

# TOWARDS TRANSFORMATION OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL MUSIC: THE STUDY OF ODABARU MUSIC ENSEMBLE OF THE OGBO-EGALU ISU EHA-AMUFU, ENUGU STATE

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## Abstract

*The nature and scope of music making are generally related to the aims and purposes of a specific social event or to the needs of the performers (Nketia: 1982). In traditional African society, music making is generally organized as a social event. Dejo & Ilori (2003) state that African music is one of the cultural indices that make Africans African. They further state that it is a cultural identity that has to do with singing, playing of instruments, dancing and use of various artifacts. In fact, African culture made it that a musical performance is meaningless without some expression shown outwardly in verbal or physical behavior. However, music and dance have been the core features of traditional ceremonies and festivals in Africa as a whole and in Igbo speaking areas of Nigeria in particular. Music plays a major role in both the social and religious activities of the Igbos. In Eha-Amufu, the raw cultural material is found more in the music than in other aspects of their culture. The reason is that music pervades the entire life of the people. They celebrate with music, carry on their daily routine and also perform funeral, and religious rites with music. The history of the Odabaru music of the Ogbo-Egalu is largely prescribed by oral tradition, which is embodied in story-telling and in songs. In fact, it is not written down. Since the music of an area is embodied in its culture, there is the need to record, document and study it. This paper systematically examined the origin of the Odabaru music ensemble of Isu Eha-Amufu, organization and membership, instrumentation and the role of the music in the society. Two excerpts of the group's repertoires were electronically recorded, transcribed and documented for posterity.*

Music is one of the oldest valuable artistic forms in the tradition of African societies (Agu: 2009). According to Ekwonwa (2009) music is a cultural heritage and serves as mark of identity. In this direction, Okafor (2005) asserts that music is the

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central expression that characterizes or gives identity to many African societies. Ibekwe (2009) writes that in Africa, music is believed to be one of the most effective ways of achieving positive life expectation. He further states that it is also a way of propagating and perpetuating traditions, norms and values. In discussing the functions of music in Africa culture and development Ekwonwa (2009) says that African music is used to express ideas for development. He further noted that as a means of expressing ideas, its producer can talk to the listeners through his musical instruments, by producing musical inflections to replace vocal ones. Agu (2009) pointed out that in Nigeria; music constitutes a rich, varied and vital functioning part of the traditional culture. Agawu (2003) reiterated that African traditional music designates those numerous repertoires of songs and instrumental music that originate in specific African communities, and performed regularly and circulate mostly orally within and across languages, ethnic and cultural boundaries.

Traditional music according to Lasisi (2012) is that type of music which is created entirely from traditional elements and has no stylistic affinity with western music. Nwonyeh (2007) views indigenous music as traditional music composed and performed by the people with traditional musical instruments, style, and in vernacular. She further states that it deals with local experiences of man and is orally handed down from one generation to another. In view of this, Akpabot (1988) opined that indigenous Nigerian music is an oral tradition handed down from generation to generation, and jealously preserved by those who have come to be known as master musicians.

The *Odabaru* music is a well known and cherished genre of instrumental music ensemble in Isi-Uzo Local Government Area of Enugu State in general and Eha-Amufu in particular. This particular group whose music is under study is an age grade called *Ogbo-Egalu* (Low age grade). Okafor (2005) however observed that Igbo traditional society organizes children born over a conventional period into the *Ogbo* (Age grade). The *Ogbo-Egalu* group comprises of instrumentalists and dancers. The membership of the group is purely by age and sex. In line with this Nzewi (1991) states that the Igbo make distinctions about age and sex of persons who could perform some specified music type. According to Ekwonwa (2009) the most common basis of musical organization in Africa is age and sex. the above statements by different authors show that in Africa, there are specific music for the male, female youths and children of the same age group.

The *Odabaru* music is performed during ceremonies such as traditional marriage, performance of rites, funeral and title taking. The group's primary aim is to entertain and also educate the people on the happenings in the community. To buttress

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the above statement Nzewi (1991) records that any Igbo music type, irrespective of its definite categorization, has some innate musical rationalization which it communicates.

### **The Origin of Odabaru Music Ensemble**

*Odabaru* music is a well known genre of instrumental music in Eha-Amufu. The music is said to Originate in Agu-Amede, one of the villages in Eha-Amufu. *Odabaru* is the short form of *Odabaru Ezekiel* the full name. It is so called because, according to Ede (2016), a man called Ezekiel was the first person who taught the music in his own village, Agu-Amede. Then other villages in Eha-Amufu and towns beyond, came to learn the music. Since then, the music has been known and called *Odabaru Ezekiel*.

The series of interviews and investigations carried out revealed that the origin of *Odabaru* music can be traced only to Ezekiel, the Olugu of Agu-Amede, Eha-Amufu. Hence, no one actually say from where he got his ideas. Among the towns that are renowned for performing *Odabaru* music are Eha-Amufu and Ikem in Isi-Uzo Local Government Area, Amagunze in Eziagu Local Government Area, all in Enugu State. The *Odabaru* music is purely an instrumental music ensemble and generally well received by the entire Eha-Amufu community. The reason why it is played and enjoyed by a large section of the community is because no ritual is connected with it.

### **Organization of the Music Ensemble**

In Igbo setting, the organization of any musical group varies from one community to another. The variation could depend on the environment and musical type. Nzewi (1991) agrees with this by saying that the organizational structure as well as the procedure for establishing an Igbo music group varies in details from one community to another on every given music type and group.

The *Odabaru* ensemble of the *Ogbo-Egalu* is so well organized that both the financial aspect and the government of the ensemble are no problem. They appoint some of their members to direct the affairs of the group. For instance, the master instrumentalist is appointed the leader of the group. These people see to the smooth running of the ensemble. When the leader of the group is away for whatever reasons the assistance or anybody the leader appoints will deputize for him. This therefore mean that there is a mutual understanding between the officials and other members. The group have their patroness and patron known as “*Nne na Nna muru oha* (mother and father who gave birth to group). These people are responsible for the moral conduct and discipline in the ensemble. Their work is also to monitor other activities of the group. The members of the *Odabaru* ensemble understudy understand one another and always take instruction from the leader so as to achieve success.

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### **Membership and Rehearsals:**

In Eha-Amufu, most of the social groups are drawn from the same age or sex. Some groups are formed out of common interest. The *Ogbo-Egalu* members are youths of the same age and sex. The operative criterion for membership is age and sex. New members do not register with money, rather they present a bottle of illicit gin (kai-Kai) or a gallon of palm-wine and two kolanuts. As found in other societies, there are laid down rules and regulations guiding the group. These rules and regulations are made known to the members on the day of admission. The rules state that all members must attend their meeting regularly and on time.

The *Ogbo-Egalu* instrumental music ensemble normally have her meetings on the last *Orie* of every month. Any person of the age grade and sex who wants to join the group appears before them during one of their meetings. Lateness to and absence from rehearsals or meetings attracts a fine of one hundred naira (N100.00) only. Any member who disturbs during rehearsals is punished according to their laid down rules. The rules state that any member who steals or fights is suspended from the group for two months or is made to pay a fine of one thousand naira (N1,000) only or both depending on the offence committed. The rehearsals are usually in a walled compound or in a scheduled enclosure made from palm frond or mats (*Ulo-egwu* or *Oda egwu*). Members of the group learn and attain perfection in the techniques of playing the instruments of the ensemble by constant practice. Because the music of the ensemble is not written down, new members acquire the playing techniques of the instruments by imitation.

### **Performance Situation and Income**

The *Ogbo-Egalu* instrumental music ensemble perform during ceremonies and festivals on invitation. Before new members participate in any public performance, their respective abilities on the various instruments are certified by the older members. It is pertinent to mention that the ensemble is invited to perform on several occasions in and outside Eha-Amufu. There is a stipulated amount the group demands from a non-member who invites them to perform for him or her. The payment of this sum of money does not prevent the person who invited the group from entertaining them with food, meats and drinks.

During this group's performance the audience is free to watch their performance without paying anything or money. They react positively or negatively to the performance because there is not a wide boundary between the audience or performers unlike in the western performance where the audience and artists or performers are separated. The audience when enthralled can join in the performance. Some people even go as far as spraying the performers with money. To buttress this Mariam in Ogene

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(1993) in comparing Western and African audience concluded that the separation of the artist from the audience is not an African pattern.

Any organization that has no money in her purse or avenues of generating money cannot progress. This particular group generates money by team work, from fines on defaulting members, levies and performances. The ensemble also generates money from fees paid by other groups who learn *Odabaru* from them, donations from friends and well-wishers. All the incomes belong to the group. From these avenues they give themselves a festive party annually towards the end of the year.

### **Instrumentation**

According to Hornby (1998) instrumentation is an arrangement of music from several instruments. The *Odabaru* music ensemble employ five instruments of three classes of African musical instruments namely; membranophones, Aerophones and idiophones. Instruments of the ensemble include

1. **Membranophones**
  - *Oke Nkwa* (Male drum)
  - *Nne nkwa* (Female drum)
  
2. **Aerophones**
  - *Oke osu* (Male flute)
  - *Nne Osu* (Female flute)
  
3. **Idiophones**
  - *Oshasha* (Basket rattle)

Nzewi (1991) states that the Igbos categorize their musical instruments primarily according to the sounding materials or the technique of sound production. The *Odabaru* music is a typical example of this categorization. The drums and flutes used in the ensemble are differentiated from analogous to the differentiation of the sexes among humans, the sound or pitches produced, and size of the instruments.

### **OKE NKWA**

The *Oke nkwa* is small in size and it produces higher stronger , more piercing and penetrating pitches than those of other drums. It is played by the leader of the ensemble and the master instrumentalist.

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The *Oke nkwa* dictates the rhythm of the music, improvises and it is played by both hands. The master instrumentalist shows off and exhibits his virtuosity during performance. He plays the most complicating rhythmic patterns in the ensemble.

### ***NNE NKWA***

The *Nne nkwa* is large in size and produces low-pitched tones. It plays a steady or unchanging rhythmic patterns provided by the *Oke Nkwa*. The instrument also provides the basic pulse.

### ***OKE OSU***

This instrument is one of the most important instruments of the *Odabaru* Ensemble. It plays the melodic line the ensemble starts a performance with the *Oke nkwa* followed immediately by *Oke Osu*. The first flutist has the power to usher in prominent men and women, praise and give advice to audience. This instrument also directs the performances and comments on the happenings in the community in the community. The pitches or ranges produced by the *Oke Osu* depend on the techniques of over-blowing.

### ***NNE OSU***

The *Nne Osu* acts as an aid to the *Oke Osu*. It plays a regular rhythmic pattern in the ensemble.

### ***OSHASHA***

The *Oshasha* is a shaken Idiophone. The number of *Oshasha* used in the ensemble are two. They are used in the ensemble to enrich the density of the texture of the *Odabaru* music. The rhythms of the *oshasha* are constant and reoccur throughout the performance. All the musical instruments employed in the ensemble are selected with respect to the pitches and tone qualities which are combined to produce harmonious sound.

### **The Role of the *Odabaru* Music Ensemble in the Society**

The *Odabaru* music ensemble plays a vital role in Eha-Amufu community. Its rhythms and functions are understood by large number of members of the community. The *Odabaru* music gives aesthetic satisfaction to the audience during performances. These aesthetics are derived both from the dance movements and the instrumentation. The dancers express this through gestures and expression of the body; while the instrumentalists express their own by extemporization.

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During *Odabaru* music performance, attention is drawn to the ills of the society. For example, a way-ward girl or woman, thieves, and disobedient children are put in music. The reason for the exposure is to correct the anomaly. This however is imperative as Ibekwe (2009) states that among other activities that help to shape, mould and reform character, traditional music plays the greatest part. Iyogu (1987) reiterated this by saying that traditional music like other aspects of cultural education is capable of moulding the child's character. The *Odabaru* music does not only expose ills in the society, it encourages members to conform to the norms and ethics of the community. Miriam reaffirms this by saying that music enforces social institutions. Furthermore Ibekwe (2009) states that music is functional; richly imbued with societal ethics, norms and values.

The music also helps in educating the public on the happenings in the community. For example good and behavior worth of emulation from indigenes living in and outside the community are recognized and commended in the music. Besides this, other objectives of this group are to unite all the members of the community, entertain the public and grace special occasions. In fact, the theme of the music centres around events and matters of common interest and concern to the members of the community. This helps in the ennobling of the people's culture.

### **Conclusions**

The people of Eha-Amufu cherish their culture so much and this is consolidated by respecting their customs and traditions. However, western religion, education and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) changed so many things in Eha-Amufu especially the culture of the people so much that very few people take part in their music. This therefore affected the membership and sponsorship of the *Ogbo-Egalu*.

Though western culture influenced the culture of the people, it did not affect the choice of instruments and instrumentation in *Odabaru* music. The group is made up of people of the same age and sex. The music is performed for entertainment, social interaction, tribute to an individual, correction of ills in the society, recognition and commendation of good and behavior of indigenes in and outside of the community that are worthy of emulation.

The study on the *Odabaru* music, with particular reference to that of the *Ogbo-Egalu* brings to lime light some of the distinctive features of the music ensemble. Members of the group learn and play techniques of the instruments by imitation. This is because the rhythms of the music were not written down. It was discovered that the rhythms were very complex but it can be transcribed.

### ***Pristine*** **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

1. Leaders in the community should encourage the culture that is devoid of rituals by sponsorship.
2. The youths should be sensitized on the importance of the music in the society.
3. Music educators should carry research on the music of their localities, with particular reference to transcription and analysis.

These measures are aimed at motivating the youths to be involved in their culture especially music and to prevent it from extinction.

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