Music Apprenticeship Unexampled Springboards Instrumental in Abigbo Musicians' Inventive Styles Par excellence

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Abstract

This paper seeks to highlight and elucidate accordingly the key factors responsible for the continual growth, spread, and professional fame identified with abigbo music after its emergence in Mbaise clans (of Igbo land, east of the River Niger), whose culture abounds with varieties of performing arts rigidly observed by the natives. The music, with its diverse functions, prevails as the foremost in existence, rendition frequency, and popularity among the indigenes. Commensurate with these includes the musicians' obvious social commentaries as critics in the rural area setting. Specifically given a pride of place in this study are: the artistes' stylistic features coupled with their bedrock and regulations, which are exclusive in evaluative opinions on existing literature about abigbo as practised in Mbaise mores. The ensemble's managerial structure and uniqueness in recruiting and training the mentees; the requisite environmental music productivity galore witnessed during the attendant rehearsals in Mbaise conducive milieu, which are not encapsulated in previous scholarly inquiries on Abigbo. Thus, this study divulges Abigbo's influential principles and traits on the apprentices as they rise from amateurism to stardom within the ensemble. Besides the library print media, ethnographic information elicited from interview and participant observation during Abigbo musical practice in Nguru-Agbaja clan of Mbaise are resorted to. Findings prove that the musicians have

established age-old reputation for unfailing precision during their acquisition of musicianship.

Keywords: Music, Apprenticeship, Springboards, Abigbo musicians, Inventive styles.

Introduction

Focus of interest in previous studies on abigbo music are: abigbo's geographical nativity (Onyeji, 2004: 52-53); its advent (p. 53-55); the socio-cultural milieu (p. 55-56); its instrumentation and dancers humorous bodily movements and steps (p. 56-59); the lyrics (p. 60-72); its social responsibilities and aesthetic efficacy (Okoro and Ofuani, 2020). These available literature on abigbo as well as others on African indigenes' musical ensembles are acknowledged with appreciation. However, abigbo neophytes' mentorship stepping stones in the aspects of dance and musical presentation with their characteristic conventionality, and follow-up due processes therein prior to their advancement to music professionalism, which are generally omitted, are updated in this particular article.

The ancestry of African indigenous knowledge conceived the musical arts to encode and perform the worldview, the philosophy of life, as well as the socio-political systems of African peoples. These philosophical procedures pervade most aspects of indigenous African systems of life and metaphysical reality. Thus, indigenous philosophy imbues a disposition that is conducive to psychically secure human living and action, and was acquired through the discursive modes of proverb, aphorism and metaphor (Nzewi, 1974:28). One of such musical artistry is evident in abigbo, a resourceful indigenous dance music ensemble of populous Mbaise, peopled with five clans and three local government areas, south of Igbo land in Nigeria. Ugwuanyi (2016:404) posits that for convenient sake "African writers work achieves a high entertainment without improving the rational culture of the people". This theoretical defect is a total departure from the truth in this narrative. The sorry case in no wise prevails in this ensemble's music discourse for the reason that this research is from the very on set, primarily a product of fieldwork by an investigative reporter.

Abigbo is a male choral-dance music with a lead singer. It is generally for the entire community. Its musical instruments are quite minimal in number and are for accompaniment. There is no master instrument as in ese or ukom ensembles where there are master drums with master musicians that specialize in the instruments with so much societal responsibilities. Abigbo musicians are groomed to possess artistic requisites for bringing about socio-cultural change propelled by their tactfully managed enculturation experiences residual in them. The musicians meet up with their respective families' daily needs by depending not solely on the financial dividends that accrue to them after performance outings but also in other economic endeavours. Although their other vocations' extra-curricular time for livelihood vary, they usually adjust slightly in favour of abigbo music rehearsals and outings. Thus, in most cases, they have to rely on or adapt to their host's convenient time just at all cost. However, doing so whenever the need arises is very demanding as it poses a plight of postponing their respective enterprises to the detriment of such business regular progress. The forgone alternative is indirectly handsomely rewarded by their music performance hosts and, of course, the fans, who routinely dole out a paltry sum of money to support them.

The emergence of Abigbo, a resourceful ensemble, wrestles with ill-conceived traditional ordinances that prevail in Mbaise and render them counter-productive. This is because the artistes being watchdogs, check ills of the society through their skilful performance. Thus, Hunter & Whitten *Encyclopaedia of Anthropology* (1976) defines music as "the expression of feeling and ideas in an organized sound: an art which in one way or another permeates the human society; a multi-dimensional art which lends itself to alliances with words (as in songs) and physical movement (as in dance)." Music indeed provokes dance; its sounds must therefore be inventively organized. More so, "Music" as "a humanly organized sound" (Blacking, 1971:186) is intellectually, creatively, consciously, and contextually applied with intention to reveal and, or affect human emotions. No wonder Shakespeare in Merchant of Venice (1962:83) also documented in Cohen and Cohen (1971:339) concludes that: "The man that hath not music in himself, nor is not moved with concord of sweet sound, is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils; the motion of his spirit is dull as night; and his affections dark as Erebus: let no such man be trusted.

Abigbo Mbaise Environmental Music Instrumentation

Instrumental resources in Mbaise could be classified as purely (a) Melo-rhythmic instruments of membranophone and autophone families. The latter includes both time liner/phrasal referent as well as other idiophone rhythmic instruments and (b) Melodic instruments of aerophone family. Echezona's (1981) "Definitive Catalogue" on Nigerian music instrumental resources gives the researcher a sense of direction in his inquiry into abigbo Mbaise instrumentation and their respective musical roles. *Oja* (notched flute), an aerophone and *ogbongelenge* (xylophone), a tuned Idiophone instrument belong to the class of melodic instruments methodically played to emit textually derived tuneful lyrics to accompany singers. As the media of traditional communication, they cue in dancers and recite genealogies. Both are systematically tuned and skilfully manipulated to imitate vocal dialogue. The *ubo-aka* (vibraphones), *ogbongelenge, oja* (either singly or collectively) accompany traditional wrestling matches where each is utilized as a recounter of a wrestler's antecedence. Besides, they supply enduring melodious sound effects to inspire and encourage the wrestlers towards victory in the bout. The notched flute is specifically played not only to honour an illustrious person but also to usher him into or out of a crowded place; it as well spurs on the accompanied masquerade to dramatic action for public appreciation and to facilitate a hitch-free passage of the masquerade through the excited crowd. The "melo-rhythmic" (Nzewi 1974: 24) instruments such as *mbembe-ala* (conga drums) provide rhythms, play ostinato passages, improvise/extemporize and direct dancers' movements and steps. *Ogele gbara mkpikpi* (twin petit clapperless bell) is employed in exorcism; and to restore order at meetings. It is sounded to formally acknowledge the speaker's report. The *ekwe* (slit drum) is sounded to draw the public's attention to an imminent peril. Apart from summoning the indigenes for communal labour, its geometric designs and carving extra-musically speak volumes for the communal ownership. In ritual context, the *oyo* (rattle/maracas) is played to communicate secret messages with the supernatural. During hunting expeditions, certain rattles are used as scare crow while others are hung on the necks of hunting dogs to scare out animals from their hideouts. Rattles may also be tied on the left hand of a baby to discourage him/her from actively and regularly using the very hand in lieu of the right hand. Time liner/phrasal referent instrument (of metallophone family) such as *ozuru-igbo* (giant clapperless bell), is a time regulator during music making. The

town crier beats the giant clapperless bell prior to announcements in the communal setting. Its loud penetrating and lasting sound effect sends signals across the villagers to draw their attention to the very message.

Prevailing Principles and Regulations in Abigbo's Apprenticeship

This subject matter deliberates on personnel or manpower development and co-ordination processes for the progress of abigbo. "Principle" is defined by Hughes and Hughes (1962:409) as "a fundamental truth, as basis of reasoning, a general law as guide to action." The end product of a principle enables relatively unskilled artistes to think rationally about their musical business for its successful presentation during performance outing. In his Political Philosophy of Right (1831), A German, Fredrick Hegel (1989) avers: "It is yet to be known of a human being whose existence is not determined or guaranteed by some laws or regulations defined by the state." Abigbo, through its music philosophy, seeks to boost Mbaise indigenous knowledge, wisdom, ideas, and demeanour in the natives' natural habitat. This philosophy is accomplished with positive results given the ensemble's ideal understanding of Mbaise milieu in the scheme of things. It equally provokes analytical meaning of philosophy as "a matter of comprehensive view usually embracing both value commitments and belief about the general nature of things and a view in which typically particular ephemeral urgencies are seen in a somewhat withdraw perspective and with a certain detachment" (Flew, Anthony in Okafor et al, 1999:94).

In his view of traditional music recruitment in Yoruba milieu, Olaniyan (1973:38) affirms that successful recruits, according to the expected standard laid down within the culture, are "Those who wish to take after elderly nuclear family members; those who made the choice out of personal interest and conviction that they are naturally endowed with musical skill and therefore can make it; then others who are there as the last resort to economic survival." Formal procedure in abigbo membership enrolment as trainees starts with visitation to the mentor musicians for self-identification and indication of interest. Thereafter, approval may be given with the following requirements fulfilled by the applicant: four cola nuts, a keg of palm wine, a rooster, and a token of money as surcharged. The above are inevitable before "recruitment exercise" which Nketia (1975:56) refers to as

"any social arrangement that ensures the availability of specialists for established roles and positions in society."

Learning by participation is an inevitable norm in abigbo. Show of interest is not enough guarantee for enrolment in abigbo because technical or musical audition is informally conducted for the benefit of the doubt on who is qualified or not. Abigbo ensemble's recruitment exercise considers, among other things, local dialects or patois derived from similar linguistic background, and musical enculturation outlook. In other words, the above factors are of invaluable advantage to prospective applicants. Recruits in abigbo ensemble are expected to be, in the first instance, musically inclined even though at the psychological moment their flair for music may be at a low ebb. Similarly, the ensemble's apprenticeship membership criteria are mostly for those whose musical inclinations are backed up with skills in singing, dancing, and instrumental accompaniment. This invariably means that any sane Mbaise man can qualify to be recruited into abigbo ensemble provided the guiding rules in abigbo are met. They must be of unquestionable character, law-abiding and from different autonomous communities in Mbaise, the study area. The above requirement are needful and basic because abigbo musicians are supposedly social critics by professional obligation. They are expected to congregate as and when due, for their musical venture interaction and engagements, at given venues.

It is a giving that, in sub Saharan African musical tradition, everybody (Mbaise not left out) is expected to be involved in music making, and it democratically lies in everybody's decision, though not everyone eventually becomes a professional musician (which abigbo musicians are). For further clarification, Merriam (1962:122) and Yekini-Ajenifuja (2015:197) speaks volumes for that. Imminent restrictions abigbo tyros encounter which emancipate them for executing apprenticeship rules and regulations, are eventually overcome as their residual knowledge of music in traditional culture is progressively enhanced while their informal training forges ahead. Apprenticeship challenges in abigbo music presentation are: poor time management, social unrest leading to phobia and lack of trust among the trainees. Impedimenta akin to indigenous legitimate injunction restricting outdoor commitments. leisure for the emergence of the target audience as they turn out *enmasse* to grace abigbo show of talent. Sequel

to that, the ensemble converges on other days convenient to them. By so doing, interested onlookers use the golden opportunity to understudy the legitimate apprenticeship demands and the styles of musical presentation as showcased by the ensemble stakeholders.

The Artiste's General Training Requisites: Considerations for rehearsal venue focus, in no small measure, on: "the centrality of the arena for the convenience of members. Spacious accommodation to shelter the musicians and their instrumentation in case of unexpected rainfall. Instruction process done by the group leader is preceded by enumerating the by-laws guiding the rehearsals. The by-laws cover a range of dos and don'ts meant to guard against lateness, disobedience, quarrelling, and other offenses that are considered unhealthy to the smooth learning" (Onyekwelu, 2009:109). Onyekwelu's explanation is never in the least a deviationfrom what obtains in abigbo recruits training requisites which are, to a large extent, executed by an adept songsmith a proficient chorographer/skilful dancer and an expert instrumentalist as the case may be. Such an artiste can also be referred to as a master musician whom Olaniyan (1987:10) describes as:

> A composer, an arranger, and performer who, from childhood has accumulated his knowledge, expertise and experiences through a long period of training. His knowledge of the culture of his people makes him qualify as an authority in his profession as he is capable of devising his new materials from his cultural background. Such materials are used with the aid of the various devices in creating his music.

Olaniyan in Onwuka (2010:178) further concludes, "Africans are in the practice of training their master musicians over a long period of time. This is to ensure that they qualify as professionals knowledgeable and properly equipped as composers, arrangers, and performers of their music in the various contexts they may be functioning." In an interview with Onwumere Òkpé, a professional abigbo musician, he says *inter alia:*

> as amateurs they were taught to keep strictly to the time signature by regulating rhythmic patterns and all other group of beats and accents with equal units of time called measure within the basic scheme of a given meter. They were equally told to note wherever

> mistakes occur and when they have finished the movement, they can thereafter return to such difficult passages, and practice them separately till the errors are corrected. Complex and technical problems which are likely to distract their attention are eschewed at the outset of their energy sapping training.

Through frequent participant-observation the neophytes gradually acquire the technical know-how and eventually forge. The training intends to help them play and lead a musical performance with intimate awareness. A good training provides all trainees with instructions which develop their skills in music leadership and subsequently pave way for emotionally satisfying musical expression. To a reasonable extent, abigbo's music training philosophy is on a parallel with Onwuka's (2010:181) idea of membership and training in *Ufie Azodoh* ensemble of Adazi Nnukwu:

> In a situation where the trainee is naturally gifted and skilled, the instructional period could be less than stipulated, but if he is not endowed with a good sense of rhythm and manipulative skills, it is usually long and very demanding. These training rehearsal sessions take place in the premises of the master and terminate only when the trainee has demonstrated mastery of the required artistic skills and delivery styles.

Recruits are trained in abigbo to sing and to play instruments with competence. Those considered eligible instructors are the lead singer, the choreographer, and the ambidextrous instrumentalist(s). They can simultaneously combine dancing and singing with instrumental manipulation. After a period of preliminary instructions, the learners are left at intervals to practise alone. Prior to a performance outing, the instructors invite the trainees to demonstrate what they were taught. This, they evaluate through the aboriginal audience's responses and critical comments. In subsequent rehearsals, corrections are issued where applicable. The end result of these efforts yields performance continuity in abigbo. As much as these training requirements- from rehearsal through presentation of musical performance- are perfectly observed as and when due, the continuity in doing so always cripples inimical confrontations arising from unfounded allegations levelled against the existence of abigbo in Mbaise.

A common example claims that commentaries from Mbaise native onlookers during abigbo live performance have indirect influence on the ensemble's rise to stardom. Abigbo is very much alive today and may continue to be, because the musicians are expertly nurtured during their musical apprenticeship.

The accuracy with which musical awareness is retained largely depends on how much impressive it is. In this case, the association of ideas is a necessary aid in recollecting facts interrelated to the said music. Again, to guard against "amnesia", a determination to imagine the existing relationship among genres of music and what they consist of is dictated by the three forms of perception. In this respect, areas of attention comprise aural, visual, tactile (relating to the sense of touch) organs. The eyes and the ears are respectively conditioned to adapt to musical structure and its philosophical details. Music, a lively art, is ideally experienced during abigbo live performance training/practice; be it on hourly or daily basis. Training duration in abigbo is neither rigidly fixed nor to the tyros' which; it all depends on the trainee's creative acumen. All learners join to sing songs introduced by *Onye agugu egwu* (the lead singer). Whenever they stop singing, they embark on playing the instruments and, or put emphasis on dancing. Like virtually elsewhere in Igboland, "The instruction is through active participation, repetition, and memorizations. All musical experiences such as the techniques of playing different instruments, dance styles, and singing are exposed to them" (Okafor, 1998:21). Members trained to learn abigbo are considered to have learnt when their biased opinion on abigbo is pragmatically ameliorated, arising from acquired musical experience that enable them present abigbo accordingly. Based on this Hergermalt (2001) in Ogunrinade (2008:142) considers 'learning' as "a relative permanent change that results from experience and cannot be attributed to temporary body state induced by drug, fatigue or illness."

Those who are music and dance inclined and have exceptional flair for the performing arts are exclusively screened for audition and subsequent enrolment into the ensemble. This is done under the tutelage of the adept artistes of the performance group, who are indeed *'maestri'* of the art in all practical terms. At this juncture, those confirmed successful henceforth begin to receive their deserved token of performance royalties after every performance invitation. Such honoraria include: money, drinks, and food respectively. One can equally be

denied these on account of poor performance, truancy, and acts of immorality. All the above training rigours, meticulously observed to the letter, challenge discontinuity of abigbo in Mbaise music philosophy.

Instrumental Trainees: All of abigbo musical instruments are obtainable in Mbaise surroundings. They are as itemized: *mgbirigba* and *ogele* (clapper and clapperless bell), *okwa* (woodblock), *oyo* or *iyara* (a pair of two-in-one basket rattle) and three-in-one distinct conga drums respectively. To be admitted as a trainee in abigbo instrumentation, the mentee is expected to have at least an average knowledge of the performance technique involved in the aforesaid instruments. Beyond that, he would have been a *bona fide* instrumentalist of a minor ensemble, where he displays a degree of ambidexterity in playing few of the available instruments. Abigbo ensemble training philosophy entails practising each of the aforementioned instruments at a time, as often as the musicians are able, and void of discouragement over a momentary inadequate progress. Their concentration on every instrumental rendition requirements, depends on how it is manipulated. For instance, resonance, interpretation, ear training, solo, scale and routine exercises are much emphasized during instrumental training. The application of all these laid down rules varies with instruments and, of course, relies on their availability in the ensemble. Palmer's (1978:112) remarkable advocacy applies here: "Aim at accuracy, however simple the music, however slow the time, get their notes and rhythm right. And do not forget to watch phrasing and expression marks, and try to capture the mood of the music". The trainees discontinue practice when mentally disturbed, physically tired, or while absent-minded. Every rehearsal held gears towards their greater improvement on the instruments. They develop concentration by recalling music from memory and eschewing repetitions. It is on the above premise that Palmer (1978:108) draws conclusion: "The real difference between a great musical artiste and an indifferent amateur may be not that one has greater musical ability than the other, but simply that the artiste knows how to develop his ability to the full, and the amateur does not".

Recruit Dancers: At the initial stage of dance rehearsals, every member participates in the dance galore. As time goes on, they gifted in medley and stylized dances are chosen accordingly. According to (Nketia, 1975:33) "Dancers"

recruited, to join the troupe as a matter of principle, "must not throw glances at people while dancing, for good dancers must be so deeply engrossed in what they are doing, and doing it so well, that people will notice it without the dancers having to 'catch their eyes' […] good dancers must not hold themselves as erect as the stalk of the plantain". Whichever is the case, a multi-metric dance is performed to phrasing and to context, to mirror or reflect social and political structure and techno-environmental factors. On the strength of these philosophical values abigbo has been sustained and retained against any detrimental pressure(s) mounted to drag it to oblivion. These include: evidences of massive departure from rural to urban centers in search of white-collar jobs among the male adolescents; inferiority complex among the recruited dancers in relation to their peer group gang of yahoo boys; and, invariably, the common impression of irregular as well as poor financial rewards and patronages created concerning the ensemble among host of others. "An African learner mentally conscious of every instrument employed in African ensemble and this has a tremendous influence on his 'dance.' All the various muscles of the body act differently to the rhythms of the instruments" (Thompson, 1974:14). This additionally reminds us of Richard Alan Waterman's theoretical account of interrelationship governing African music and dance. A musical situation ensues whereby each metrical thread is responded to, within the entire percussive music rendition void of separating from multi-metric context. This narration presupposes that during learning process, the dancers' hand and feet keep time with a given instrument, their hips with another instrument, while backs and shoulders respond to some others.

Fig. 1: Two dance trainees taking instruction from the choreographer under a gmelina tree. Photo by J.C. Okoro (2003:88).

Abigbo Musicians' Vocal Quality and Song Traits

Vocal Quality: The essence of qualitative voice in musical career cannot be over emphasized. Basic qualifications are expected of a singer's voice be it used *a cappela* or accompanied with musical instruments. In abigbo voice application, *olu-okwa* (a high-pitched musical voice) is undesirable because it does not continue endure. Also, a raucous voice is not ideal for story-narration. For a thematic clarity to ensue in singing, Azuonye (2008:94) advises, "singers are urged to add as many details

as possible so that the listener will never, at any stage, be at loss in following the plot of the story as a whole or any stage of its development". This beneficial instruction expects a well-trained voice to utilize assorted vocal techniques, to sing and clarify the message for the hearer's void of creating doubt in their minds. This is vividly described in Adedeji (2000:11) as he writes: "When you train the voice, you can teach it to sing in any style you choose to specialize in, or one can specialize one's voice in singing a particular style […] The trained voice is more versatile in changing from one style to the other […] when the voice is trained simply to perform as an instrument, the voice should be able to sing in any style". To this effect, "The possession of a sweet voice is not a guarantee that one would become a good singer of tales. To sound proper in songs, the voice must have the right kind of modulation. This can only be acquired through training under a master-singer". Such trainees in the long run foresee events like poets. Adedeji (2000:1) further noted that:

> Human voice has four categories of instruments and articulators. Larynx is the generator. It is inside it that the voice is produced. Inside the larynx are too narrow, elastic fibrous bands known as vocal cords. They are the vibrators. The resonators include various spaces or cavities within the chest and the head chest cavities, the throat, the mouth, the nose and nostrils and the spaces in the head cone. The articulators are lips, teeth, tongue and palate.

Two major disparities between the voice and any other musical instruments are: "The voice is completely under the control and influence of the singer; other instruments are not. The voice reflects the emotional and psychological state of the singer, other instruments do not".

For a skilful singing continuity, Adedeji (2000:19) advises: "Vocal exercises in the areas of deficiency and needs should be carried out on a regular and continuous basis. There are many areas of the voice that may be deficient or in need of development. It might also be necessary to work toward attaining some higher skills. These may include attack and tone production, steadiness of tone, resonance and blending of registers". Besides, "tone memory usually brings with it some aptitude for learning music by heart; it is also a valuable aid to the performance of unaccompanied vocal music" (Palmer, 1978:45). Arising from the aforesaid

clarifications, a sonorous voice in abigbo is unavoidably aesthetic and typically pure. More so, it correspondingly disseminates the requisite message with efficiency. Abogbo vocalists practically observe these principles during their performance outings; they demonstrate them to the letter as their indoor rehearsals progress.

Song Traits: Viewed from vocal perspective, Uzoigwe's (1984:60) review on *ogbe nkwa abigbo* (otherwise abigbo ancient and contemporary song categories) submits: "the folk term *ogbe nkwa* is closely associated with short (limited) song variations. *Ogbe* implies a cross section of community settlement; *Nkwa* added to it means a bunch/collection of dances and, or musical types". *ogbe nkwa abigbo* (abigbo Second Compartment) comprised compositions on current affairs and all other societal values within the community. Two major kinds of *ogbe nkwa abigbo* reflected in the daily activities of Mbaise indigenes are: Songs of encouragement (*nkwa-ike*) or modern warrior songs (*ekere avu abigbo*). The songs deal precisely with momentous issues on moral values. For instance, only a fool dies in tranquillity by stubbornly declining being defeated and appealing for peace to reign. The current abigbo literarily, Igbo wit compositions consist of those introduced into *ukom* (abigbo feminine ensemble) repertory from abigbo songs. The item one songs genres are based on contemporary activities. The next is world news (*akuko uwa)* on topical events. Its repertory of songs encompasses all facets of social life reflecting and expressing nuclear family in penury, immoral conducts, marital relationship issues, as well as societal activities towards abigbo music/musicians. To this end, Uzoigwe (1998:79) concludes "in conceiving these pieces, musicians derive the theme from both personal experiences and those of other members of the Igbo society; and also adapt some songs from other Igbo music types."

The most common theme in satirical songs reflected in *ihu-nkwa abigbo* compositions are those based on: "The transition from the ritual event to the celebratory finale; comments on hospitality of the host; the social and moral relationship between men and women in the community; audience/dance response to and interactions in *ihu nkwa abigbo* [prelude] performance" (Uzoigwe, 1998:83). Praise and supplication, social morality and optimism are other predominant themes of *abigbo* satirical songs the musicians sing to uphold the tenets of the society and to eradicate human sufferings.

Recruit Singers: To win populous, the recruited singer is expected to lay emphasis on a character's dominant feature or those of the venue of performance, its surrounding objects and situations therein. They are specifically recruited with the understanding that they can fit into the ensemble's performance presentations with ease after series of rehearsals. This reflection, reasoning, and argument, according to Azuonye (2008:88), is achievable through "a mythopoetic, descriptive or associative epithet of formulas of the particularized category, which functions in the compositions of the singers as verbal fossils in which the dominant characteristics of individual heroes, localities, etc., are preserved in picturesque and memorable forms." An adult (single or married) who could sing with elocution and marked enunciation is recruited into the ensemble. "Recruitment demands that the singer must inform, explain, and carry his audience with him, especially by exploiting the full dramatic possibilities of dialogue and the re-enactment of the pathetic as well as the happy utterance of his characters" (Azuonye, 2008:94). Agu (1984:13-29) proves that no Igbo is a stranger to music making as he comments: "the musical training of the vocal music composer starts from the womb, passing through infancy to adolescence and down to the initiation schools and social groups […] The method of teaching was usually by participation and repetition since the writing culture was absent." Unlike the expert singers who sing and breathe steadily, silently, deeply, and slowly in the song, the recruits pause and breathe only at intervals, especially where rests occur in the song. This observation is in consonance with Palmer's (1978:104) opinion that "The shoulders should not be raised while breath is being inhaled. Do not think about breathing when you are actually singing; concentrate on the sounds which you are producing, and let your breath take care of itself. Should your breath become too difficult, inhale gently, and exhale with a slow, steady sigh." Palmer's advice is a given because while singing in abigbo ensemble, deep breath braces up tones and the entire nervous system, which serves effectively as a preventive measure against 'cold feet' or fright during performance. Also, while reflecting on vocal tone-colour, King Palmer (1978:98) avers:

> Unfortunately, the breathing and resonating apparatus do not function entirely automatically, and the singer must give some thought to them since the mouth and nasal cavities act as resonators, it follows that the quality of tone is conditioned by the

> shape of the mouth, and that this depends on the position of the lips, tongue, soft palate (the fleshy substance which forms the back part of the roof of the mouth), and lower jaw.

Retentive memory calls for sanity in vocal music production management. The capacity to retain the song lyrics and the power to recall them is of immense importance. Nervousness arising from excess conscious effort could effectively frustrate and paralyze the memory, thereby leading to its failure. Amateur singers (in abigbo) are therefore expected to go for ditties, and on gradual process and regular practice, they can eventually advance to difficult songs. This is particularly so because such a piece contains at least a new thing to derive from. Attempting anonymous works by various performers and composers is not out of place in their rehearsal exercises. Practising Igbo indigenous vocal music repertoires in the diaspora (for voice training purpose) is systematically done, and under the auspices of an instructor too. Varieties of vocal exercises they embark on periodic basis assist to augment their vocal flexibility, range, and general control of their voices. In the early stages, a few minutes practice of an assigned vocal role, to be carried out at regular intervals, is encouraged. Meanwhile it is counter-productive to master such exercises too rapidly. In the area of aural perception, association of familiar sounds with a fixed pitch is quite invaluable. Singers are equally recruited in abigbo ensemble considering their realistic employment of vocal expressions in interaction with instrumental or bodily medium to communicate philosophical values to the audience. The singer has to acquaint himself emotionally with desirable, tone and tone-colour.

Musical Presentation Characteristic Styles

This section reviews literature on musical styles and techniques that prevailed in Abigbo, guided by the key concepts eclectically woven together. It serves as a springboard for assessing abigbo's creative styles in musical rendition. Musical presentation implies the process of its rendition, which includes the qualitative interpretation of the acoustic effect to the aural perception. These determine the musical impressions created to the listening audience. This philosophically involves exploration of the ensemble's instrumental sonorities in their different combinations and conscious selection of the existing traditional forms, which they (instrumentalists) append to their own creative ideas to form befitting music

idioms. Abigbo musical presentation, guided by the event situation of the moment during context of performance, are fused to the sonorous instruments to produce inherent sounds and emotions pertaining to the occasion-inspired music. For any quality of sound emitted (either from musical instruments or human voice) to have a specific meaning, it must be objectively organized in accordance with the people's tonal inflection; explain how it is saddled with certain observable conducts in keeping with performance requirements, including use of conventional tools in a bid to achieve effective communication. The temperament and creative ability of the singer or instrumentalist among other factors, largely determine his/her musical expression during its presentation.

Okafor and Emeka (2004:147) tell us that "music"- as a system of expression- "uses sound, rhythm and time." These triple components the evident in the aforesaid scholars view of music are skilfully and pragmatically employed in Abigbo music making to admirable advantage of both the benefactors and beneficiaries. Marius Schneider in Merriam (1964:254) considers music as "the seat of secret forces or spirits which can be evoked by song in order to give man a power which is either higher than himself or which allows him to rediscover his deepest self […]. Marius' definition of music creates the impression that it is basically psychological: it equally stands to reason and acknowledge the fact that practically music inevitably goes a long way in dictating the performance presentation *modus operandi* which gives rise to emergence of styles to achieve the desired objective. It is the implicit styles that appeal to the onlookers, who also constitute the listening audience. Should style be a yardstick for defining music, it will be multi-purpose and as such complex, in the sense that very many styles applied in music cannot be covered in a definition. Moreover, many a musical style is unknown to exotic cultures because the documentation evidence is non-existent.

In Mbaise venues of music dress rehearsals, to be on the safe-side, prior to the performance-proper, the musicians, as a matter of necessity, routinely polish their repertoire and get rid of errors of omissions among other undesirable sound effect. Thereafter, they take off to the host(s) performance venue. Having reached and acclimatized to the environment, they begin to sing their signature tune and communicate their arrival by greeting their hosts as well as audience and equally, solicit their cooperation. They invoke the spirit of the land through

vocalism and body language, supported with instrumental accompaniment for the purpose of securing its supernatural intervention and protection in the interest of Mbaise well-being. Because Mbaise's musical traits and rules guiding acquisition of musicianship are of great essence for maintaining cultural heritage, their " musical presentation characteristic styles" are likewise, adjusted to the said noble demands.

In his classification of musical epochs based on style, Okafor and Emeka (2004:156) note: "The styles of music are constantly changing. In the distant past the evolution of music was very slow and barely perceptible stylistic changes were centuries in the making. Recently the pace has quickened and radically new styles have emerged almost overnight". Style in music, as a manner of performance, varies from culture to culture and individual musicians in every musical era. In Abigbo musical presentation, style is a method by which these elements of music composition – form, time, pitch, rhythm, harmony, melody and interval are treated in the manuscript, aurally interpreted in record discs and presented during live performance. For instance, the artistes skilfully bare their minds on family encounters, exchange ideas or raise general questions through music rendition as showcased in this song text with a slow but dignified responsorial harmonization:

Igbo Text	**English Translation**
'Maikelu' lee! Nw' onye anya mpi na- eji egid' onye ohi;	Michael! A blind man that wants to catch thief;
Onye anya mpi o ji-egid' onye ohi?	A blind man can he catch a thief?
Umu nnaa eee!	My kinsmen – o!
Nwanyi mu na ya no n' ulo atagha-ahuhu,	My wife that was with me at home, Suffering
Ogu-ebirile ya-ekworo naira duwa ndi 'Awusa'	When the war started, she left me because of money and followed Hausa men.
Ogu-ebirile ya-ekworo naira duwa ndi 'Awusa'	During war she left me because of money and followed Hausa men.

Abigbo lee, iberibe w' ara a-ah e-e-e eee!	*Abigbo* – e! Stupidity is madness – no doubt at all.
Ya mechaa lohue. O chere si M gi-ilu ya-ozo?	If she returns later, does she expect to remain my wife?
A-ah-ah eee!	(I need your response.)

Fig. 2: An Extract from Abigbo Song Repertoire

The vital question arising from the satirical ditty points to the fact that one cannot give out what one lacks; as in the case of a blind man claiming to have caught a thief. Its conclusive remark also challenges house wives to be careful of misconducts during hardship or life confrontations, knowing full well that after every storm comes calm. The song is stylistically rhetoric, glamourized with humourously historical tales and routine dance.

The concept of voice application style in music making is expressed by Jones (1959:205). According to him, "In many songs, definite musical tones are connected by means of other tones of indefinite pitch through glides or glissandi. This method of singing may be used by any group as part of its artistic style". In abigbo vocal music styles, points of tension and relaxation, beginning and ending of musical thoughts involve open resonant voice production expressively sung with the singer's facial expression corresponding to the song text. Exclamatory statements of facts sacrificed under the cloak of idiomatic expressions abound in the musical verse. To make the message clearer, the text is sometimes recited or spoken dialogue is employed not only to add effect, but also to assist the clarification of the philosophical and witty utterances. Repetition characterizes the song for the sake of helping memorisation of the stanzas. Singers' ornamental devices employed include different kinds of "vocal bend and dip, characteristic use of glissando, rising attack and falling release. Some songs are almost shouted, spoken or whispered rather than sung" (Merriam, 1959:75; 1954:257). The lead singer uses a type of open resonant vocal quality unlike that associated with Western European folk music. Besides, just as Merriam (1959:75) observes, "the resonant possibilities of the various facial cavities are exploited rather fully; a wide variety of tonal qualities is employed; the variety in timbre sometimes leads to a rather persistent use of a burred tone." The soloist intones a song,

using idioms (or adages) to make a critical statement connecting series of songs in a row. His communication involves praising somebody in the society; this he does for a while. After that he observes a pause, as instrumentation continually sustains the tempo with an already established melo-rhythmic pattern. This practice makes the songs so- combined assume a longer duration or length in spite of their remarkable short motifs. To blend such combinations, a meticulously selected section of songs is sung solely by the lead soloist controlling the rendition. Most often, he is saddled with new philosophical ideas and non-conceited experiences in his mode of performance artistry. Neologism, at times, takes place simultaneously with composite sounds of the instruments thereby giving rise to performance-composition. The ensemble sings to invite the villagers or spur them on to come and grace the occasion. Instrumental dialogue goes on at intervals to give a background support to the stylized vocal commentary as well as punctuate vocal cadential points. At social level, the ensemble sings together and harmonizes, making sure that the *tessitura* is conventionally in consonance with a given texture. As the music increases in intensity, drums improvisation is heightened on the spur of the moment. With the entire musical group performing together, musical development takes place forthwith. During break, the soloist once again assumes rendition with short entertaining vocalization devoid of accompaniment be it vocal or instrumental. Thereafter, the entire ensemble resumes conclusive performance style in earnest.

In summation, in Mbaise homogenous community, application of styles typical of abigbo musical genre is a concerted responsibility of the music specialists (professional music practitioners). During creative process, stylistic formation of performance- compositional techniques, including dance forms and figure, et cetera, are expressed in relation to the nuances directly drawn from the folk's tradition. There is generally an instrumental introduction of the theme by the drummer. At this juncture, vocal solo and chorus refrain follow suit. Usually, the soloist decidedly sings a cappella; however, at times he is supported by few humorious voices. Most often, the songs begin with shouts akin to ululation as well as humming done simultaneously by both soloist and chorus. This kind of melody-plus-accompaniment texture reminds one of Igbo music formal structure, which is virtually homogenic. After the public rendition, the audience begins its music criticism which may be either constructive or otherwise. This

done, always generates required performance actions that lead to desirable musical climax during subsequent performances. From the foregoing, suffice it to resolve that abigbo musicians stylistically employ certain exclamation like sounds in songs which cannot be noted as precise tones. The songs are restricted to certain vocal range within the capability of an average Mbaise man with flair for singing. Despite hitches, uneasiness, and intractable experiences confronting them while grappling with the musical presentation styles, success ensues from the ensemble's exposure to abigbo music enculturation and their concomitant musicality. In all, the end result of abigbo musical presentation unique styles gears towards social entertainment, victory of truth over falsehood, or to express feelings and ideas for a thriving society.

Conclusion

Freedom of artistic expression through stylistic music communication enterprise is strictly justified and promoted in abigbo in Mbaise society. However, abigbo's artistry during musical presentation is not an absolute one; it is balanced against the moral rights of indigenes and their essential social interests. Thus, considerations of Mbaise inhabitants' welfare do override their privilege for free utterances and choice of lyrics. Community pressure group such as Mbaise People's Congress (M.P.C.) influences abigbo's styles in music professional ethics by calling them to order (as the need arises) during town union talks. This has always yielded positive results as it cautiously challenges them in their devoted application of sarcasm, irony, wit and humour, which at times deceitfully undermine Mbaise ethoses.

Abigbo is unique in musicality but never a diversion from other musical genres in African tradition. No theory or conclusive remark on the music is explained away in the light of the researcher's experience; they are satisfactorily scrutinized and conclusively theorized about. Active interaction inherent in both speech and dramatic movement is a sign of outward manifestation of legitimate authority bestowed on abigbo singers and dancers. Dance recruits understand the conga drums message and translate their rhythms into dance gestures. These combined artistic efforts are expressed with emotion that knows no bounds as the dance rendition forges. Abigbo, secular audio-visual art for occasional social events, is identified with excellent performance techniques, which serve multi- cultural

purposes in Mbaise. They music is trivially influenced by globalization and is void of sexual and seductive motive despite its coquettish trend. As a public relation/communication agency to the indigenous onlookers, it exposes cultural heritage, societal values as well as brings about togetherness and communism. The ensemble is not as static in characterisation as it used to be, given the quasi-impact of inevitable current change in musical text and fashions. Issues of castigation against the professional band are as summed up: Unfortunately, arising from the wind of change, abigbo's artistic merit have been contrarily converted rather than remaining stereotyped in its music professionalism. Its "twist and strip tease", sheer immorality _which are marks of no civilization_ are common features of its unconstructive criticism by the biased critics. Since no condition is permanent except change, some positive changes which occurred in abigbo recently have ameliorated certain earlier inapt observations, particularly from field reports. Thus, if we must preserve and sustain this musical heritage and its artistry in the interest of continuity, these challenges still call for further review of abigbo rendition styles in keeping with its explicit usefulness in Mbaise.

No. 33: Umu Agboghobia




12
O.A.E
N.N.E.
Ta-ra wu - s'a bu ghia h'o ma
Mo-der-nA bi -
ve hi-w'e kwu:
E-be na-di-gh'o ny'o nwe-r'i k'i som nya,
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
occasionally; improvised beats
15
gbon d'o zio-ma
m'O ku-ru y'a hia e - e - e - e - e - eee!
O ga-w'o nye n'o ny'o h'ru v'e kwe di - o aa
19
O-nye hu-r'i h'o joo kue s'o jon jo
eee!
23
O nwe-di-ri ques-tio-na nyi n'a ju, a-gbo-gho bia ma-ra mma gi ni ga ji g'a lu-la di?
TOVE impr. beats


26
O.A.E
I-b'o ka mma na be-d g'a gw'a nyi,
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
30
O.A.E
i-di mma n'i m'e ny'i dii mm'o lu-lu? U-nu za num ques-tio - n ma-la-wa!
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
33
O.A.E
A ha - puo nu nwo-ko y'e ru-chie, o-nye hu-r'o ku-ko vo - wa n-shi,
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
36
O.A.E
chu-fu-ni ya i - di m'o nye g'i tau-kwu ya. A -gbo-gh'i h'i me-re nne na nna s'o di mma,
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.


40
O.A.E
bu-ru n'u che s'u mu ke gi gai..me-gi y'e me.
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
44
O.A.E
M-kpi ta-r'o kw'ru gbu-r'o nwe ya.
A gwao jooe mee-n'a gbo-gho- bi'a_ lu-la di.
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
48
O.A.E
O nyei shi ta-chi-ri-n'o bi ju-ni ri.
ya ta chie kw'o bi me-h'a nya.
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
52
O.A.E
A-gbo-gho ga-r'o ku lo ju ri.
a-nyi kwu-ru si.
o-le-ghe nne na nn'a nya n'o nu.
gwa-ni ya.
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.


56
O.A.E
i-he ka-ra y'o bi ga-n'i ku y'a hia.
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
60
O.A.E
O nyea du-ru bu-n'a han de-k'a nyi.
A gwao jooe mee-n'a gbo-gho bi'a lu-la di.
Ekwe
Oyo
[Occ. Inye beats.....
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
63
O.A.E
o ku-nna y'a hia y'a ba-nye chur-che kpe-re muon so.
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
66
O.A.E
Mgb'o n'e kpe-l'o nwa n'abo m'o b'a to, a-gbo-gho bia cho-wa di e-le-w'a ny'o ga bu'a mu-ma.
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.


69
O.A.E
E-b'e yi-ri cru-sa-d'a ya w'o nyem bu;
Night vi - gil_ bu-cha-kw'a ru.
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
73
O.A.E
Ya hu nwo-ko-ro - bia_ ma-ra mma,
y'e bi-d'a mu-ma:
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
76
O.A.E
O-nwe-r'o zi muo n-so zi-rim zie___ gi.
O-ko-ro-bia so-wan ti la-bo che-r'a mu-ma,
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
79
O.A.E
nwa-gho-gho-bia g'e bi-do ti-we: MuoN so s'a gi g'a lu m yee!
Ekwe
Oyo
{Occ. Impr. beats.....}
O.M.A.
M.A.A.


83
O.A.E
O-nye hu-r'i h'o joo__ kwues'o jon jo!
O-nwe-kwe - re no-ti-c'a nyi n'e nye,
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
86
u-n'a gbo-gho-bia ji mi-ni skir-ta cho w'a ny'o gwu,.
Man din ke si ha
89
yi i- rou - ser gba - r'o to
I kp'ro ya sa-gi i-b'A la-ye La-go - s_g'a gw'a nyi
92
U-nu gwa-kwa ha,
o-nwu-nwa k'e kwen-su na Jo-b mma n'a ka.
(Occ. Impr. beats.....)


95
O.A.E
gi gaa n'i m'O werri g'a hu ha;
G'a gaa n'i m'A ba g'a hu ha;
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
99
O.A.E
Gi gaa na La-go - s ha bun ja;
Por - t n'a bu-ja bu-kwa-nidea-ler'nyi nwe - re;
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
102
O.A.E
Man din ke gba-cha-r'i sia wo n'u kw'a fo.
M-ghe nwa-nyi gba-r'i sia won'u kw'a fo.
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
105
O.A.E
n - de-k'a nyi, a-kwu-kwo re-tire-men-t y'a lo - nna.
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.


108
O.A.E
A-tu-ru nyu-r'o du yan shi me-r'o nwe ya.
A-gbo-gho yi mi-ni skir-tu ga-wa n'a ma,
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
111
O.A.E
Gbe-w'o bio n'o nwe-re p - la-n kam kwuo ya.
De Be-nne-thi ga hu-nna,
Ekwe
Oyo
O.M.A.
M.A.A.
115
O.A.E
s'a ki be - kee me-di-r'i h'e ji-ri se-pu-ru ya n'a ka.
U-fo-du j'i b'a kpa ma-lam zo-ro shia-ko.
M.A.A.
118
O.A.E
O-nye me-nye k'omee kpa-cha-r'a nya, o-ria AJD-S ka din jo, o-riaJe-su-s nye-re ma ka.
M.A.A.
121
O.A.E
O-nye nwe-ren ti ya nu-ru.
I-he me-re n'i m'a hi'a di-ghi mma,
M.A.A.
125
O.A.E
A sia pas-tor ga-ra n'i m'a hiaj'irin ri.
O ri-chan-la ri nuo nwa gbo-gho - bra, ra n'a hia.
M.A.A.



Fig. 1: Evidence of Inventive Styles in Abigbo Musical Composition (Copyright J.C. Okoro, 2016)

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