

Voices of Tradition: A Study of Ekobe Music, Enuani Culture, the Art of Masterful Singing

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Abstract

The art of masterful singing within indigenous musical traditions remains a vital component of cultural identity, particularly among the Enuani people of Nigeria's Delta North Senatorial District. Central to this study is *Ekobe* music, a distinctive genre rooted in Enuani culture, which combines complex vocal techniques, rhythmic instrumentation, and performative expression. This paper explores the foundational qualities required for one to be recognised as a “Master Singer” within this musical tradition, including the mental capacity to internalise and reproduce musical sounds, vocal strength, creative intuition, and a deep-seated understanding of communal values and ethics. Drawing from qualitative methodologies – interviews, participant observation, and analysis of primary and secondary sources – the study provides an examination of the socio-cultural, psychological, and physiological elements that characterise *Ekobe* performance. The research highlights that musical competence in *Ekobe* is not innate but cultivated through disciplined practice, communal mentorship, and cultural immersion. It also establishes the role of the lead singer as a conductor whose vocal delivery is both a reflection of internal cognition and a strategic manipulation of bodily mechanics to achieve tonal clarity and expressive nuance. In articulating these dynamics, the paper delineates a dual-level framework of *Ekobe* singing: the mental (conceptualisation, intention, and cultural memory) and the physical (technique, posture, breath control, and gestural rhythm). Furthermore, the paper situates *Ekobe* within the wider discourse on Nigerian art songs, suggesting that its indigenous techniques offer valuable interpretative models for modern musical pedagogy. Ultimately, the study affirms the importance of preserving and promoting indigenous music forms as reservoirs of cultural wisdom and artistic excellence. It recommends structured orientation programmes and curricular integration to safeguard these traditions for future generations. This contribution extends the discourse in ethnomusicology by presenting *Ekobe* not merely as entertainment but as a sophisticated cultural artefact.

Keywords: Ekobe Music, Enuani Culture, Indigenous Singing Techniques, Nigerian Folk Music

Introduction

As one of the most valued forms of human activities, to the extent that its high priority is often reflected in the amount of recognition it receives in different societies, music is considered a sublime art form especially in African societies. Several scholars have provided information on the general characteristics of African vocal music. There is a possible correlation between vocal quality and other human characteristics and behaviors. Evidence from the latter does suggest that a well-blended choral and polyphonic singing is synonymous with vocal relaxation and openness. The focus of this paper therefore, is on the art of good singing in Egwu Ekobe performance among the Enuani communities of the Delta North Senatorial district of Delta State Nigeria. Music, a linguistic phenomenon that knows no bounds, possesses the extraordinary ability to bridge cultural, geographical, and ideological divides. Throughout the annals of human history, music has been harnessed by societies globally to spark transformative movements, fuel revolutionary fervor, and craft narratives that shape our collective identity. In Africa, where the continent's vibrant cultural heritage is deeply intertwined with the rhythms of music, its role as a potent catalyst for societal metamorphosis is particularly evident (Anyanwu, 2019). Nigeria, boasting a dynamic and diverse musical landscape, presents a compelling case study for examining the transformative potential of music communication in driving meaningful social change.

Throughout history, music has played a pivotal role in cultivating social connections and community cohesion (Savage, 2015). Whether in the form of communal rituals or jubilant celebrations, music has consistently served as a unifying force, fostering shared experiences and a sense of togetherness. Collective musical activities, such as group singing, dancing, and performances, provide a platform for individuals to express themselves collectively, thereby facilitating deeper interpersonal connections (Turner & Behringer, 2019). Moreover, musical genres often reflect the distinct social identities and values of specific groups, thereby contributing to a sense of belonging and shared cultural heritage (DeNora, 2020). Long before European colonization, the diverse indigenous cultures that comprise Nigerian society had already refined their unique musical traditions to perfection. In other words, pre-colonial Nigeria had established a robust musical performance technique long before the European presence in Africa (Okafor, 2004). As an integral component of African culture, folk music manifests in various forms, closely tied to the different stages of human life, from birth to death. Over the centuries, Africans have leveraged their rich musical heritage to great effect in diverse contexts. It is essential to recognize that no culture is inherently superior to another; rather, each culture boasts distinct characteristics that are cherished by its adherents.

According to Okafor (2017), folk music is inherently tied to the cultural identity of a specific group of people residing in a particular geographic region, sharing a common cultural heritage and values that distinguish it from contemporary popular and art music. In the Igbo traditional context, music plays a vital role in worship, often taking the form of instrumental, vocal, or a combination of both. The Igbo community collectively refers to music as "egwu," encompassing vocal, instrumental, and dance forms. Interestingly, the term "egwu" is multifaceted, giving rise to the titles of music performers, including "ogu-egwu" (vocalist), "ote-egwu" (dancer), and "oku-egwu" (instrumentalist). Notably, every Igbo musician is referred to as "onye-egwu," highlighting the significance of music in Igbo culture. The objectives of this research are: 1. To briefly discuss the concept of singing in Ekobe music performance; 2. To provide a resource framework for further academic research on the indigenous musical styles of Enuani people; 3. To creatively generate strategies towards effectively interpreting Nigerian art songs by using indigenous singing techniques. The study supports the expatriation of knowledge on indigenous popular music thus providing a resource framework for further academic research. Ekobe music is gradually and steadily becoming a force to be reckoned with in Nigerian entertainment scene; therefore, investigating the singing techniques and other factors that have contributed to its growth is significant. The study will provide justifiable guidelines to Ekobe musicians and aid them to attain the required musical standard widely accepted especially by the Enuani people.

The theory of structural functionalism was used in this study this theoretical framework draws inspiration from the works of a renowned English philosopher and Biologist Herbert

Spencer (1898) this theory drew parallels between the human body and society. It posits that societal cohesion is facilitated by the intricate web of institutions and structures that operate in tandem. This includes various of social entities including education, healthcare, family, legal systems, economies and religious institutions. By examining the interdependencies and relationships between these components, structural functionalism provides a comprehensive understanding of how societies various elements collaborate to maintain social order and ensure the continued existence of societal system as a whole.

This top-down approach conceptualizes society as a complex, interconnected network of units that work in harmony to achieve collective stability. In the realm of sociology structural-functional theory, also known as functionalism, posits that society is an intricate system comprising interconnected components that cater to the biological and social necessities of its individual members. Spencer contended that just as various bodily organs collaborate to maintain overall bodily functions, the distinct component of society work in tandem to ensure the smooth operation of a society as a whole. The components in question encompasses social institutions, which are essentially pattern of beliefs and behaviors that converge to address specific social needs, including government, education, family, healthcare, religion and the economy. This theory is relevant to this study as it touches on the socio-cultural interaction within the society. The intricate relation within the Enuani culture, has given rise to the insatiable desire for collective social entertainment, culminating in the emergence of various folk popular music types of which Ekobe popular music is prominent.

Methods and Procedure

This study employed the historical and descriptive research methods for the purpose of data collection. The historical research method was used to reconstruct the past objectively and accurately in relation to the defense of the stated objectives of this study. The descriptive research design was used to compare, contrast, classify, analyze and interpret the existing concepts with a view to answering questions and discovering the status of the concept under investigation. For data collection, the researcher adopted a fusion of various ethnomusicological data gathering methods such as the interviews and participant-as-observer approach, to enable a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter, thus enabling the researcher to establish rapport with Ekobe musicians. All participants that were contacted for discussions and interviews consented willingly to providing relevant information for this research.

Enuani Culture and Music

The Enuani culture plays a vital role in shaping the identity of its people, serving as a rich tapestry that weaves together the diverse customs and traditions of its various communities. This multifaceted culture permeates every aspect of daily life, influencing a wide range of activities, from the rhythms of music and the rituals of marriage, birth, and burial, to the flavors of food, the practices of religion, and the expressions of art. The distinctive 'Ndi'Enuani' Culture, in particular, is characterized by its unique attire, delectable cuisine, exquisite crafts, and deeply held religious beliefs, which collectively form an integral part of the Enuani people's heritage. From inception the various communities that make up Enuani have leveraged their rich musical legacy to achieve success in diverse settings. It is essential to recognize that cultural superiority is a myth, and each culture possesses unique attributes that are cherished by its practitioners, based on this information Lerman (1974: 17), advise that it is essential to accept human beings and their creations in their current state, recognizing that a work of art is responsible solely to the audience it was intended for. Consequently, we must exercise caution when evaluating cultural artifacts, avoiding the imposition of external standards that may lead to the condemnation of an entire group. The realm of culture and humanities must be racism-free, yet it is crucial to acknowledge the legitimacy of diverse cultural perspectives and appreciate their distinct characteristics. By doing so, we can foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the rich tapestry of human experience.

Undoubtedly, modern Nigeria exists at the intersection of two distinct cultural realms: the time-honored system of values and the governing regulations. This dichotomy has given rise

to the complex cultural phenomena we are currently witnessing. Regarding this Ekwueme (2004) said:

... The black man cannot and should not live in isolation. He is inevitably influenced to the tremendous influences exerted by the economic and political forces of western civilization. He must draw from cultures other than his own to the further enrichment of his own. He must continue to adapt to changing conditions in order to survive in an ever changing world (p 203).

The Enuani sub-ethnic group is endowed with a rich musical heritage, comprising various genres such as Uloko, Agbalani, Ekobe, Ubo'gazu, Olimgba, Aguba, Okanga, Egwu'ngbeli Egwu-Ajah, Imanokwa, and many others. The inherent musical inclinations of Enuani communities have led to the adoption of musical ideas from their surroundings. For instance, Iman'okwa, a musical style, was borrowed from the Ishan communities of Edo State Nigeria and subsequently assimilated into Enuani musical culture. Enuani communities have traditionally recognized two distinct categories of musicians: solo performers and "Otu" troupes. The Otu groups, comprising multiple entertainers led by a principal vocalist and sponsored by a male and female patron, strive to deliver exceptional traditional dance performances. Solo artists, on the other hand, specialize in highlife or traditional music, although many have previously been members of an Otu before opting to perform independently. Okafor (2017: 17) would say that a folk song can be defined as an integral component of a community's cultural heritage. Alternatively, it is a musical composition that has evolved alongside a particular race, nation, or community, with its creative origins shrouded in antiquity. While the original author remains unknown, the song's collective ownership is attributed to the community, as successive generations have contributed to its development and growth. With its roots tracing back to numerous generations, folk music lacks a distinct personal signature. The essence of folk songs lies in their dynamic nature, which evolves through each rendition and reinterpretation. Consequently, a folk song is characterized by its adaptability and malleability, defying stagnation.

The Enuani people's rich musical heritage is an integral component of their cultural identity, having undergone significant transformations over the years to reflect the evolving tastes and preferences of the community. From a sociological perspective, music is a product of societal constructs, encompassing the organized ways in which individuals interact with one another when creating, consuming, and reproducing sounds perceived as music. Okafor (2017: 19) believes that a folk song is characterized by its organic nature and deep connection to the collective experience of a particular culture. It vocalizes the stories, emotions, and daily realities of a community, encompassing their spiritual practices, occupations, and social interactions. Furthermore, it often explores the intricate relationships between humanity and the natural world, including the land, climate, and celestial bodies, as well as the realm of imagination. Notably, the three most prevalent motifs in folk music revolve around the universal themes of love, home, and spirituality. To gain a comprehensive understanding of music in various African societies, it is essential to consider factors such as the linguistic terminology employed to describe music, the context in which musical performances take place, the organizational procedures associated with these performances, the nature of the musical expression itself, and the message intended to be conveyed.

Enuani popular music entertainment is characterized by the use of percussion instruments like gongs, pot drums, skin drums, maracas, and traditional flutes; it is often accompanied by storytelling and dance, which are deeply ingrained in the Enuani people's social and cultural fabric. The melodies of Enuani musical performances resonate with the harmony of humanity, embodying the essence of a balanced society where collective well-being and individual respect for the rule of law are cherished. By doing so, they inspire unity, fostering a culture of peaceful coexistence and patriotic pride. However, with the advent of colonialism and the influence of Western culture, most Enuani musical types underwent significant changes, resulting in the development of a modern form of popular entertainment music that blends traditional Enuani rhythms with modern melodies.

In pre-colonial Nigeria, Enuani music served as a powerful instrument of social responsibility, illuminating the path to upholding the highest moral standards and fostering a culture of

accountability within the community. For example, one of the most notable trends in Ekobe music of Enuani is the fusion of traditional and modern styles, with Ekobe as a variant of Highlife music gaining immense popularity among the Anioma people. The legendary musician Chief Ogbogu Okonji is credited with creating a unique blend of traditional Ekobe music and modern Highlife, which has become a hallmark of Anioma music. Ekobe popular music plays a vital role in upholding societal values and norms, providing a platform for constructive criticism and self-reflection.

In the African context, folk music is synonymous with traditional melodies that predate the colonial era. These songs are deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric, having evolved alongside specific racial or ethnic groups. Although their origins may be shrouded in mystery, they are collectively owned by the community, lacking individual authorship. The enduring popularity of Nigerian folk songs can be attributed to their strong cultural ties, spontaneous nature, social commentary, adaptability, and the strong bond between artists and their audience. Typically, folk music is rooted in rural settings, transmitted orally and aurally through family and social networks. Unlike art music, which is primarily appreciated for its aesthetic value, or popular music, which serves as entertainment, folk music is often linked to activities such as seasonal celebrations, life cycle rituals, work, games, cultural indoctrination, and traditional religious practices. Notably, folk music tends to be more participatory than performance-oriented. Impressively, many of these folk songs have withstood the erosive effects of cultural assimilation.

The Enuani entertainment music was introduced by founding fathers who thought it wise to create their own legacy of entertainment musically. The Enuani people's cross-cultural exchanges with surrounding towns contributed significantly to the development of a rich and diverse musical heritage. The folk music of Enuani, like that of other ethnic groups served a multi-purpose function. One would wonder why a people so blessed with a rich cultural musical heritage have not formally documented any information concerning this aspect of their culture, but on the other way round it is almost normal to say that most cultural entities prefer and still maintain the oral transmission ideology. Although much information have been handed orally the disadvantages outweighs the advantage. The Enuani people over the centuries have retained some folk music types that share similar qualities, and characteristics with minor differences.

Ekobe –

Ekobe is a folk music type performed generally to entertain. At its commencement, the Ekobe music was used to accompany the traditional burial rites of an untitled Enuani indigene. The Ekobe music is an expanded form of the Agbala'ni and Idegbea'ni folk music varieties. Just like all other Enuani musical types, Ekobe music holds a special place in the hearts of Enuani people as it helps preserve timeless moral standards and values passed down to them by their ancestors. To the Enuani people when wrongdoing goes unnoticed or unexposed, and serious offenses are committed without accountability, there is a risk of losing their rich cultural heritage. Enuani music serves as a platform for self-reflection and growth, where musicians correct each other's mistakes and guide others in the community towards a better path.

The fusion of styles has not only helped preserve such Enuani traditional music as Ekobe, but has also made it more appealing to a wider audience. With Enuani remaining the primary language of most Anioma towns, the use of multiple languages from the entire Anioma ethnicity has helped promote Enuani music beyond the Anioma region, making it more accessible to a broader audience. Membership: The membership of this group is restricted to adults and includes men and women numbering Six (6) to nine (9), as the case may be. There is no actual retirement age or guides other than factors such as death, old age, sickness, relocation, and or voluntary retirement. Training: Training and rehearsals are held in the leader of the group's compound or some other hidden place from the public. The training/rehearsal ground is usually secured with palm fronds to avoid undue interference from the public and significantly increase public anticipation in the public to see the group perform openly. Performance Technique: In performing Ekobe music, most certainly the leader of the group is the lead singer. He is saddled with the organization of the group, and most importantly composition/arrangement of the folk tunes performed. Also the leader is

versed in parables which are used to lace up their performances. While the lead singer raises the song the chorus who doubles as the instrumentalists respond repeating exactly the same phrases and words used by the lead singer. The performance specifically features the call response and solo chorus pattern of folk music performance. While the performance is going on the women mainly do the dancing, occasionally joined by some of the men who are part of the chorus/instrumentalists. Instruments/Costumes: The instruments used to accompany the Ekobe music include the okpokolo (slit wood) agogo (small gong), isaka (maracas), the akpele (ram horn), udu (pot drum), ubome (big gong) ekwe (slit drum). Ekobe music does not require any strict costume the men mostly tie a wrapper of any design across their shoulders while the women tie theirs knotting it to the left hand side of their waists with a blouse at the top. But the group may also choose to adopt certain uniforms in order to be unique and more presentable during their performances. Patronage/Finance: Ekobe music enjoys lots of patronage especially during the performance of traditional burial rite for an Enuani indigene. Also Ekobe music has a place during the final burial rites that cannot be replaced by any other entertainment medium. Finance is gotten from invitations to perform and goodwill donations from well-meaning lovers of Enuani culture and the populace at large. Part of the financial proceeds from performances are shared amongst the members of the group, while a part is kept in the purse for to take care/replace any of the instruments that may require such attention when and if the need arises.

In addition to occasional compositions created to commemorate specific events, such as weddings, coronations, funerals, and other significant life transitions, diverse popular music styles keeps emerging. According to Onwuegbuna (2007), in West Africa, the Igbo people of Nigeria are renowned for their unique ethnic pop styles, including igede, nkpokiti, atilogwu, nkwa-nwite, nkwa-umuagbogho, and egwu-amala. Similarly, the Hausa people are known for their distinctive styles, such as rokonfada, boorii, and asuawara, while the Yoruba people boast an array of styles, including waka, sakara, and ere-ege (p. 32). The rich tapestry of Ekobe music, which flourished in the 19th and early 20th centuries, retained its unique essence despite the influences of the time. As previously discussed, this traditional folk music of the Enuani people played a pivotal role in their cultural festivities and was also an integral part of the hospitality extended to esteemed visitors in Enuani towns and settlements. The performance of Ekobe music was characterized by its simplicity and coordination, with the original instruments used in its early forms remaining unchanged until the late 20th century, when the forces of acculturation led to the incorporation of the English drum set in the 1990s, courtesy of Chief Ogbogu Okonji, a renowned Ekobe music exponent. According to Okafor (2004), Western scholars only began to take notice of music from other regions of the world in the 19th century. However, each geographical and ethnic group has its distinctive musical identity, instruments, and traditions. Music is perceived as a social construct, a deliberately organized sound, rather than a mere sonic entity. The appeal of certain types of music may be limited to specific communities that create them; except for scholars who examine them scientifically, while others have universal appeal. At the core of ethnomusicology lies traditional music, which is more familiar to most people than other genres. This indigenous music is an integral part of a way of life, deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of a community (p. 147). This perspective acknowledges that folk music tends to flourish more within its native surroundings than beyond its cultural borders. In the 21st century, many ethnic groups aspire to share their unique entertainment traditions with other communities, thereby seeking recognition and appreciation. However, to achieve this, certain aspects of these indigenous cultural practices must undergo adaptation. African popular music, as a result, represents a natural evolution of traditional African recreational music, albeit with incorporated Western influences (John Collins, p. 61).

Performance of Ekobe Music

The primary role of the lead singer during Ekobe performance is primarily that of a musical conductor/director. His leadership role is due to his possession of socially recognized musical qualities, such as; the natural ability to mentally hear and reproduce musical sound, a strong vocal range, quickness of mind, and a strong desire for creative self-realization. Since singing is a learned human behavior, it cannot be taken for granted that all the qualities

mentioned above are effectively visible. The singing techniques in Ekobe will be reviewed and analyzed in two levels - the mental level and the physical level.

The Mental Level

The fact that Ekobe musicians always refer to Ekobe music as Egwu-odinani, leads one to speculate that the mind of an Ekobe musician plays an important role in the act of singing. Such assumptions are confirmed when some of the Ekobe singers infer that musical themes are articulate general happenings in the society laced with proverbially enriched nuggets. According to the musicians, being deeply versed in the norms and cultural practices of the inhabitants of these Enuani societies would also translate into a smooth Ekobe music performance. Purity of the conscience or inner self of the singer is also required to objectively realize what is being communicated through Ekobe music. Thus the necessity for the ability to mentally hear and reproduce musical sound is one of the attributes of an Ekobe singer. One may venture to conclude first, that singing is as a result of the coordinative process between (musical) thoughts and the mechanics of phonation such that the thoughts influence or stimulate the latter to make necessary adjustments needed for the objective realization of a musical idea, secondly, that when the singer wishes to realize certain musical ideas his thoughts activate nerve energies in his body which in turn stimulates corresponding nerve actions and muscles in the respiratory organ. The latter is then converted into a phonating organ and the mental thought is finally translated into musical sound or a song.

Most physical actions in singing Ekobe songs are preceded by mental ones. Although singing comes from the heart, there must be some coordination between the inner rhythm within the individual and the rhythm of the songs one performs. The relationship is such that the singer as it were, becomes the song and the song becomes singer. By the latter I mean the tone colors, dynamics, pitch, phrasing, etc., which the singer produces are as a result of his physiology, sensitivity, emotion, and perception.

The Physical Level

This is at the level the singer objectively realizes a song – i.e. the level of interpretation. Ekobe musicians recognize certain factors as being of great importance in the physical realization of musical thoughts. These includes-

(A) The position of every active participant during an Ekobe performance is determined by his or her role. For example, the chorus stands along with the lead singer when singing, all facing the listening audience, while the instrumentalists are seated at the back with their various instruments. The standing position of the lead singer gives him a clear view of all the participants as he is the director/conductor of the performance. In addition, his posture not only allows him the freedom to respond, through body movements, to his musical ideas but provides the maximum bodily freedom for the projection of his voice.

(B) Generally, singers in Ekobe employ the open voice method in their performance. The voice, in other words, does not sound restrained when singing but seems to flow unobstructed. The term "ringing" is used by the musicians to qualify the ideal voice quality. This does not only refer to the register of the voice (i.e. high or low voice) but to both the steadiness and strength of the voice. The ideal voice sounds like a bell; it does not quaver and is vibrant and alive. According to Ekobe musicians possessing a ringing voice does not make one a master singer especially if the singer has an ugly mouth (i.e. defective textual articulation). Ekobe musicians attribute the ability to articulate words clearly to a conscious freedom of the tongue, lips, mouth and jaws, as well as to knowledge of the correct pronunciation of words.

(C) Showmanship or the physical actions exhibited by a singer are external manifestations of several coordinated elements. The latter includes a good aural image of the specific music type, the formation of new songs from a creative synthesis of musical ideas, and the co-ordination of the musical ideas with physical singing action.

These physical actions can be grouped under the following headings:

(i) Performance rhythm and singing rhythm, (ii) Movements of body while singing; and (iii) Complete physical endurance.

Performance Rhythm

This is the overall flow of the musical performance. The singing rhythm is the limitation of tone aggregates within a fixed metrical pulse. These two factors depending on the degree of coordination, distinguishes one Ekobe singer from another, or one Ekobe group from another. Speaking about the link between inner feelings and singing, Ekobe musicians point out that “a good soloist never lacks what to say”. He keeps the (musical) ideas that are in his mind moving continually until the theme has been exhausted. Thus a good lead singer is adjudged from the quality of his articulation and expression of musical ideas and also by the ability to keep time. It has been observed that the inspired creative acts of the singer often correspond with the slight body gestures carried out by him. One may speculate that the physical movements exhibited by the singer while singing assist in the reproduction of his musical ideas. Thus it could be said that a musical idea elicits a feeling of emotion from the singer, this feeling or emotion is converted into the physical reproduction of a musical idea. Thus the body movements observed in the singer are the physical manifestations of the desire to reproduce exactly the musical ideas perceived mentally.

Singing rhythm, as mentioned earlier, refers to those aspects of Ekobe performance that deals specifically with metrical sound production. The choice of rhythm is governed by the musical compartment in which the songs are being performed. There are three musical compartments in a typical Ekobe musical performance, they are: musical proverb, musical prelude and main music. The first two compartment are rendered unaccompanied and in free rhythm most times while the third compartment is performed in strict rhythm accompanied by musical instruments. The rhythm of the song is largely influenced by the rhythm of the spoken words. Specifically in the first compartment, these short songs are performed *ad lib* in a style half-way between speech and song. The singer takes his time in expressing his musical ideas. However, in the second and third compartments the songs are rendered within the metrical pulse of music.

An Ekobe musician will point out that the first compartment of Ekobe is performed in free rhythmic style. Therefore no instrumental accompaniment is needed. However, songs performed in the third compartment are rendered within a strict tempo enabling the dancers to participate. The Ekobe musicians emphasize the importance of the *okpokolo* (slit wood) a wooden gong and *agogo* (metal gong) in the ensemble. The rhythmic flow of these instruments binds the various instrumental parts together, just as it assists the lead singer in identifying the beginning and end of musical phrases.

Movement of Body while Singing

There is the need for singers to not only express self through sound, but also through body movements and gestures. As musical ideas flow so also must the body flow in a well coordinated manner. Ekobe musicians have consciously engaged their gestures/physical body parts - their eyes, pointing, swaying, clapping, twisting of body parts or gesticulating while singing. In addition to this, the lead singers will often gracefully turn their bodies rhythmically towards the audience. When the lead singer dances, his dance movements may not be the exact movements being exhibited by the dancers although there may be some similarities.

The process of singing first commences in the mind of the singer, resulting into two musical behaviors viz - the production of sound and the objective demonstration of the mental process by way of sways and slight movements of the body, gesticulations, closing of the eyes and even sudden smiles during the performance. These movements are directly related to the quality of tone which the lead singer wishes to produce.

Physical Endurance

Among the signs of good singing control and distribution of power noted in Ekobe music performance, the free flow of sound from the lead singer and the lead singer's ability to sing long phrases without running short of breath are paramount. The quality of breath the singer takes in is called ‘snatch breath’ because breathing is almost unnoticeable, as a deep breath might break the continuity in the rendition of songs. It may be concluded therefore, that the

singer's physical endurance is determined to a large extent, by his technical ability in vocal production, similarly his ability to remain in good singing form is a reflection of the type of vocal technique he has employed throughout the years.

The use of Indigenous Singing Tactics in Interpreting Nigerian Art Songs

According to Adebawale (2012), the initial encounter between Islam and West Africa dates back to the 8th century. The Kanem-Bornu Empire was introduced to Islam in the 11th century, and later, Fulani pastoralists played a significant role in spreading Islam to the Hausa region by the 14th century. Notably, Islamic teachings relegated music to a subordinate position, deeming the use of musical instruments in worship as unacceptable. Consequently, Islamic contributions to the development of music and music education in Nigeria have been relatively limited, unlike the significant impact of Western influence, which began to penetrate Nigeria from the 16th century onwards with the introduction of Christianity. Initially, music education was confined to church and school settings, emulating European and American musical practices. Moreover, Nigerian cultural traditions, including music and instruments, were viewed as malevolent. However, the emergence of African Churches in the 1880s led to the incorporation of African musical heritage.

It is worth noting that pre-colonial Nigerian society had already established a standardized musical performance technique before interacting with Euro-American musical styles. Therefore, it can be argued that the convergence of Euro-American and Nigerian traditional musical cultures gave rise to unique hybrids, such as indigenous art music and popular music genres that have achieved recognition in the performance arena.

Many singers find the interpretation of Nigerian Art Songs difficult for many reasons firstly, art Songs are written while folk songs are transmitted orally. The latter process allows the careful transmission of the established folk tradition of singing style from the master singer to the pupil. However in learning art songs singers have to rely on their limited abilities to articulate texts that are foreign to them, combine these text with the established music, and sing the songs with the appropriate tone inflection, color and expression. At times the singer fails to capture that cultural essence which a song is associated with.

Singers may decide to study Nigerian languages to acquire fluency so as to aid the understanding of the texts of such songs. In the alternative singers may consult a person or persons fluent in these languages. Art songs are not context-bound but require the singer to assume a character and express certain moods and emotions. However with the use of the imagination a singer may allow his/her inner self to direct the interpretation of the song, such that the singer becomes the song and the song becomes the singer. The melodic complexity of art songs is another differentiating factor in the foregoing comparison. Some art songs may contain long held notes, for example in Uzoigwe's composition for solo voice titled *Eri Ngeringe* one comes across a compromise between the African ululation and the western trill. Knowledge about breath-control should facilitate the holding of the note for the required length of time while the singer concentrates on producing a steady and penetrating tone. For example the ululations in Nzewi's drum poem titled '*Tough and Tender*' consist of notes that lie within the head register.

Research Findings and Recommendations

The history of Ekobe music has never recorded a female Ekobe musician rather the women are involved in the supporting role of dancing mainly.

The Ekobe music available today is a variant of Nigerian Highlife music.

Based on the findings made in this study, the following are recommended:

The Nigerian school curriculum from pre-nursery to tertiary level should be restructured to be relevant to the present day Nigerian society. This will encourage participation in the performance of the various Nigerian indigenous musical genres.

Acquiring of resource materials in the area of ethnomusicology should be sponsored by the Federal Ministry of Education. This will become an avenue to easily inform and enlighten

musicologists and every interested person about what traditional (folk) music certainly stands for and will also simplify further research in this area.

Conclusion

This research has been able to establish that Ekobe musicians (vocalists) have certain musical concepts that guide the production and maintenance of good vocal quality. Ekobe singing technique is based on a co-coordinative process involving the singer's inner self, body and voice. In applying Ekobe singing technique to the performance of Nigerian Art Songs certain guidelines can be followed. These include: An understanding of the expressive behaviors peculiar to a song style, knowledge of the correct pronunciation of the song texts, conscious freedom of the mechanics of phonation, production of a steady and vibrant voice and communication with the singers inner self for inspiration in the expression and interpretation of the song. Following these guidelines, the vocal apparatus will regulate itself and make the necessary adjustment needed for the expression of various musical ideas.

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