

TRADITIONAL MUSIC EDUCATION THROUGH BINI SONGS AND DANCES

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Abstract

Music and dance plays important role in the traditional institutions of the Binis in Edo State of Nigeria. Music and dance not only educate its citizens, it also tells the history of the past heroes of Bini kingdom. Bini culture among many others in Africa is one of the few that has been preserved for many decades. However in the recent past western styles has been infused into the music and dance structures of the Bini people by youths, this is a challenge for the preservation of the indigenous musical culture that ought to be sustained in spite of western influence. This paper therefore examines music and dance among the Binis. It equally serves as a historical reconstruction for the Edo people and seeks to highlight the role of music and dance in the traditional life of the Binis. It gives some recommendations as to the preservation of the Bini culture in the area of music and dance and suggested that the elderly ones should continue to pass on the original Bini musical culture and dance to the present generation for continuity.

The concept traditional education is synonymous with the term indigenous education. Indigenous education has been perceived by different authorities. Wilson (1966:16) perceived it as "learning of the environment in its economic potential and the learning of the skills required for exploiting the environment". Taiwo (1980) defined it as "the education which each community hand down to succeeding generations quite apart from western-style education of modern school system or the formal education of the Koranic school". Itedjere (1990) perceived it as "the original way of transmitting

the values and skills in a society without foreign influence at any stage or time to the young ones. From the foregoing indigenous education is the transmission of culture – and music is an aspect of culture because any society that does not cherish music is a dead community.

Sequel to the above definitions, traditional or indigenous music education is the process of inculcating moral values in an individual or group of individuals outside the formal school system through the use of music – songs and dances. The lyrics of the songs and dances steps associated with them go a long way to educating and creating a sense of total transformation and rehabilitation of the individual or groups, as most of the songs and dances portray the culture of the people generally and the Bini in particular. This music is quite distinct in its idiom and orientation from the contemporary art and popular music. It is absolute in its purity.

Aims of Indigenous Music Education

The aims of indigenous music education are coterminous with that of indigenous education as observed by Itedjere (1990:55) He opined that indigenous education has the following aims:

- i) To enable man know and understand his cultural heritage and do everything possible to preserve it by ensuring that they are handed over to the succeeding generation.
- ii) To enable the individual adapt himself to the prevailing condition of environment.
- iii) To require the individuals with skills (physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual

and vocational) in order to effectively function in the environment and earn a living.

- iv) To mould the individual's character and inculcate in him desirable moral qualities such as respect for elders, humility, obedience, sociability and solidarity and finally,
- v) Develop a sense of belonging to his environment by active participation in the family *and society's affairs*.

It is worthy to note that the aforementioned aims can also be achieved through indigenous music education in our various traditional societies. No society is devoid of music, as it forms an Integra aspect of the people's philosophy. Through indigenous music education, the individual will avail himself the opportunity of not only knowing more about his culture, but will also create job opportunity, understanding of his environment, and transformation of his characteristic etc. These are possible because most of our indigenous music is in one way or the other didactic in nature.

The Place of Music (Songs) in Bini Traditional Society

In Bini culture, everybody is involved in music making, beginning with children's play songs during moonlit nights. During such nights the girls sit in a row with their wrappers folded in a bunch and placed between their tights and beaten with the palms of their hands to produce a mellow drum-like sound. They refer to this as "Ukpon n' a gbe" (cloth beating). The following song may be sung:

Bini		Translation	
Wa gh' uvbi	ee (2ce)	Behold a damsel	ee
Uvbi n' ekoko	ee	Breasted damsel	ee
Ekoko duma	ee	What a robust breast	ee
Eweni ghi rro	ee	Breasts are no more	ee
Udu va re	ee	Heart is broken	ee

ile o gele yow' ileo ee (2ce) ile o bid ile farewell ee

This song apparently bemoans the sorry state of a lady who matures to marriageable age but is yet single. This is just a folk song which is not directed at anybody in particular except perhaps when it first originated. The "ee" at the end of each line is a nonsense syllable. So also is the word "ile" with the "o" after is (see the last line). In fact, the last line is a refrain used during this performance as shown in the song text below.

Bini	Translation:
Eruvbi, Eruvbi, Eruvbi, ee (2ce)	Eruvbi's father Eruvbi's father
Eruvbi khin eze y'oto oha, ee	Eruvbi turned to a forest river ee
Q ke khin eze n'uhobo y'a khue, ee	A river in which Urhobos swim ee
Q ke khin eze n'uhobo yaru edin, ee	With her waters they process palm oil ee
ile o gele yow' ile o, ee	ile o, bid ile farewell

The only meaning the word "ile" has in Bini language is "a bet" and in the context of these songs, it is completely out of place. The last line is therefore a meaningfulness refrain.

Music is socially controlled among the Binis. Music associated with certain deities may not be performed on any other occasion. In communities, where Ovia juju festivals are held, no other forms of music-making or singing are allowed except songs connected with the festival and even at that, women may not sing the songs of the masquerades except those normally sung in praise of the masquerades who are regarded as spirits. Throughout the period which is fourteen days in duration, whistling of any kind is strictly forbidden.

Funeral songs are restricted for such ceremonies. Funeral songs may not be performed in any other occasion as it is viewed as overt

invitation to death. In some communities whistling at night is a taboo while music associated with female cults may not be performed by the males and vice versa.

An average Bini person does not desire to be barren or childless. The following song text illustrates this;

Omo nigha ka bie o
 'N 'ukpereghe
 Kpe, kpe, kpe, kpe
 Nukpe reghe
 Okieke n' igbo ye o
 N' ukpereghe
 Kpe, kpe, kpe, kpe
 N' ukpe reghe.

Translation

I will first have children
 Money is last.

Not only has that, events of the life cycle provided avenues for singing songs extolling the joy of being blessed with offspring's. On the birth of a child, such songs as this are heard.

Bini	Translation
Vbokhin?	What is it?
Oyemwē nō?	It is joy
Oyemwē omō	Joy of children
Oyemwē nō	It is joy.

The above song is also used during marriage ceremonies just as the following which is also sung during naming ceremonies.

Bini	Translation
Evba ghiru vb' ediran – o?	What are we doing here?
Ugiomō ma do vbe' eran – o	We are celebrating fruit fullness

Considering the importance the Binis attach to the proper disposal of the remains at death, it is indeed cruel to wish that the remains of the barren be consumed by dogs. The following song is used to ridicule the barren

during burial ceremonies although it is also sung on other occasions.

Agan nō ma bie
 Gha vbie ovbe – ovbe o iro
 Iro, iro o gb' agan

Translation

The barren goes on sleeping and sleeping, slain by her sorrowful thoughts.

Another one goes:

Nō ma bie, do ghe (2x)
 Do ghe vb' omō ru n omwan

Translation

Childless one care and see what children do for the one who has them.

The above song is a *Ugho* song which is sung during *Isoton* procession. *Isoton* is one of those activities by which the children of the deceased pay their last respect to their departed parent. It is marked by procession to *Emotan* shrine with a colorful wooden box called Okun. Those in the rural areas or villages process to the village square. Such is the importance attached to this activity that an adult child of the deceased who failed to perform it might be denied his or her right to the estate of the deceased. The above song is used to remind the childless that he/she has no one to perform this rite for him/her. This is anything but fair as the unfortunate does not need to be reminded of his/her misfortune. Osayande/Abolagba (2006:8).

The most outstanding festival of the Bini culture, that unit all is the *Igue* festival. It is being celebrated every December to mark the end of year. The following ceremonies are done with the permission of the monarch. It is a combination of seven principal ceremonies, namely.

1. Otue – Ugierhoba
2. Igue – Oba
3. Igue – Ineen
4. Ugie – Emobo
5. Igue – Irbioba
6. Igue – Edohia

7. Ugie – Ewere

With the above, it is clear that the Bini monarchy attached much importance to festivals and these festivals are mostly influenced by music.

In fact, the song sung in the festival tells more on what the festival is all about and the importance attached to these songs. The adult women are mostly involved in the music. The song sung by the women is a thanksgiving song to God.

The *Ugie-Ewere* is a unique festival in *Evbohuan* that embraces all forms of singing and dancing. But some aspects of it have to do with ritual ceremonies, which also characterize the fact that the gods are in ecstasy with the celebration.

In a nutshell, the structure of *Ugie-Ewere* can be divided into two categories namely; the religions component which comprises rites and rituals, and the recreational aspect, which comprises singing, dancing and general merrymaking.

In the same vein, Agatha (2005:99) sees festival as a day set aside by the community to celebrate certain events that happens in the past. It is a day of merrymaking, and so, every member of the community looks forward to the day of festival.

Music plays multifarious roles during festivals. Music is used to evoke strange mode on the devotee or participants. According to Vidal (1997:119), “the movements performed by participants at the sango festival are volatile and convulsive, this coupled with a magical display of “eye plucking” and “ear cutting” creates an atmosphere of uneasiness and fear. These contrasting moods are evoked partly through music”.

This assertion shows that through music, certain mood can be evoked that can make a participant of a particular festival to indulge in an exercise which naturally would pose some level of phobia. He went further to say that,

“besides evoking mood and appropriate behavior from participants, music is also used during the annual rite of appeasement and worship to invoke the divinities” music is a powerful instrument through which the spirit of the gods is aroused to accept offerings and prayers of the devotee. In the same view, Drewell (1954:119), observes that,

“Invocation, praise, poetry, music, and dance are all essential to Yoruba ritual performances in which spiritual forces are actualized. However, since festivals are held in respect of some deified beings, it is apparently necessary for them to be present during such exercises”. Usually, there is ritual music designed mainly to summon and entice them to be present at the festivals Loko (2005:154).

The *Ugie-Ewere* ceremonies come at the tail end of the *Igue* festival. The songs sung are used to scare out evil spirit from the land and the song symbolizes good luck and prosperity and can also be used for entertainment purpose. The instruments used are konga drum, maracas, metal gong and hand clapping.

Furthermore, music in Bini tradition is also used to inform its people of what has happened in days past. This is done in form of folk tales e.g. the deportation of Oba Ovoranwmen n’ Ogbasi to Calabar by white men in the colonial days.

Music plays prominent role during coronation or chieftaincy taking among the Binis. Songs like this are sung;

Ivbare ivbare, ivba dion nikaro
Ivbare ivbare vba edion nikar (3ce)

Translation

I have met the elders
I have met the elderly ones
Or
Kpomwonba me egua mese
Kpomwonba me egua mese
Egua rue se

Egua rue se

Translation

Please thank the king for me (3ce)

Thank the palace also.

In Bini culture, the children assist in the economic activities of their parents. They are given special responsibilities such as looking after flocks, they may be encouraged to play native flutes for their enjoyment.

In Bini metropolis apart from Christianity, well-known cults also exist, such as Ogboru, Asigidi, Oyidion Niyason, Ayelala, and Owegbe. Many divinities also exist such as Olokun cult, Ogun, ekpo, Aznu, Eziza, Orhomila, Isango and Okhuaihe. These are worshipped in accordance to the different gods and musical accompaniments are used, in bringing devotees in close communion with the gods. The advent of Christianity saw most of our indigenous culture as devilish. This had rendered some of our rich cultural heritage such as festivals, music, dance etc, to go on extinction.

Common Instruments Used in Bini

The various musical instruments commonly used by the Binis include the Ukuse- (maracas) Ema (drum), Agban Ema Ogun (god of iron drum), Emugho (drum), Emighan (drum), idan (drum), Emedo (drum), Emwini (drum), Okpeh (trumpet or horn), Ekpeho (flute), Egogo (bell), Ighede (drum). Just to mention but a few.

The Place of Dance in Bini Traditional Society

In Bini tradition, music and dance go on pari-passu. Most of their songs are harmonized in thirds and their dance steps are gaily. It is often jocularly said by Europeans that all Africans are dancers. This is partially true judging from the variety of dances that we have within ethnic groups within geographical or cultural zones and the wide variety of reasons that stimulates dance in us. Also, dance differs from one culture to another. Although, there are

some basic denominators that are found in basically all dances. They are the factors that underline technique. Once they are mastered, the dancer has no problem in dancing. They are the dancer's tool, the "body", the place he occupies during performance either on stage or on an open area called the "space" the way he responds to rhythm either slowly or very fast called the "time".

Dance in Bini culture are two main types, these are; free dance and stylized dance. In free dancing, there are no specifications as to how each dancer moves in terms of space, relationship to other dancers and body movement. Rather, each dancer expresses his inner feeling independent of what other dancers or other parts of the body do.

Stylized dance on the other hand, is concerned with purposeful and uniformity in movements. The movements are planned in such a way that body relationships and individual relationships are all meaningful.

In Bini traditions, dances can also be categorized along functional line.

- a) Occupational dances
- b) Social dances
- c) Ritual dances

Occupational dances are those associated with or staged to reflect different aspects of Bini professions, such as hunting, divination, fishing, farming, etc.

Social dances include those stated for social occasions such as wedding, title taking, etc.

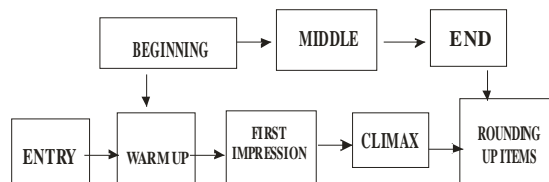
Ritual dances include Ogun dance, new yam dance, Igwe dance, masquerade dance, etc.

Some examples where Bini traditions where songs/dance, are featured will be explained in details.

The Structure of Bini Dance

The Bini has 3 basic dance structures;
(i) Beginning (ii) Middle, (iii) End

Table Showing the Structure of Dance



Bini Dance Formations

The Binis made use of different mathematical formations which provide the framework for the organization, position, space and movement of the dancers and the music orchestra or ensemble. These formations are as follows.

- a) Circle formation
- b) Parallel lines formation
 - i. Double parallel lines
 - ii. Triple parallel lines
 - iii. Quadruple parallel lines
- c) Single line formation
- d) Semi-circle or horse-shoe line formation

Components of Bini Dance

Bini dance contains the following components; Music, Drama, Costume, Language and Mimes.

Music is indispensable in Bini dance because the dancer dances to the rhythm and tempo of music including sudden and planned musical variations.

Drama is used in the form of acting or imitating some professionals or animals which has dominated Bini home video of this century.

Costume provides and expresses the external body beauty and gives colour of joy, sadness, gallantry, war, peace, smartness or worship to the dancers and the dance depending on the type of social function and objectives of the dance. The Binis put on choral beads on their neck, hands and sometimes the legs. White and

red are the favourite colours of dress worn by the Binis. The white costume is used during the dance proper, while the red is used during incantation.

Language is in the form of words and statements in vocal line including, comments, creative speech and recitations associated with a particular dance.

Mime is in the form of gestures by different patterns of facial expression, arm, head and eye movements and sings with the intension to amuse and imitate or communicate some ideas is predominantly used by the Binis.

As earlier noted about African music, dance or rhythmic movement is an important feature of Bini music. Some dances are the exclusive preserve of the palace. These include Ekasa, which is performed during coronation ceremonies of the Oba, "Emaba" which features during the palace festivals such as "Igue", and "Ekoko" masquerade dance. Other dances include "Ugho" and "Esakpaede". Of these two Ugho is the most popular. There are also organized dance troupes such as "Ekareta" and Ikuarre (cultural dance) troupes. While the former has its specific dance steps, the latter is based mainly on "Ugho", Esakpaede and other steps synthesized from steps used in the worship of some deities such as Olokun, Isango, which also have their own special kind of dance steps. Devotees of Okhuaihe also perform "Akaba" dance during the wet season with special bells tied to the back of their waists. These are shaken as they sing and dance or jog along the streets.

Music associated with the palace of the Oba may not be performed elsewhere or by any other group than the designated performers. Ekasa dance is performed by *Ogbelaka* while Emaba is performed by *Iguosodin nigbemaba*. Ekoko is the exclusive preserve of *Utte* people. Osayande/ Abolagba (2006:5).

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the beauty of Bini traditional songs and dances. It has equally exposed the danger of western influence on the traditions of the Binis, which should be corrected in order for the preservation of the good traditions and culture of the Binis through songs and dances.

Recommendations

- ❖ The impact of western music in way has affected Bini young girls and boys to loose grips of the proper way Bini traditional songs and dances in performed. They should not adulterate Bini traditional songs with western songs and dances.
- ❖ To this end, aged women and men should continually teach the young boys and girls Bini traditional songs and dances from time to time. The present emphasis on Bini home video on songs and dances currently been publicized on radio and television is a step in the right direction.
- ❖ In the past, Bini traditional marriage of native law and custom, usually have the maiden coming out to sing and dance with musical accompaniment of drums, gong and maracas. But nowadays amplifier and record player are used to entertain guests. This should not be so, for our tradition not to go into extinction or what is termed “cultural surrender”.

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