinguishable from the tones of the others. One unique feature is that the drums involved were placed on the head of fellow women while they were being played.

The *Ukuse* ensemble starts with one playing the time line while the others join with distinctive rhythmical patterns one after the other. They played their rhythmical ensemble in an increasingly complex fashion starting with the simple time line played by the first person. In this case, the instrumentalists ended up playing together with a richly woven pattern. Another mode observed among the *Ukuse* instrumentalists is one in which one starts a rhythmic pattern and others join using the same pattern with no variation.

Other ensembles among the Bini include rattles and an iron bell struck with a stick to produce a repeated pattern (sometimes called a timeline) that penetrates the dense texture of the ensemble and helps the male drummers to remain synchronized with each other. One group plays a repeated pattern in predetermined pitches, and a second group fills in the missing beats with an interlocking pattern. The most common style of instrumentation among the Bini male drummers is one in which each drummer extemporizes his own version of rhythm to complement what other drummers are playing thereby creating a rich polyphonic texture.

Selected Bini Dances

Musical performances among the Bini are closely associated with dance. In many cases, the dance by the male indigenes is different from the female indigenes. While majority of the dance steps are regal and graceful, that of the men or boys are normally more energetic than that of the women or girls. According to Madam Ilawagbon Egharevba (personal interview), the most popular dance associated with the women is the *Ugho* dance. She described the dance as one in which the legs of the women glides on the floor in an expected pattern accompanied by some twists and turns. She stated that of recent, some men have been seen dancing the *Ugho* dance. Describing this development as an aberration, she insisted that the dance was originally meant for the women folk. In concordance with her claim, the mentor of the Inneh Cultural Troupe Mr Sunny Obasuyi (personal interview), stated emphatically that the men have their dance. While dancing, men also do some sort of gliding similar to that of the women however raise their arms in a proud manner.

This male dance is also closely associated with the chiefs.

The *Ekaba* dance came as the most energetic male dance. According to Obarisiagbon (2019), the dance is closely associated with Ekaba festival and is celebrated annually in about six towns and villages in Orhionmwon Local Government of Edo State. These towns include Urhonigbe the Headquarter and the birthplace of Ekaba. The exciting nature of the dance has attracted both the male and the female indigenes to the dance floor. It exhibits the character of affirmation displayed by the stamping of the feet on the dance floor. It is taken as a matter of pride that one is able to dance the *Ekaba* dance. Its music which is unique to the dance consists of a very rhythmic and distinctive percussion and drum rhythm. The male dancers usually have shakers tied around their waist and ankles. These serve to reinforce the dance rhythm as the dancers do the dance.

The Symbiotic/Symbolic Relevance of Bini Music Practice Healing/Calmng Effect

As alluded to earlier in this paper, music plays a very symbolic and symbiotic part in Bini people's culture. Bini musicians have always managed to create a sonic atmosphere which encourages the ancestral spirit-possession that is a necessary part of healing and worship. This can be likened to stories in the Bible of David's use of music to heal King Saul whenever he [Saul] was feeling sick. The researcher witnessed this reality during an incident in which frayed nerves resulting from very hot arguments at a wedding were calmed by the musicians who started playing a traditional music that concerned 'Ubi' and 'Ewere'. In the song, Ubi represented confusion and rancor while Ewere represented peace and progress. These two characters were sisters and wives of Oba Ewuare (1440-1473).

Enhancement of Emotions

The Bini are emotional people and music helps to convey and define various emotions associated with the social/cultural activities of the people. The emotions include feelings of sadness like during mourning occasions and joy like the occasion of marriage, using the marriage ceremony as an example, when the Bride's family does anything that is particularly pleasing to the Groom's family. The following song '*Vbo ghi na ye niahe, ivbievbowan Vbo ghi na ye niahe,*' is usually rendered to praise the beauty of the entire family:

*Vbo ghi na ye niahe, ivbievbowan Vbo ghi na ye niahe,
Vbo ghi na ye niahe, ivbievbowan Vbo ghi na ye niahe,
Wa ma khue, wa mose o, vbo ghi na ye niahe
Vbo ghi na ye niahe, ivbievbowan Vbo ghi na ye niahe,*

Translation

Why are things like this my people, why are things like this
Why are things like this my people, why are things like this
Even without having your bath, you look so beautiful
Even without having your bath, you look so beautiful

Another worthy example is the naming ceremony of a new born baby titled '*Erhomon kponmwe, iyomon kponmwe*' One of the many songs that

help to enhance the emotions of the celebration is as follows:

Erhomon kponmwe, iyomon kponmwe
Erhomon kponmwe, iyomon kponmwe
Aighi yigho iya domo, Osa n'oyomon gima
Aighi yigho iya domo, esohe no,
Obo'sa kerre

Translation

Baby's father, give thanks, baby's mother, give thanks
One cannot buy a baby with money, it's a gift from God
One cannot buy a baby with money, it's a free gift
From God

Lullaby:

A lullaby '*Omomoo, eghivieo omomo*', is a song rendered to put babies to sleep. The song is normally rendered with a soft voice, sometimes accompanied with a gentle rocking of the baby. The Bini people have this popular lullaby that goes as follows:

Omomoo, eghivieo omomo,
Gie 'rha rre ne uke gha vie,
Gie iyue rre ne uke gha vie,
Nu ghe kha ghi mo gbueo
Omomo

Translation

Baby, do not cry,
Allow your father to be present before you start crying
Allow your mother to be present before you start crying
So that you will not lie that I am beating you
Baby.

Worship

According to Encarta Encyclopedia (2006), in many African religions, sound is thought to be one of the primary means by which deities and humans impose order upon ceremonies, in which the deities enter the bodies of devotees. Among the Bini people of Nigeria, a competent drummer must be able to play specific rhythms for certain songs meant for particular deities. By controlling the quality and flow of sound from the drums, he uses music to regulate the flow of supernatural power in ritual contexts. Music therefore serves as the means through which the atmosphere is prepared for enhanced spiritual manifestations.

Apart from the playing of musical instruments, there are songs devoted to the worship of particular deities. One very popular song is the song devoted to the worship of Olokun. The lyrics go like this:

Olokun mwen o, de machini me

Translation

My Olokun, buy machine (sewing machine) for me

Identity

Music plays a crucial role in issues of identity. Countries are identified by their national anthems. Once an anthem is played, it is often possible to identify the country that it represents. Among the Bini, just as a man is known as *Okpi'Oba* (full-grown man as recognized by the King) and the woman is known as *Okhu'Oba* (full-grown woman as recognized by the King), so do they have a unique anthem which is composed around the personality of the Oba. The lyrics go as follows:

Ewuare vben n'ogio nigho
Ovbie kene kene madoyo
Ogha de vbumodia anahoren o
Tu gha tor gbegie e

Translation

My Ewuare, the king as valuable as money
 The son of the King that does not go off
 It is as he comes from a distance that he is recognized
 May you live long to overcome with your Kingship

Entertainment

The Bini have a lot of ceremonies celebrated. Among them is *Ugie Ewere*. This is a ceremony that ushers in the traditionally-recognized New Year. When ceremonies like this are organized, what keeps the people occupied and entertained is music. One of the popular songs rendered during this particular ceremony is as follows:

Ewere derre, kien'were
Ewere ogheranmwe, kien'ewere
Ewere oghiyemwe, kien'ewere
Arhie'were giomon vbugha
Ewere 'were no yoyo o
Ewere
Ukodo'Ewere rre mwana
Ukodo'Ewere rre mwana

Translation

Ewere is coming, open (the door) for her
 My father's Ewere, open for her
 My mother's Ewere, open for her
 Ewere has been taken to the King in the room
 Ewere is blessed
 Ewere's food, full of goodness

Funeral

Hardly is any funeral among the Bini complete without music. Funeral music can be heard along the street during a funeral procession. The Dirge is normally music composed especially for mourning the dead. The words of such music are usually philosophical in nature. Some of the songs seek to encourage the living to accept the situation. . According to Madam Stella Egharevba, (personal

interview) during the funeral rites among the people, the ceremony will not be complete without the singing of the song 'Agha dukpon o, Ukpon sorre o'

Agha dukpon o, Ukpon sorre o
Osa gha rhiorhion, Orhion gha bue naren
Egbe na tete, o khi e ken

Translation

When you buy a cloth material, it eventually gets torn
When God takes his spirit, the spirit will return to its maker
The body one maintains eventually turns to sand

Other songs extol the qualities of the dead. Some texts even see death as a necessary end to living that cannot be avoided. An example is in the text of the song 'Wheno'ghimena, whe whu'.

:

Wheno'ghimena, whe whu
Wheno'ghimena, whe whu

Translation

You that is looking at me, will you not experience death?

In this instance, music is used as a route for venting ones despair, for fortifying the mourners to be able to carry on the ceremonies and for assuaging their emotions.

Festivals

Music is used for celebrating important communal festivals. Such festivals include new yam festival, age-grade festival and initiation rites. According to Chief Priest Osemwengie Ebohon, (personal interview) during such festivals, the musicians recount the wisdom of the ancestors in marking the commencement of the events, the need of such events and the celebrations. Music therefore serves as an avenue for justifying the events. It is also one activity that gives everybody a sense of belonging. One of the songs for these festivals is the *Ekaba Song*.

Ekassa ...

Announcement

Enobiomon rhie gba udu

Translation

Anyone who has a child should wrap the child on her back
The Tiger is on the prowl

This song is a classic example of an announcement. The announcement is that everyone should remain indoors because outside is dangerous, things are happening. The playing of a gong usually signals the commencement of an announcement in the village.

Coronation

Important stages of a person's life are often marked with music. The coronation of Oba Erediauwa of Benin Kingdom in 1979 saw the appearance of certain music that had not been played for a long time. The music is heard only during such ceremonies. In other words, without such music, important events like the coronation of the Oba would not be complete. Such music is always loaded with significant information that has a direct bearing on the event.

Signals

Music can be used to send signals of a development to the populace, for example the presence of danger. Local history is replete with stories of scouts who on sighting the enemy produce certain sounds that alert the people.

Societal Values/Cultural Competence

Music is often combined with speech, dance, and the visual arts to create multimedia performance. Among the Bini, the ability of all individuals to participate in a musical event by adding a voice to the chorus or an appropriate clap pattern is assumed to be part of normal cultural competence. The Bini also have an evening session of songs and games that round off the day: it is called *Ibota*. *Ibota* serves a dual function; it helps to account for the presence of every member of the household and keeps the children entertained until it is time for sleep.

Vboghinaye niaghe, ivbievbomwa, vboghinaye niaghe
 Vboghinaye niaghe, ivbievbomwa, vboghinaye niaghe
 Wha ma khue, wha mose o, vboghinaye niaghe
 Wha ma khue, wha mose o, vboghinaye niaghe

Bini Folk Music and Art Music Education

Folk music is closely associated with the social-cultural activities of a people. The language and musical instruments used are usually rural and sometimes peculiar to the people. Bini folk music is very rich with the cultural exploits of the peoples' heroes as well as their values.

This paper explored the content of Bini folk music that are of immense value to the society with a view to promoting them through the implementation of policies in Art Music Education. This implies that the folk music of the Bini will not only be entertaining but instrumental in the sustenance, promotion and attainment of societal values educationally.

Conclusion

The African society discussed in this paper refers to a hybrid of different life-styles and groups of diverse people who occupy the south of the Sahara. The sample society used for this paper is the Bini in Edo State, Nigeria. Although this discourse is by no means exhaustive of the uses to which folk songs and dances have been employed, musical practice of the Bini provides enough rich bases for the sourcing of materials for educational goals. Bini musical practice is dominated by recurring rhythmic patterns. They have groups within the cultural society which help to propagate their rich traditional folk songs. One of such groups is the Inneh

International Theatre Troupe. The Bini have a robust cultural heritage symbolized by the Oba who is the monarch. The paper highlighted music as a sonic expression of the people's culture, fully embedded with their goals and aspirations. The Bini not only sing but also dance with the most energetic dance being the Ekaba dance. The social benefits of Bini folk music practice include calming of nerves, healing of emotional stress, enhancing of spiritual worship, preservation of social-cultural values and entertainment during festivals.

Recommendation

Arising from the findings above, the study recommends that the content of Bini folk songs and dances should be made the focus of deep academic study. This is with a view to extracting all that would help to preserve and promote the good aspects of the people's culture. These should then form the local content of the educational goals for the school system in the Bini society.

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