

MUSIC COMPOSITION IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY: ISSUES, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

There is practically no aspect of life in which music does not play an essential and functional part. People throughout the ages seem to have found music to be of practical value in accomplishing the tasks of everyday living. From the cradle to the grave, literally, music has been an important factor in every society as composers may feel free to choose their lyrics or send their messages across without fear or favour. This paper therefore looked at music composition from the following perspectives: Music Composition; democracy, issues in music composition in a democratic society, prospects of music composition, suggested solutions to the problems, summary and conclusion.

Introduction

Music is an aesthetic art which requires peace of mind and serene environment. However a composer can draw his elements of composition from different experiences. These experiences could be from joyful as well as from sorrowful events encountered in life. These range from childbirth, naming ceremonies, outing of various kinds, funeral ceremonies to wars and many other experiences.

Writing on music, Uzoigwe, (1996:2) defined music by saying that music is not just an aspect of only the human culture. It is a solemn activity which is unavoidably engaged by man and the world around him, consciously and most often unconsciously. This pervading nature of music underscores its mystic or spiritual significance in creation, being a true and clear vehicle by which the creature indulges in constant direct communication with its creator.

Music, no matter its form is for expression of gratitude and in most part, symbolic. Nature is always in constant expression of gratitude to the Almighty Father. Every aspect of nature has its way of giving praises and thanks to God according to its level of awareness. For instance, the cricket at its own level of evolution chips praises to God, the snake hisses, the dog growls, the owl hoots, the bee buzzes, the thunder rolls, the rain prattles, the cock crows, many other phenomena in nature express praise to the Almighty Father in one way or the other. Above all, man expresses his adoration and praises through singing. Is it any surprise to observe what a marvellous musician everything in creation is?

Democracy

Democracy is one word that is very popular among different governments of the world. One thing is to talk of democracy and another thing is to practice democracy in the real sense of the word. No matter the shape democracy might take at any given time or place, it serves as a pointer to the best form of government preferred by a majority of the world community, this is in line with Buhari's (1998) view "Democracy does not take root easily and is full of shortcomings, but it still remains the least evil of any form of government." Raney & Kendall in Chukwujekwu, (1998:24) defined democracy as "a form of government organised in accordance with the principles of popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultation, and majority rule." Kirkpatrick (1991) defined democracy as a form of government in which the people freely elect representatives to govern them." MacDonald in Okafor (1998: 48) defined democracy as "A form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people collectively and is administered by them or by officers appointed by them." Democracy has also been defined as "government of the people, by the people and for the people." Defining democracy, Hornby (2000:309) said, "Democracy is a system of government by all the people of a country usually through representatives whom they elect, thought of as allowing freedom of speech, religion and political opinion".

Different countries of the world interpret and practice their own democracy in their own way. In Nigeria, what we used to have was military dictatorship. With the enthronement of democracy, Nigeria with other nations of the world are trying to ensure that democracy is practised

in the real sense. Nevertheless, with the long military rule, Nigeria is facing a lot of teething problems which cannot be solved immediately. However, time heals every wound.

Music Composition

Music composition is an aesthetic art of writing or producing an original music. The art of music composition is done by composers. All over the world there are many music composers. The composer is a man or a woman who can express himself in terms of music. To him it is a language with rules of its own and its own inner logic. It is not however, the kind of language that can express ordinary everyday matters. The ideas that concern music belong to music alone, and can only be understood in musical terms. To the composer, their meaning is crystal clear.

The language of music, however, is not quite expressing purely musical thoughts, it is also able to suggest quite definite emotions. And with a little help from works or drama, it can even be made to paint pictures and tell stories. Writing on the composer, Hurd (1968:13) said.

Let us think of the composers as a perfectly ordinary man, to whom fate has given a mind that responds profoundly and creatively to the language we call music. He may perhaps seem a little pre-occupied when we meet him in the street, but no more so than any man with an absorbing interest. He will not wear his hair noticeably longer than is the fashion, nor will his eyes be lit with an unearthly glow. In fact, we shall probably walk straight past him.

He also went on to explain that there is no one method of composing. Composers work in different ways, entirely according to temperament. Some like to improvise at the piano, jotting down ideas as they go. Some like to work out their ideas on paper, going over them again and again until they reach a satisfactory shape. Some prefer to do all the work in their heads only picking up a pen to write down the finished piece. And some perhaps the majority, combine all three approaches.

Whichever method you adopt, composing calls for enormous powers of concentration, in the most convincing works the musical ideas follow each other so logically that it would be impossible to improve upon a single line. Since it is necessary to keep a firm grip on the overall shape of a piece of music, many composers like to sketch their works in short score. They jot down a rough outline on two or three staves - such as might easily be played on the piano. Once this general impression has been written down, they can then go back and complete the details - working perhaps for many months on an outline that may have taken only few hours to set down.

Music Composition In a Society.

In an ideal democratic society, there is freedom of expression, freedom of worship, freedom from oppression and suppression. With the democratic dispensation in musicians are more likely to compose their music without fear. This peace of mind will allow their natural talents to unfold..

Musicians can now compose their music to serve the government in power. Sometimes some of these music are aimed at correcting the government in power. The government can then make necessary adjustments and or take corrections. This helps in no small way in governing the people.

On the other hand, music could be composed to enlighten the people on the importance of governmental programmes.

It can be vividly remembered that late Olu Fela Anikulapo Kuti popularly known as Fela was always trying to point out some of the evil practices in Nigeria by individuals, groups and the government in particular. He was fearless. He did not mind going into prison and coming out again. When he came out he usually went back to his music. However, Fela's imprisonment happened during the military regime. In line with the above point, Brown (1996:7) said "Fela was a genius, a legend of our time and a great singer. He opposed and talked against the government."

Being in the military regime his opposition to the government did not go unpunished. His frequent clashes with the military resulted in his house being burnt down.. This was pointed out by Brown (1996:8) when he said,

His Kalakuta Republic was burnt down in 1977 during the Obasanjo regime which resulted in the mother's death. The mother's (first Nigerian woman car owner and politician) died on the 13th April, 1978. After the demolition of the Empire Hotel by the Obasanjo Boys, Fela approached the Binitie family for a portion of land through their son Mike which he later bought for his live performance based at Pepple Street Ikeja, popularly known as the "African Shrine".

That was the plight of some revolutionary musicians during the military regime. In the democratic society, the story is different.

Problems of Music Composition

Music has no problem whatsoever. It is the musicians and music composers that encounter one problem or the other. The school is situated in the society. The needs of the society are reflected in the curricula of its schools. Unfortunately in Nigeria, music is not given its proper place in the curricula of schools. In the primary school for instance, music is not taught as a full fledged subject. It is regarded as mere classroom singing done in the afternoon when the children are already exhausted from the day's activities. A hungry and tired child cannot sing effectively. The rudiments of music are not taught in the primary schools as happens with other subjects of the primary school curriculum. Teachers who are even experts in the field of music posted to primary schools are not given the opportunities to teach rudiments of music since this is not in the curriculum.

In the secondary school curriculum, music is not a full fledged subject although it is grouped as one of the core subjects. Music is taken as an alternative to Fine and Applied Arts and Drama. As a result of the above students who are talented in both music and fine arts are forced to drop one of them.

The seeming negative attitude towards music and musicians leaves much to be desired. This has led to parents dissuading their children from taking up music as a career. In line with the above view, Alor (1986:123) pointed out the fact that the magnitude of erroneous impression still imbibed by the masses and many elites of this country in respect of music education was alarming. To many Nigerians, music education is a subject for school dropouts who are not clever enough to secure admission in other areas of study apparently seen as more prospective.

Another nagging problem of music composers is that of copyright/piracy. Some composers spend months and even years to produce a piece of work only to find out that another person not necessarily a musician has pirated his work and has sent it to the market thus enriching himself while the composer who has put in all he has to produce the music remains a pauper. The problems are too numerous to be exhausted here.

Suggested Solutions to the Problems

Some of the problems that face musicians and music composition have been discussed and the following are the suggested solutions to the problems.

Music should be made a full fledged subject of both the primary and secondary schools' curricula, just as it is done in subjects like English, Mathematics, Igbo, Social Studies, Primary Science to mention but a few.

In the secondary school, music should be made to stand on its own. It should not be made an alternative to Fine Arts and Drama or any other subject in the secondary school curriculum. Experts in music should be sent to the secondary schools for the purpose of organising seminars and workshops. Copyright law should be adequately enforced in Nigeria to discourage people who pirate the original music of composers for their own selfish ends.

Prospects of Music Composition in a Democratic Society

In a democratic society, there are a lot of prospects for music composition. Music could be used for many desirable results. Music could be composed for enlightenment purposes. It could be used to make the citizens aware of the importance of payment of tax for instance. A typical example is the advertisement on the radio which runs thus:

Tax i no be punishment i beg
oo Tax i no be punishment i
say Na to help government to
help You o. Pay your tax like
Gentle mani o. Let nobody
Worry you, pay your tax.

Naturally when such a piece of music is heard over the radio it serves as a reminder to honest citizens who are willing to pay their taxes. Chronic tax evaders may not necessarily be touched by the music since they are bent on finding ways of cheating the government.

Music composition could be used to enlighten the masses as regards politics and political parties. Upholding the above view Onwuekwe (1994: 143) said.

During electioneering campaigns music is used in creating awareness among individuals in general and the rural communities in particular. The Electoral Commission and political parties formulate songs to win the hearts of voters.

Music could be composed and used as a medium for disseminating information through public enlightenment campaign for social mobilization. This could be done through songs calling on the society to avail themselves of some health services like immunization, environmental sanitation, adaptation to environmental hazards for the survival of the society, preventive measures against some diseases and epidemics. Through songs, communities are called upon to embrace indigenous technology, adult education, population education, women education, political education to mention but a few. In fact the prospects of music composition are too numerous to be exhausted within the confines of this paper.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper discussed the importance of music composition in a democratic society. The concepts of music and music composition was discussed. The personality and the role of the composer were highlighted, the elements from which the composers draw were also highlighted. The emphasis is on nature and natural phenomena. The concept of democracy was discussed with emphasis on the Nigerian situation. Music composition in a democratic society' w'as stressed. Prospects of music composition in a democratic society were highlighted. Problems of music composition were also discussed. After looking at the problems, possible solutions to the problems were preferred.

In conclusion, therefore, having seen the numerous prospects of music in the development any nation, Nigerians should wake up and harness this invaluable instrument of national development. The developed nations from where we borrowed our educational system make adequate use of music for national development. Why should Nigeria be an exception?

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