

The Igbo Concept Of Mother Musicianship



Mgba tuned drum row

Music is a 'woman', and intuitive creative management of life is more of a feminine attribute. Music is a communion, a social communion that nourishes spirituality, and manages socialisation during public events. These are some of the philosophical and concrete rationalizations that guided the indigenous categorization of an extraordinary performance-composer irrespective of gender or age as a mother musician as per indigenous terminological evidence in Africa. A composer gestates and gives birth to sonic phenomena.

Musical meaning has been discussed from the indigenous perspective as being based on the factors of musical sense, psychical tolerance and musical intention. The practice of performance-composition has also been identified as processing the realisation and approval of musical meaning as per context. Central to the philosophy of musical meaning as a society's conceptualization of creative genius are the creative personalities who interpret and extend the musical factors as well as the musical facts of a culture. Such specialists are sensitive to the socio-musical factors contingent on a musical context at the same time as they are the repositories of the theory of composition in a musical arts tradition. Socio-musical factors here categorize those non-musical circumstances of a music-making situation that inform the architecture of a performance-composition; while musical facts are the essential elements of creative configurations that furnish musical arts theory.

The concept of mother musicianship, where found, no doubt varies from one indigenous musical arts culture area to another, and will be defined according to how a society values, utilizes and regulates the musical arts as a cultural institution. Although reference will be made to concepts of musicianship in a few related culture areas, the main purpose here is to examine the concept in the Igbo context.

Qualities of mother musicianship

The Igbo mother musician must be cognizant of, and acknowledged in the organization and execution of the art of contextual composition. This definition hinges on four key terms: Cognizance, Acknowledgement, Organization and Execution in the musical management of life and events.

Cognizance

Cognizance defines the ability to formulate and communicate musical sense in a culture's medium of musical expression subject to the society's cultural sonic references and psychical tolerance. Such a performer is then a specialized musical artiste. The Igbo theory of practical musicianship recognizes the following levels of expertise that qualify categories of practitioners:

- *Onye egwu* for any artist who is competently engaged in any of the indigenous creative and performance arts *Onye isi egwu*, for a leader of a performing group.

When exceptional capability is being assessed, specifically descriptive metaphors are used to denote:

- *Onye nwe egwu* - a star, the 'owner', the embodiment of expertise in a particular musical arts type under consideration;

- *Di egwu* - the 'husband', maestro of a music or dance type;

- *Onye ji nkpu egwu* - the 'mystifying wizard', the ultimate reference in expertise and knowledge.

Much of the literature on African music and musicality tend to imply that everybody in African, south of the Sahara is a dancer and a musician; and that Africans, generally, are exceptionally rhythmic. Without intending to hold brief for all Africa, it is pertinent to observe that everybody with African genetic instincts has a latent capability to dance or play music, and has a secure sense of rhythm. These are cultural rather than automatic African biological phenomena. Experiences deriving from many years of teaching music in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria, reveal that an Igbo person could be as baffled by the configurations of Igbo music and dance rhythms as anybody from any other culture marooned in the Igbo music complexity. But such student-cases are usually Igbo students who are born and brought up in the contemporary urban

Igbo environment. Such an environment of upbringing does not expose them to the peculiar rhythms of the Igbo cultural activities. Their introduction to structured rhythmic activities starts with Western church hymn tunes, modern popular music and simple Western classical music that lack indigenous rhythmic sensitization of mind and body. As a result, they arrive at the University to start grappling with the realities of Igbo indigenous music and rhythm for the first time as performers. I discovered that apart from boasting Igbo nationality and language, I was dealing with foreigners to Igbo sense of rhythm. Some eventually achieve progress because of awakened genetic consciousness after a period of adult enculturation in the university. This is equally true of Yoruba, Efik and other music students from other Nigerian societies with similar backgrounds, as one cannot really talk of Igbo-specific rhythmic configurations. The patterns of deploying the body in ordinary activities of normal living inculcate the basic rhythmic instincts that become systematically structured into music and dance activities.

The phenomenon of African innate sense of rhythm as a specific cultural factor could be discussed as accruing from the distinctive patterns of movement naturally adopted for performing the habitual cultural activities of the indigenous life style that marks an African culture group.

Cultural rhythm

It is necessary to examine some cultural foundations for Igbo musical arts expressions. A child of, maybe, five years carries on her, or his, back a toddler of about one year. With her load she executes rhythmically organized steps and turns. At the same time she is gently jogging her/his body with its load, up and down in a different time-space motion. The exercise is expected to soothe a crying child to keep quite or maybe rocking a child to sleep. At other times the toddler clings to the back of the carrier without additional support while the carrier may be engaged in a dancing quiz-game that requires her to use her legs and hands in other intricate movements while the toddler is balanced and bobbed about on her [the carrier's] torso. Thus there are three rhythmically poly-linear, but coordinated applications of the body parts of the carrier: the legs, the torso, and the hands.

Igbo boys and girls carry pots, baskets, firewood etc. on the head in indigenous societies. From the age of four or five when a child starts being useful around the house, she begins to carry loads appropriate to her size. The technique of

carrying loads emphasizes balance and body symmetry. At the same time the style is intentionally an artistic-aesthetic exercise for children, although on rare occasions accidents may occur. The load is balanced on a soft pad on the head; and it is an artistic game to walk without holding the precious pot of water, for instance. To do this requires subtle adjustments of the parts of the body while 'walk-dancing' at a regular pace that could be faster than normal. The body is divided into four dimensions of coordinated but independent rhythmic planes: the legs, torso, hands and head. Even though the load should ordinarily be carried on the head supported with one or two hands, children prefer the game of keeping the hands off it, and balancing it with no other support than the rhythmic counterpoint of various parts of the body, the sight of which is quite supple and graceful.

When there are a number of children moving with loads on their heads it becomes a comparative game. If the load falls off by any fortuitous chance and breaks, you could cry to show that you are sorry, although that may not mitigate the scolding due to you when you arrive home with wet cheeks and a head-pad without load.

When cutting firewood, pounding, sweeping the compound, stamping mud for building a house etc., it is the same contrapuntal application and manipulation of multiple body rhythm. You do not have to sing unless you are in the mood. If you sing, it does not have to be a 'pounding' song or a 'sweeping' song. It could be a song from your dance group repertory, or a folk tale song, or any song selected from your entire culture's repertory, or a spontaneous original composition to express your mood. If you sing, it is not necessarily because it promotes the activity of pounding, or that you are culturally required to supply a melody to the rhythm of pounding. It would be a contemplative celebration at a psychological level while executing the mechanical motions of pounding, for instance, at a physically coordinated level.

During the Second World War when Igbo men, women and children were commandeered to provide either the manpower or the economy that would help Britain, the colonial masters, win their 'private' war, Igbo women were most enthusiastic about the win-the-war economic exploitation of their time and energy. There was a drive for palm nut-cracking activity involving the women. For this exercise, they were organized as work gangs, although each person had to work independently and contribute the fruits of her labour to the common pool.

Palm Kernel Song

Example 1a

Prisoners' Work (or Dance?) Song

Example 1b

Example 1a -Palm Kernel Song
/ 1b - Prisoners' Work

A propaganda song (Ex. 1a) was composed to promote, not necessarily the physical activity of cracking palm nut, rather, the psychological propaganda that they should deprive themselves in order that Britain should win the war. Although I was small at the time, we got involved, age notwithstanding, in the palm nut-cracking assignment. The so-called palm nut-cracking song, despite the appropriateness of the text, inhibited rather than promoted the physical activity. What is worse, it was in the character of a hymn tune, and could not be said to be an Igbo song, apart from the text. The text and melody of the song make the point:

Kpam! Kpam! Kpam! Kányi néti aku

(Kpam! Kpam! Kpam! We are cracking palm nuts)

Anyi néti nke anyi ga ele

(We are shelling so that we can sell)

Anyi etinugoli aku

(Even if we have shelled previously)

Anyi ga etiwanye ozo

(We will continue to contribute)

Ka'nyi welu dinu n'otu melie agha

(So that we will be united in order to win the war).

This is obviously a typical case of 'work song' that was introduced in the 1940's probably in the belief that the African cannot work without song. It was not

structured to the pulse and rhythm of the palm nut cracking routine, so it did not enhance the execution of the physical activity. It was, therefore, more useful for campaigns and for moving about in the house, or making clothes on a sewing machine.

Another 'typical' work song is that by the prisoners while cutting grass (Ex. 1b). In this instance the physical activity was structured to the song and its pulse and rhythm flow. But because it is not necessarily conceived to promote labour, it ensured that the prisoners spent more time dancing to the music, a healthy exercise, than in producing any impressive outcome from the manual labour. The grass-cutting motion occurs on the first beat of an eight-beat song cycle:

Onye suba achala onye suba

(Everybody cuts grass like every other person)

Onye akpona ibe ya onye ikoli

(Let nobody call his fellow a prisoner)

This 'typical' work song that has many versions, was probably intended to prompt the prisoners to cut grass to rhythm. The song is as old as the modern prisons in Igbo society, and is exclusive to prisoners although the Nigerian police band waxed a highlife dance music derivation of it.

The incidence of music in labour activities has so far been categorized as work music/song in ethnomusicological literature. Cultural terminologies as well as explanations by the music owners and users, at least in the culture area used as the model for this study, do not support such assumptions and classification. Hence there is the need to re-examine the concept of work music/song as well as the nature and utilitarian intentions of the corpus of indigenous music hitherto categorized as work music. There are music types associated with organized trade or labour groups. Such associational music may or may not be featured during the process and mechanics of production distinguishing a trade or labour specialisation. Rather, the music identifies the trade group or labour team as a social and common interest group (*otu*) without necessarily being of productive or structural significance if featured in labour situations. In other words the music is not necessarily 'action or labour-facilitating music' suited to the physical motions of production. It could be a mood music background affective at the psychological

level of inspiration or anguish. It becomes inspirational music or song of suffering in its social or musical classification. The music corpus so far classified as work music/songs are distinctive of occupational groups/teams, and are, therefore associational, *otu*, music categories that give the groups/teams social identity. They are used and enjoyed primarily in celebrative or recreational contexts or otherwise as inspirational music incidental to other in-group interactions that could include the activities of production. The rhythm and texture of the music are not necessarily appropriate to the characteristic motions of labour that are, therefore, of little relevance in the conception, creation and making of the music. Work music, implying music conceived to enable the execution of the physical process of an activity, would thus seem to be a misperception of the social intentions as well as the utilitarian and creative dynamics of such music types. In fact some music items incidental to work situations, and which are thus classified as work music/songs, are music types conceived, created and performed for other social-cultural contexts. It is more appropriate to categorize trade/associational music, *egwu otu*, and inspirational music, which as such could be incidental to the labour activities of the owners and users of the music. Further sub-classifications would specify hunters' music, farmers' music, fishermen's music, etc.

It is possible that other cultures may have what could be analyzed as music intended to aid manual labour. The Igbo, traditionally, have music while they work and not necessarily work music. A woman could sing the same song while she is cutting vegetables, pounding food, fetching water, washing dresses or dishes, breast-feeding a baby etc. The tune could be original or could be a popular ballad. The rhythms of pounding, sweeping, mud-stamping, grinding, etc., are work rhythms, often intrinsically irregular and not specifically structured to musical rhythms. An inspired person could superimpose a tune on work-rhythms to suit the mood or feelings in the same way as a person could sing while taking a bath without categorizing the music as bath music.

The few examples discussed distinguish cultural rhythm from 'work' music, and illustrate what I mean by the fundamental patterns of rhythmic cognition needed to accomplish the cultural normal activities of the Igbo life style. In other words the character of Igbo work-rhythms inform the Igbo rhythm sensibility, which is not exclusively musical, and may exhibit cultural peculiarity. In a music-making and dancing situation every Igbo person has the cultural sensitization to coordinate multi-dimensional body rhythms, which Kauffman (1980:402) has

alluded to, when interpreting a given action-rhythm intention of a style/type of music. Given a chance, he could also perform, with sustained regularity, basic rhythmic patterns on a music instrument. These are extensions of innate sense of motion, and additionally, an acquired cultural sense of rhythm or cultural motor behaviour, which are notionally musical without necessarily being a phenomenon exclusive to music making. This capability cannot, and should not, be interpreted to mean that everybody is a competent dancer or a musician. In other words, every Igbo, by virtue of acquiring Igbo cultural rhythm, can demonstrate the fundamental rhythm-sense ordinarily expected of what is peculiarly Igbo in music and dance. But to become what could be categorized as a competent Igbo dancer or musician requires a level of expertise much beyond the common advantages of cultural rhythm.

Cross-cultural references

Every human person is naturally, even if not culturally, musical. Some writers contend, albeit vaguely, that every African is a musician, while others are a bit more cautious. Thus Alakija (1993) proposes that every African is gifted to be a composer. A logical extension of the proposal would make everybody in the world a possibly, gifted composer by virtue of being a notionally musical human. Messenger (1958:22) credits the Anang culture group of Cross River State in Nigeria, who are ethnic neighbours of the Igbo, with claiming that 'every one can dance and sing well'. In another publication Messenger also reports that the Anang

... assume that under ordinary circumstances any person can learn to sing, dance act, weave, carve, play musical instruments, and recite folklore in a manner considered exceptional by unbiased Western aestheticians, and Anang culture rewards in numerous ways the acquisition of these abilities (Messenger 1973: 125)

Messenger's report can be accepted only on the basis of discussing standard capabilities although there are problems with his view that the assessment of 'a manner considered exceptional' has to be from the perspective of 'unbiased Western aestheticians'. He poses the paradoxical situation in which 'culture rewards in numerous ways the acquisition of these [artistic] abilities' in a culture where everybody is able and free to achieve 'exceptional' artistic excellence.

I conducted fieldwork in Anang in 1967, and I learned from observations and

interviews in Abak that everyone can no longer dance and sing well probably for reasons of disabled cultural upbringing. I was specifically directed to meet three musicians the villagers recommended highly. One of them, Umo, satisfied the concept of a mother musician as already discussed in this study. He was an expert performer on the xylophone. He was an exceptional performer on *Ekong* music. And he performed on the row of open-ended tuned membrane drums, four in a row, used in *Ekpo* music. He was accompanied by a group of young percussionists whom he conducted with body signs as well as musical cues. The percussionists played open-ended membrane drums hung on poles, two or three players to one drum, each playing with two drums sticks, and all combining to produce a barrage of mono-toned patterns. In addition to conducting the ensemble, Umo directed, through his tuned drums, the dance-drama acts of every *ekpo* spirit manifest artist. The spirit manifest, mis-perceptually termed masquerades, acted their danced-drama anecdotes in turns, one after the other. Umo was open to spontaneous criticism by the cultural audience, but was such a confident artist that he did not mind bluffing occasionally.

During a second field trip to Anang in 1967, I took along a class of music students from the Music Department of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, to meet Umo and observe him direct the *ekpo* danced-drama from his music stand. Umo was so happy at seeing us that he drank himself tipsy before the performance. He was so tipsy that he got careless and was not marshalling the actions of the spirit manifests properly. The traditional ruler of the community who was in our company cautioned him. But Umo retorted by challenging the traditional ruler, or any other person present who felt competent, to come and take over. Nobody felt up to taking over, and I doubt that anybody present could have because *ekong* is a specialist instrumental music style. But the spirit manifest actors were most disappointed with Umo as he made them limp through their acts. If they made signs of disapproval Umo would merely snicker. An anticlimax was reached when the principal actor, *eka ekpo*, (mother *ekpo*) who usually climaxes and concludes a performance session, came out and had to protest vigorously, in mime, against the discomfiture Umo was occasioning the masked actors. The mother *ekpo* was so offended that, to the disappointment of all of us, she merely took a turn of dance-mime to indicate her skill, and then stalked back in anger into the *ekpo* grove from where each actor emerged.

Umo took all the criticisms unruffled. But later he confided that they could

reprimand him but would not really dislodge him because there was no one good enough to play and communicate as effectively with the actors. He apologized for having taken more wine than he ought to, before a show. But the incident does demonstrate that even though everybody is capably musical in Anang society, not everybody does achieve exceptional musical ability required of a mother. It further makes points about standards of cultural artistic expression, criticism and aesthetic.

Nketia (1954: 39) points out that the art of a mother drummer role is inheritable and learned in the Akan society of Ghana, and that it is believed a person could be a born drummer. Gadzekpo (1952: 621), reports about the Ewe of Ghana that inheritance is a factor, but adds that a person from a non-drumming family could also learn and master the art of drumming. In effect, the ability to become a mother drummer in both Ghanaian societies could be ascribed or achieved. Either way it has to be developed through a process of learning and dedicated practice. Blacking states, concerning the Venda, South Africa that musical ability is not a matter of special talent, rather a matter of opportunity and encouragement. From his various published accounts about Venda music and cultural practices, we learn that specialists such as the mother drummer, *matsige*, are recognized, and that his presence in a district inspires young admirers to practice to attain his level of expertise. In other circumstances, especially with respect to dancing ability, Blacking informs that exceptional capability could be suggested to individuals from the ruling class who thereby 'perform better because they have devoted more time and energy to it' (Blacking 1965; 1976).

Merriam (1964: 68) reports that the Basongye of the Congo recognise that some individuals lack musical abilities for reasons associated with heritage. So there is a concept of a 'gifted' musician 'whose talents come through inheritance'. Basden (1921: 120) notes about the Igbo that talent is recognized and that musicians 'are treated with great respect'.

When at the age of nine I spent one year in my mother's community in Nnewi, Igboland, attending school, I belonged to a children's music (mask and dance) group in the community. My grandmother, with whom I lived, was a devout Christian convert with strict Christian attitudes that condemned indigenous musical arts practices, she could not effectively prevent me from playing with my mates. So we struck a compromise that restrained me from 'entering the children's mask' (*ibu mmanwu*) myself. It was not every child in the community

that belonged to the popular children's masking practice type called *nwabuja*. But many would troop after us whenever we performed along the streets and in the playgrounds. Also during the early years of my life, which I spent in the southern Igbo towns with my father, we still managed to evade surveillance and form children's musical arts groups. It was only a few of the children in the community around where we lived that participated. Within the group we made fun of those who could neither play nor dance well. And they never took such ridicules without trying to save face by provoking scuffles that often ended our performances.

In effect then, by virtue of acquired cultural rhythm, every Igbo should be capable of interpreting fundamental Igbo dance rhythms, and play music. When it is a matter of singing and playing simple tunes with syncopations, probably anybody could play. But when it comes to the level of ability to spontaneously compose extensions of melodies or melorhythms to interpret a context, experts emerge from a group of average practitioners because, in the first instance, they are gifted, and have also applied their faculties to acquiring specialist knowledge through practice. The general observation that so far credits every African with a capability to participate in the music and dance of her/his community is therefore informed by cultural factors other than automatic African musicality. But the fact that there are knowledgeable experts within a generality of participants commands probing beyond the cultural fundamentals to consider the factors of the developed artistic acumen, *agugu isi*. The acumen, and its development according to cultural norms, accrues exceptional knowledgeable in any aspect of musical arts specialisation.

Acknowledgement

Public acknowledgement of competence validates general cognizance of a culture's standards creativity and performance. This presupposes an audience that is conversant with, and critical of the ramifications of musical sense in a culture. Acknowledgement has two aspects: the social personality of the musician, and the artistic quality or suitability of a performance informed by the markers of style and content.

Social aspect

The musician must be seen as a person in society. The society assesses a person primarily on the basis of social personality and the circumstances of human achievement and lifestyle. In some societies musicians tend to exhibit peculiar,

often ascribed, behavioural traits, and are consequently classified as a social category, especially highly stratified societies.

Ames and King (1971) observe in the stratified socio-political system of the Hausa of Nigeria that musicians are treated as a class. Within that class, musicians further distinguish themselves according to classes. Ames (1973) further indicates that the Hausa have no single generic word for the various categories of musicians. In the categories listed by Ames and King, the Hausa have *marok'an saarakuna*, for instance, as praise musicians attached to patrons. To this category belongs 'anybody who acclaims another, whether solicited or not, in the hope of obtaining reward as a means of livelihood'. But they could earn additional income during naming and marriage ceremonies. They classified the range of Hausa musicians into:

- Court musicians and acclaimers with official status in courts;
- Performers tied to distinct class of patrons like farmers;
- Hunters and blacksmiths but who have no titles;
- Free lancers and semi-professionals and non-professionals who are not considered by themselves or their audience to be *marak'a* (Ames and King 1971).

Here, therefore, we find musicians being acknowledged on the basis of their social attributes in a class society, and not on the basis of their musical arts ability. Thus a Hausa musician is born into a class and recognized as such, irrespective of his level of expertise.

Ames' (1973) view is that the Hausa musician is a 'social specialist' as well as a professional in the sense that his social reference is as a musician, and he earns his living through making music as a trade. Within the class there is a distinction between a performer with ordinary technical skill and one with originality, inventiveness, and the ability to improve. According to Ames these qualities are assessed by how the music affects the audience. There is, therefore, recognition of outstanding musicians. We also find that although the Hausa may admire the art of a musician, he has little respect for a musician, socially. It could be deduced from these accounts that the Hausa musician of any classification or categorization has no direct organisational responsibility for the way an event for which he performs is enacted. His music also appears to be peripheral to its social

context.

Merriam (1973: 257) argues that the musician is a 'specialist' in whatever culture he is found, and further qualifies his use of the term as 'economic specialist'. His qualification applies to the Hausa example as perceived by Ames, and also the Basongye. In the indigenous Igbo society the musician is not an 'economic specialist' unless we could regard a university professor in Economics who gets an allowance for playing the organ during Sunday services in his parish church as an economic specialist. Merriam further argues that 'the "true" specialist is a social specialist; he must be acknowledged as a musician by the members of the society of which he is a part' (Merriam 1964: 125), and that the ultimate criterion for professionalism hinges on this. In the Igbo society the ultimate criterion for musicianhip hinges only partly on social acknowledgement.

Fances Bebey (1975) cautions that it would be a mistake to assume that all Africans are necessarily musicians, in a brief study of a class of professional musicians fairly well distributed over the northern areas of West Africa and generally identified as 'griots'. Griots have local names in various West African societies where they are found. In Gambia they are known as the *jali* (Knight 1974). Griots are found in the Fali of Guinea and the Bambara of Mali (Gorer 1949). They belong to a menial social class, and the accounts about them indicate that they are not buried in the ground so that their corpses would not desecrate it. They were rather buried in hollow tree-trunks so that their bodies would not bring a curse such as barrenness of the earth. The griots were indigenously treated as the lowest group in the class or social hierarchy of their various class societies. And from all accounts they apparently did everything to exploit their derogated status to economic advantage. On the other hand, according to Bebey's account, they are feared because as genealogy singers and satiric minstrels, they ferret out many social secrets: 'They know everything that is going on and ... can recall events that are no longer within living memory' (Bebey 1975: 24). They are treated with 'contempt' because of their interaction traits that include insulting a patron who did not reward them sufficiently for praise. At the same time

... the virtuoso of the griot command universal admiration. This virtuosity is the culmination of long years of study and hard work (Bebey 1975: 24). [Griots] are extraordinary musicians with outstanding talent who play an extremely important role in their respective societies. Their knowledge of the customs of the people and courtly life in all countries where they exercise their art gives them definite

advantages; for the whole life of the people, its monarch, and ministers, is preserved intact in the infallible memory of the griots (27-8).

As such the griots could be argued as evoking ambivalent social acknowledgement: derogated and feared, lowly but powerful, socially-politically indispensable but discriminated. Gorer (1949) reports that they could be very rich, and exercise great influence over the life and activities of those whom they serve. The griots' model presents a paradoxical situation where a group in a society is respected and admired as knowledgeable, full time professional musicians, but is, at the same time, held in low esteem because of the social status ascribed to them. Bebey also infers that they are extreme individualists; a self centred and self-seeking group whose music is not necessarily conceived as an indispensable factor in social institutions other than articulating social classes. Their music, it would seem, is a luxury in the art of living. A griot plays for what he could get, and uses the art to insult for what he is not given.

Mvet players of southern Cameroon and Gabon are itinerant professional entertainers like the griots, but they do not ply their trade on the same terms. *Mvet* players use the harp either to accompany mythical tales, and are highly regarded by their audiences (Bebey 1975). What the *Mvet* players have in common with the griot is that their music is in the music-event category, that is, for social entertainment (Nzewi 1977).

In some societies that are organised as monarchies there are musician-families, many of which are attached to the court, and are maintained as professionals by the ruler. Nketia's (1954: 40-1) report recommends that the Akan court drummers belong to this category, although the situation has been changing, and they are no longer content to be solely dependent on the courts. He distinguishes between mother drummers and secondary drummers. The former 'conducts' the performance of the whole orchestra. The secondary drummer requires just enough expertise to provide persistent, accompanying 'contrasting' themes, or those themes that underline the basic beats, or provide the ground bass for the music. The mother drummers are those that give the music its fullness, and quite often its distinctive character. A drummer is required to know his art as well as the duties required of him, including the 'conventions and routines of dances and matters of procedure' (*ibid* . : 36). Among the Yoruba of Nigeria there are also drum families some of whom are attached to the courts as in the example of the Timi of Ede's court.

Social acknowledgement is, as such, not necessarily synonymous with social respect in the indigenous African reckoning of specialist musicianship. The specialist or subsistence professional musician could be accorded recognition on the merits of artistic expertise without attracting much social prestige thereby. There would, therefore, be a tendency for such musicians not to be too particular about personal integrity except probably in the case of court drummers, for instance, where lack of integrity could affect the image of the ruler or the conduct of court events. Some societies have terminologies with which to recognise musicians as a distinctive group of specialists whose social status is primarily dependent on other social factors, such as the ascribed class of birth that is not necessarily informed or determined by their skill or specialization as musicians. They could be seen as trade-professionals in a sense that would not automatically implicate artistic expertise.

Proficient musical arts practitioners in the Igbo society enjoy the same status and opportunities, by right of birth and extra-musical achievements, as every other member of the society. They could achieve any height in the social hierarchy, and perform without any compelling social ascriptions. The specialist musical arts practitioner performs in order to avail the society of the exceptional skill acquired, and is compensated with appropriate societal acknowledgement. Such extraordinary attainment accrues the musical arts specialist additional social distinctions. When she is performing within her society she is not necessarily paid for her artistic expertise. But her music group could be engaged on a customary token fee, to make special performance-appearances. A musician is required to have a normal subsistence occupation. She could then charge fees for engagements on the principle of making up for the workdays lost in fulfilling a privately contracted musical arts engagement. She is acknowledged as a person in society first on the basis of what she does for a living apart from playing music; and also on her social integrity: how she conforms to the norms of behaviour and discipline of her society without reference to the additional specialization or stature as a musician. The special factor of being a musician becomes additional recommendation that boosts rather than detracts from extra-musically attained social stature. And her music making is conceived and programmed as an input factor in the organisation and enactment of Igbo social systems and institutions.

Artistic aspect

With reference to artistic proficiency, expertise has been argued as an innate

capability that is exceptionally developed, and not an automatic endowment by the advantage of being born into an Igbo culture. The debate on whether there is such a phenomenon as talent as opposed to environment, opportunity, and encouragement, remains unresolved, and continues to engage the attention of scholars. I argue that normative cognitive skill in the musical arts is the birth potentiality of everybody in the society, and could be developed through practical engagement during in-cultural upbringing. Whereas not everybody is an expert musical arts performer, everybody could be a cognitive critical audience. Hence Blacking (1976: 46) argues about the Venda: 'Judgement is based on the performer's display of technical brilliance and originality, and the vigour and confidence of his execution'. The society has criteria for evaluating standards of musical arts creativity and criticism. In such a situation the gifted musician has freedom to create within such ethnic criteria while her audience respects the creative freedom but checks any tendency towards unrestrained individualism. At other times the structure and expectations of the social context in which the musical arts is operational, and/or the musical arts style itself, model and control the scope of creative freedom in certain musical arts types.

Specialization in instrumental performance commands instruments that demand special skills. These have been referred to in the literature as master (mother) instruments. Although the opportunity and ability to become proficient on such instruments is the advantage of a few in the community, everybody in the society by reason of exposure or cultural assimilation could develop the cognitive intellect to evaluate the standard of performances on the instruments. So that while a few are skilful in the art of specialized musical arts, recognition of mother status proves the musical perspicacity of the audience. In the final analyses, therefore, it is the audience that acknowledges the exceptional musical genius of a few in the community who have achieved extraordinary expertise - both technical and creative - that mark specialist musicians and dancers and dramatists. The principle of rating expertise based on acknowledgement of skill warrants that an Igbo celebrant who is organising a prestigious event could ignore practitioners in own patrilineage or community, and search farther afield to engage practitioners reputed for outstanding merit in the particular musical arts type needed.

Organization

Cognizance and acknowledgement require further qualifications before the

attribution of expertise to a degree that would make an Igbo refer to an artist as 'attaining the ultimate degree of its essence' as different from 'leader of a music type'. Organization is taken into account. The importance of organization is stressed because it is in the contextual organization of the musical arts production and presentation that musical meaning emerges and becomes validated. Organization here has two levels: the personal, and the event itself.

Personal organization

A knowledgeable musical arts expert is conscious of her esteem in the Igbo society where good reputation is assiduously built up in order to elevate one's social stature in any field of human endeavour. In such a comparative achievement milieu as marks the Igbo society every person strives to excel in any trade or artistic engagement, in order to emerge as the icon of achievement in a field of expertise. So, to achieve eminence is one thing, and to maintain it is another. If a person's social reputation drops to a low rating, the artistic reputation would not guarantee her continued top public acknowledgement. The Igbo would ask: 'Is he the indispensable that would prevent an event from taking place?' And recognition would pass on to a more responsible artist who may be less accomplished.

The leader of a music group is responsible for the organization and discipline of the group, and ensures a high standard of social and artistic reputation for the group. The type of licenses and peculiar social irresponsibility allowable to expert musicians in some other societies does not obtain in the Igbo society. Merriam (1964: 123-44) offers an extensive sampling based on the reports of many field researchers, on the social behaviour of musicians in various world societies. It would appear from the reports recorded in Merriam's book that the social regard accorded musicians within a society goes a long way towards determining how they organise themselves as social personalities in the society.

Event organization

The mother musician is the maker of a musical event, i.e., the stimulator of musical intention. The musician's ability to understand and interpret with cognitive insight a musical arts type instituted for an event and its observance in the Igbo society is probably more important, therefore, than her personal organization. The expert musician is here required not only to be knowledgeable about what makes musical meaning in a given context, but more so, to be knowledgeable about the structure and the customary procedure for the event in

which her music is involved, especially if it is an event-music (Nzewi, 1977). Mother instruments are more commonly found associated with specific events of high institutional hierarchy in the Igbo society. In such instances the musical arts serves as the frame of reference on which the scenario, as well as the interpretative scope of the event, depends for a satisfactory realisation. The mother musician has the task to coordinate the music in a manner that would underscore the event-mood, interpret the scenic activities, and generally promote the fulfilment of the objective of an event. She has, in addition, to be sensitive to the reactions of the actors and the audience in order to sustain action and interest. She has to compose and arrange at every event-occasion according to the structural eventualities of the particular occasion, as what transpires during every occasion of an event is a variant elaboration of the prescribed standard expectations typifying such an event. If she should fail to generate the mood as well as sustain the interest of the audience and actors, the event would not be a success and the event-musician would loose acclaim.

Thus, the role of the mother musician does not end with being a mother of her music (that is, making musical sense). Rather, it begins with that, and ends with applying the skill to capably transacting the meaning of the musical arts type in event context. It is especially in the context of being the organizer of the structural-contextual intentions of the music that the term mother musician has relevance and application in the Igbo society. A dextrous performer on a finger piano (*ubo aka*) could be acknowledged as an expert musician (*onye egwu*), but not as a mother musician, 'without whose role there would be no event' (*afugh n'ejegh*); that is to say, who is the maker and marker of an event.

Execution

In performing the role of the organizer of an event the mother musician's integrity in executing the musical arts type as a phenomenon that transcends its institutional use is highly cherished. Artistic integrity and sensitivity in execution, that is, performance-composition that communicates effectively the conceived musical meaning, complete the qualifications of a mother musician. She must possess talent as a matter of creative flair; skill as a matter of technical proficiency; and timing as a matter of social responsibility and dramatic or event sensitivity.

It is necessary to make a distinction between skilful conformity, and creative originality. That some good musicians die and live on through their musical

legacies, while others live acknowledged but die forgotten, is not necessarily because they were competent within a given tradition, but rather because within conformity they extended the artistic range of a tradition. Quite often this dimension of creative-flair in reckoning musicianship is explained at the level of supernatural endowment. Israel Anyahuru and Nwosu Anyahuru, both of whom are mother musicians in Ngwa, discussed their creative genius on the plane that: 'No man is a creator. Only the Supreme Deity is the creator, and man, the instrument through which He creates'. This is not an echo of Merriam's report about the Bala musicians of Zaire who 'do not admit to composition, holding rather that music comes from *Efile Mukulu* (God) who will it so at that instant'. Merriam interprets the explanation as an apparent absence of any 'purposeful intent to create something aesthetic' among the Bala (Merriam 1973: 179). By their dictum Israel and Nwosu attribute creative capability (talent) and inspiration to the supernatural, while the creative experience within a cultural matrix, is consciously pursued by them as mothers of music. Hence an Ngwa mother musician is always proud to claim that he is the author of a musical creation, or the stylistic adaptation of an extant number. However, the matter of creative originality is merely an extra distinction that marks a mother musician. It should also be borne in mind that the relative importance of a mother musician in a community could be determined by the artistic medium and style of creative expression, as well as the rating of the musical arts type in the community's criteria for hierarchical classification of its musical arts inventory.

Igbo mother musicianship

A mother musician is not, to begin with, necessarily a subsistence professional musician if we take cognizance of the arguments so far adduced from the Igbo situation vis-à-vis the reports about some other societies that have been cited. On the other hand, a professional musician could be, but is not always, a mother musician as in the Hausa example. A professional musician could be a skilled specialist recognized at the level of expertise and sentiment that includes talent. The professional musician who engages in music making or musical arts creativity as a matter of livelihood belongs to a social class in some societies. The Igbo mother musician is committed to music making and musical arts creativity as primarily a matter of artistic integrity, and also because she fulfils a specialized role that makes the musical arts a societal institution, and the practitioner a person of stature in the organization and explication of the other institutions in a society.

To have mother musicians in a society, therefore, the society needs to be cognizant of the concept of the musical arts as a contemplative art because of its intrinsic artistic-aesthetic aspirations, as well as a public utility that effectuates the functioning of other non-musical institutions. Compensations as well as distinctive social recognition accrue to those practitioners central to the fulfilment of such utilitarian intentions.

Mother musicianship is a social-cultural concept of the music-maker and music making as much as it defines creative-artistic expertise. This is the frame of reference in which the term is used in this study that models the Igbo society. The social and musicological portraits of five mother musicians with whom I studied will, it is hoped, bring into clear perspective, the Igbo concept of mother musicianship as well as the Igbo philosophy and theory of the musical arts as illustrative of the indigenous philosophy and epistemology that mark musical arts creativity and practice in Africa.

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