

DEVELOPMENT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF YORÙBÁ MUSIC-THEATRE FROM FOLK OPERA TO CONTEMPORARY OPERA



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Abstract

Opera as a form of performing arts is a genre of music and theatre which is categorised under Music-Theatre. Its antecedents among Yorùbá people include various traditional and cultural performances while the generic art form (opera) evolved with the development of modern society among the people in Nigeria. Evolution of Yorùbá folk opera has been widely established in literature but dearth of literature persists on the growth of contemporary opera among the Yorùbá people. Through literature review and ethnographic method, this paper reviewed the development of Yorùbá folk opera and established the growth of contemporary opera with their composers among the people. Findings showed two categories of opera; the unscored and the scored opera which are the folk opera and the contemporary modern opera with 3 and 8 composers respectively among the Yorùbá. It however concluded on the significance of Yorùbá opera which include: the preservation of Yorùbá culture, globalisation of Yorùbá artistic elements (music, drama, dance etc) and the advancement of the Yorùbá socio-cultural and socio-economic development which is a vital part of the African heritage for global development.

Keywords: Development, Significance, Opera, globalization. Socio-culture, Socio-economy.

Introduction

Opera as a generic Western art form found its way to the Yoruba people in Nigeria during the colonial period. Since then, the art form has expanded in contemporary modern day. However, prior introduction of Western opera,

cultural performances similar to the opera existed within the people's culture long before the introduction of the Western opera. Nuptial performance among women is performed with songs' dialogue, the ancient performance continued to grow with modifications as the society developed. In modern time, the performance involves the engagement of *Alaga iduro* and *Alaga ijoko* (two women who lead the performance during traditional wedding ceremonies) who lead the songs' dialogue with gesticulations, speeches, chorus and instrumental accompaniment as a form cultural practice. This reveals a form of operatic performance before Western opera surfaced. In addition, there are other musico-dramatic performances that exist within the Yoruba culture. These serve as antecedents to opera among the Yorubas, therefore, the idea of music-drama is not entirely new among the people.

Subsequently, Western influence brought the generic opera and became accepted, the foreign art form developed among the people in Nigeria as modern society advanced. Development of Yoruba opera began to grow in phases beginning with the folk opera before Nigeria's independence, thereafter, the era of higher institutional development established the scored opera. As Yoruba music expands in contemporary times, so do genres of music and indeed performances advance. The focus of this paper therefore, is the evolution of Yoruba opera and its significance. While Scholars have written extensively on the folk opera in Nigeria that developed during pre-independence among the Yorubas, there is dearth of literature about opera development beyond folk opera which developed during the post-independence. Therefore, the objectives of the paper include; to

- trace Yoruba music-theatre development from folk opera to contemporary opera (1940 to 2020)
- identify major Yoruba opera compositions and composers
- state the significance of Yoruba opera for global development

Antecedence of Modern Yoruba Music-theatre

Music as a phenomenon develops within various cultural practices in Africa. It is established as an integral part of the African culture, Nketia (1974), Ekweme (2008) among others. African ways of life breed the music and the music is best understood within the context of cultural practices that produce it. Music and indeed the other related art continues to enjoy growth as society

and culture develop. Development of Yoruba music according to Vidal (1977) falls into four periods namely; early period (c. 1500 A.D. – 1700 A.D.), middle period (1700 A.D – 1860 A.D.), late period (1860 A.D. – 1914 A.D.), modern period (1914 A.D., and after. In explaining musical development in each period, he revealed that the early period was described as the period of indigenisation and creation of traditional forms established by custom. Religious rituals dominated the scene with cries and recited poetry accompanied by bells. Communication through drums and simple aerophones was the practice. However, the middle period saw the evolution in the religious, political institutions, trade and social organisations that formed dynasties, empires and external trade with foreigners. Theatre form developed from the constant repetition of rituals with the functional use of music that developed entertainment while complexity in music set in and theatre became more complex as the religious, political and social systems expanded. Vidal stressed that cries and incantation gave way to chants and songs with more complex drumming which forbears the numerous percussion ensemble as we see today. These gave a general overview of the musical growth among the Yoruba people before the influence of foreign influences which came in the late and modern periods.

Different institutions within the society created music that were suitable for the activities carried out within them. For example, the marriage institution developed some music and performances for the celebration of marriage. Ajibade (2005) reveals the nuptial performance in Africa among the Yoruba people and some other ethnic groups, ‘the performance of the nuptial songs in Yoruba society is by the bride, her friends (Òré Ìyàwó), and the housewives of the groom’. While describing the form of performance, he emphasised that;

The performer of nuptial poetry is the bride accompanied by her friends, which takes place a day before leaving for the husband’s house. In reality, we can say that the bride is just one of the performers, because this nuptial poetry is a form of group performance during which the friends of the bride ricochet and also chant and sing.

It is an elaborate performance among women from both the bride and the groom’s family who sing in dialogue. The nuptial performance in

contemporary time takes a different structure from the ancient practice. Professional marriage managers called *Alaga iduro* and *Alaga ijoko* are hired who lead the song dialogue for both the bride and groom's family while the performance takes place in designated place as against the form of parade it took. The above represents several musico-dramatic performances, age-long practices among various sub-ethnic groups among the Yoruba people in different perspectives.

Development of Modern Music-Theatre / Opera among the Yoruba People before 1960

Numerous scholars have established the various musical and theatrical practices that developed in modern Yoruba society when the people had contact with Western culture during the colonial period. These literatures form sources of information on modern music-theatre among the Yoruba people. Musical development among the Yoruba people expanded as modern society emerged and intensified. The modern period among the Yoruba people according to Vidal (1977) began in 1914 and was marked by the 'Europeanisation' of various musical genres of the people, it brought the development of 'new music' Western acculturation resulted in various musical forms which include 'opera' in the modern emerging cities. Ogunbiyi (1981), while tracing the development of drama and theatre in Nigeria, and Omojola (1998) established various musical and theatrical performances that took place in Lagos which was a major centre of commercial activities among the Yoruba. These activities sprang from the influence of Western education, Church and social activities within the metropolis and grew along the existing ancient traditions and gradually spread as Western influence became more accepted among the people who adopted the Western culture with foreigners as well as the returnees from the trans-Atlantic unpleasant expedition. Vidal (1977) quoted Euba (1970) who described the shows in the early days as 'Annual entertainments' performed in the School-rooms of missionary Churches on raised platforms as theatrical forms and are the earliest forms and forerunners of today's modern music-drama, or "folk opera" - Vidal added.

In the 1940s, the folk opera developed as a result of Church activities among Africans who had some form of Western education and were influenced by the Church. Clark (1980), Ogunbiyi (1981), Adedeji & Ekwazi (1998) and

Vidal (2012) gave accounts of its development. Contributions from various artistes which included composers, playwrights, singers, dramatists and dancers gave the folk opera the form it took. Most of these artistes were primary products of Yoruba cultural traditional performances and later got Western influence through Western education and the mission Churches. Concisely, Adedeji & Ekwazi (1998) puts it that

...the Yoruba opera is a dramatic composition which combines the art of music, poetry and, dance. Its literature derives its essence from a combination of an aesthetic element and the principle of form. Its playwright and composers are products of two traditions: Yoruba indigenous culture and Western civilization, especially Christianity and Western education.

For example, Ogunde who pioneered the folk operatic movement established his natal in a family of traditionalist where drumming and dancing was a regular routine. Adedeji and Ekwazi reported it that ‘...it is drumming and drumming all day and night...’ he also affirmed that the experience created an impact in him...‘what I knew was drumming, dancing...’ He (Ogunde) subsequently confirmed that he learnt the organ from his Dad through rote learning. He stressed that,

Now my father too was an organist in our Church, So when I was young he taught me the simple notes – d:r:m:f:s:l:t:d:-, and so on, Then I became an organist myself, that was in the early thirties: 1930, 1931, 1932.

Artistes who practiced folk opera mostly took to formal teachers’ training which was a common educational training after secondary school in pre-independence Nigeria. Even though music was part of the curriculum in schools, professional music education was not offered in Nigeria at the time as those who studied music at higher institutions went outside the country. It must be noted therefore, that even though they had some form of music training, it was not in the standard of Western opera which ensured music literacy. Similarity can be drawn in Nigerian drama as documented by Ogunbiyi (1981) who implied that dramatic practices before independence was different from the practice in the independent year and after when English drama surfaced in Nigeria. ‘In discussing serious contemporary

Nigerian drama, the year 1960 is taken as a starting point - the year in which Wole Soyinka founded “The 1960 Masks”.’ However, 1944 marked the year the first folk opera was staged in Lagos, this was the beginning of what is known as the Nigerian professional theatre today.

Professional Training in Music-Theatre/Opera

As growing modern society kept spreading among the Yoruba people, Western culture gained more ground breeding elites. Music and drama in the similitude of Western performances continued to spread with practitioners and enthusiasts staging plays and concerts. Art music among Yoruba people therefore grew as indigenes who studied music, composed using local idioms as established by Omojola (1995), Adegbite (2001), Vidal (1993) Olaniyan (2001) and Ekwueme (2008) among others. In addition, English drama among Western educated Yoruba people who mainly occupy the South Western part of Nigeria also evolved as trained artistes featured local elements, culture and reenacted myths, legends and historical antecedents in their plays and performances for the growing modern society. Mokwunyei (2001) quoting Ogunbiyi (1981) on contemporary drama in Nigeria said ‘This class of Nigerians imported the Western European forms of concert and drama which were to constitute the framework of early Nigerian modern drama’.

Subsequently, establishing indigenous Universities in Nigeria with the drive to cater for the needs of the people further strengthened the development of trained personnel for modern opera among the Yoruba people. An example is the University of Ife now Obafemi Awolowo University with the motto ‘for learning and culture’, was established in 1962 which hosts the Institute of cultural studies from where Department of Music and Dramatic Arts emanated. First of such a University in Nigeria, although, is University of Nigeria, Nsukka with the motto, ‘restoring the dignity of man’, was established in 1960 and hosts the Department of Music as well as Dramatic Arts. Composers, playwrights, musicians, dramatists and theatre artistes in general were trained in various institutions in Nigeria who fostered the growth of music-theatres in general.

Training scholars and artistes with greater sense of African culture helped in raising dedicated personnel to fill the society with the African social and cultural vacuum that the new and foreign culture brought. While these

artistic expressions (music, dance and drama) are integrated in traditional African performances, they became separated in modern society especially in educational institutions as separate areas of study, therefore to a large extent, schooled musicians wrote music pieces with no input of dramatic or dance movement while educated dramatists wrote play concentrating on lines, movement and in some cases song texts with no or little input of scored music. Even though, there were scripts for plays featuring total theatre that incorporated music-dance-drama, there was next to nothing in opera or music-theatre (with libretto and complete music score). Intensified training raised more artistes with greater interest in music-theatre, experimenting with ideas while they studied and performed Western opera in schools. Omojola in an interview affirmed that operatic performances while he was at the University gave an impetus to opera and this was corroborated by Mokwunyei who identified Omojola as a constant and dedicated student who participated in operatic performances. Trained composers and performers thereafter took to opera composition and performance as opportunities beckoned, especially within Nigerian growing institutions. Furthermore, with the establishment of more institutions, trained personnel continued to develop and they fostered music-theatre generally and operatic performances when occasions demanded.

Yoruba Opera Compositions and Composers

Composition, even though is an area of specialisation in musical training, yet it is a natural endowment that emanates from creative instinct. Nzewi (2012) in a forum opined that Africans are generally natural composers who explore creativity without special training. He emphasised and experimented with modifications of simple rhythm as an act of composition that manifests naturally in Africans. This points to the natural instinct in the composition of opera among Yoruba people. Natural composers without formal training improvise opera, while composers with formal training also create opera. Opera composition with corresponding composers therefore falls into two categories, one, textual and improvised opera compositions, and libretto and scored opera compositions. Nigerian folk opera constitutes the first category while contemporary (scored) opera falls in the second. In the first half of the 18th century when primary and secondary Western education had taken root among the Yoruba people with the influence of colonial activities, sizable number of Yoruba people who obtained Western education were engaged in

office job, clerk, teaching, lay reader, catechists, interpreter and police among other jobs that require minimal level of literacy. Among these was Ogunde who was a teacher and later a police constable. Their engagements cut across different sectors within the growing modern societies within the Yoruba region.

More importantly, activities within various Churches and Schools called for compositions and performances (music, dance, drama etc). Talented individuals created various art forms for occasions as identified by Euba (1970). Subsequently, what established the folk opera was the activity of ‘The Church of the Lord’ at Ebute-Metta who requested Ogunde to compose music for her service of song in 1944. Ogunde who was a trained teacher and a police constable had acquired some knowledge and skills in music from his cultural background, school activities, Church and his father but not from a standardised Western point of view. Ogunde became a pioneering force as a composer of folk opera. Prior to Ogunde were composers who engaged with compositions of anthems, song and oratorio were influenced by Ogunde who added actions and dances into the compositions to establish the folk operas. Clark (1980), Adedeji and Ekwazi (1989), Vidal (2012), Omojola (1995), Raji-Oyelade, Olorunyomi & Duro-Ladipo (2008) identified these composers and some of their compositions.

Subsequent development (studies in higher institutions) evolved the second type of opera composition and raised a set of composers who were formally and professionally trained in Western music education. This raised opera composers through the growth of Nigerian art music. Bello (2014) classified Nigerian art music composers into four generations, among these are Yoruba opera composers. Opera composition of this category requires libretto (opera text showing the story, characters, plot and lines) as well as the music score (vocal and instrumental). This composition thrives more within the academic institutions in Nigeria, probably because of its affiliation with elitist culture unlike the Nigerian folk opera that appeals more to the local people and it is performed more in the larger society than within the academic environment which seldom witnessed the performances.

Despite the versatility of Nigerian opera, Abe (2021) noted the dearth of opera compositions and composers among Nigerian art music. Yoruba opera

compositions in this category with their composers are noted by Omojola (1995), Ekwueme (2008) and Abe (2021). Below are some compositions and major opera composers among the Yoruba people.

Table 1.1. Title of Yoruba operas and composers

Opera Composition	Composer	Year of Composition	Category of Opera
The Garden of Eden and the Throne of God	Hubert Ogunde	1944	Folk Opera
Africa and the God	Hubert Ogunde	1944	Folk Opera
Nebuchadnezer's Reign and Belshazzar's Feast	Hubert Ogunde		Folk Opera
Worse than crime	Hubert Ogunde	1945	Folk Opera
Tiger's Empire	Hubert Ogunde	1946	Folk Opera
Palmwine Drinkard	Kola Ogunmola		Folk Opera
Oba Koso	Duro Ladiipo		Folk Opera
A night of Miracle	Ayo Bankole		Contemporary Scored Opera
Odyssey of an Innocent	Bode Omojola	1994	Contemporary Scored Opera
Moremi	Bode Omojola	2014	Contemporary Scored Opera
Irin ajo (Odyssey of a dream)	Bode Omojola	2018	Contemporary Scored Opera
The sailors	Sam Amusan		Contemporary Scored Opera
The gods have spoken	Taiye Adeola	2012	Contemporary Scored Opera
Wanted	Taiye Adeola	2019	Contemporary Scored Opera
Ife lagba	Christopher Omotoso	2001	Contemporary Scored Opera
Efunsetan	Christopher Omotoso	2001	Contemporary Scored Opera
Triumph of Destiny	Christopher Omotoso	2018	Contemporary Scored Opera
Dawn of new era	Debo Akinwumi	2001	Contemporary Scored Opera
Campus life	Debo Akinwumi	2001	Contemporary Scored Opera

Tani mola	David Bolaji	2010	Contemporary Scored Opera
Campus life	David Bolaji	2016	Contemporary Scored Opera
Omo agbe	Ayo Oluranti	2022	Contemporary Scored Opera

Table 1.1 Showing Yoruba opera compositions, composers, year and category of opera

Yorùbá opera and global significance

Music is an intangible and valuable product similar to the physical or concrete produce by other sectors of society. While some tangible products fill the physical need of man, music as an intangible substance, it occupies and satisfies the psychological and spiritual need of man. Opera which is an eclectic form of art feeds man with natural as well as socio-cultural appetite through the sonic and the visual senses. Songs, musical sounds and sound effects that are presented along actions and movements with occasional speech and rhythmic as well as dances combine as a holistic art form to provide man with affective gratification. Joy, pleasure, a sense of satisfaction, pride, courage, morality, virtue and more are embedded in opera for significant humanity. The Yoruba opera therefore apart from the general humanistic value transmitted, projects the African essence from the Yoruba worldview to the global community. An example is ‘The Gods Have Spoken’ by Taiye Adeola which projects the Yoruba belief in the Supreme Being (the god) over the affairs of men and the sense of judgement to the mischievousness and tyranny of man. The natural phenomena of various human as well as socio-cultural expressions in the various art forms combined in Yoruba opera are endearing.

Part of the elements in the opera that have shaped the world are great choruses, aria, and recitative as well as instrumental pieces written for opera. A chorus of similar magnitude is found in the oratorio, Handel’s Messiah – ‘Hallelujah chorus’ which has enjoyed cross-continental translations in many languages of the world including Yoruba, and has appeared in various global performances. Many musical elements of the world’s famous operas are notable and bare standard and classic vocal dexterity. Some arias, duets, choruses and instrumental pieces in operas have stood out as unique pieces

of heritage and human endeavor. Roberts (2023) speaking on famous opera songs and arias emphasised that ‘opera is home to some of music history’s most hummable tunes...’ he continued, ‘opera has become our popular culture landscape, its catches melodies and hummable choruses taking the genre far beyond the hallowed halls of the opera house’. Arias, duets, choruses etc from Yoruba operas are significant parts of human heritage from the people’s endeavours. Aria like ‘Orisa’ in Adeola’s ‘The Gods Have Spoken’ and chorus such as ‘Awa n sure’ in ‘Odyssey of a Dream’ by Bode Omojola are great songs from Yoruba operas which have added significantly to global heritage.

Opera as an art form showcases a wide range of the culture of a people. Various European operas such as ‘Marriage of Figaro’ are mirrors of German culture starting with the language, names, songs, dances and many expressions within the opera. Culture which is the way of life is widely expressed in operatic works. Cultural norms, belief systems, nuances of various degrees, values, procedures which are represented in Yoruba operas are for the preservation, transmission, communication and establishment of the culture of the Yorubas in a world that is eroding valuable African culture. In addition, creative intelligence in historical as well as projection for future development are cultural antecedents and subsequent representations as expressed by both Omojola and Adeola in their operas.

Bamidele (2000) in his submission on the artiste and his position in society, concluded that artistes are prophets, teachers, and connoisseurs of value and moral ethics within a society. They foretell, instruct, and judge morality and the value system of a society among other duties. Subject in the theme in Omojola’s ‘Odyssey of an innocent’ is the effect of ‘japa’ movement that became widespread in the second decade of Nigeria’s 21st century. As an artiste, he had foreseen and forewarned the people through the medium of his art – opera. Multi-dimensional artistic expression in opera provides various ways to carry out the artistic duties, songs, speeches, actions, and dances are all means of expression that corroborate each other to appeal to the moral and value senses of the audience and society at large.

Yoruba opera from its early days had been a commodity for global consumption. As artistic product, it is not only useful for the local audience,

but its global significance can be seen when Ogunde took his folk operas beyond the Yoruba community within Nigeria and outside, into West African countries. Clark (1980) as well as Adedeji and Ekwazi (1998) recorded the success of his memorable tours in West Africa in 1948 and 1949 respectively. More importantly, his overseas exploration was noted by Ugolo (2014) when he represented Nigeria at the World Festival of Culture. Duro Ladipo equally took the Yoruba arts as artistic products to Germany in 1964 and later in 1965 to Britain and some other European nations as reported by Raji-Oyelade et al. (2008) While music and drama are good artistic commodities that can be showcased as artistic performances, opera provides the opportunity for a variety of arts and therefore will sufficiently and adequately represent all artistic expressions holistically. In recent time, Omojola has been performing Yoruba operas at the United States of America. The artistic products imbedded in Yoruba opera is significant for artistic expression for consumption on the global space.

In addition, Yoruba opera has been used as course materials in the study of African music, theatre as well as a mirror of social and cultural existence among the people. This is part of the emphasis of some of the opera composers, Omojola (2019) as well as Adeola (2010) during interview emphasised this in their efforts as music instructors at Mt. Holyoke College and five College Consortium in the United States of America and at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. In this wise, the opera serves as teaching aids to students, a phenomenon, and consumable as body of knowledge.

Finally, Yoruba opera is highly significant as commercial product used for economic gain. In situations where audience paid to watch opera performance as in the case of Ogunde's 'The Garden of Eden and the Throne of God' among others performed to paying audience, it becomes lucrative venture. Also, most of the opera performances within the institutions attracted gate proceeds. The performance of 'The Gods have Spoken' at the University of Ilorin as well as other performances from other institutions had tickets for audience admission. As a highly creative venture, opera promises mental refreshment and emotional satisfaction which can provide financial reward to the producers and performers.

Conclusion

Yoruba opera as an artistic work occupies a unique place in Africa and the entire world. It shows the ingenuity of the Yoruba people with significant creative intelligence and sustainable advancement. This work of art continues to expand in the hands of individuals for the promotion of aesthetics, culture, education, entertainment, health and socio-cultural engineering. It has stood the test of time and it remains a distinctive innovation that is useful for the creation and improvement of an enduring and developed society of our dream. It is therefore a necessity that this genre of art be taken beyond individuals' efforts to become a general heritage and project. This will go a long way in building a lofty communal and national legacy for the Yoruba people and the Nigerian nation as well as Africa. It will further widen the economic scope and through a planned curriculum inculcating Yoruba opera, morals, education and socio-cultural development will be strengthened to build better citizens and society.

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THE EXPLORATION OF TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS IN NIGERIAN TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS



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Abstract

This study examined technological innovation in the area of traditional musical instruments in Nigeria. Specifically, traditional musical instruments and technological innovation adopted in Nigeria music Industry were examined and analyzed the influence technological innovation on traditional musical instruments in Nigeria. Scoping review method was adopted to select research studies on Nigeria's traditional musical instruments that maintain their traditional values, in a contemporary way. Electronic sources were obtained from database Scopus, Science Direct, Google Scholar, and Research Gate. Each database was searched using few terms; technological innovation, traditional musical instruments, augmented musical instruments, robotic, and preservation. The studies selected for this study were analysed through content analysis. Finding revealed three major concepts of innovation among the past researches and the first is the lowest cost so far and is the application tools with interactive interface. Next to that, is the replicated instrument, which replaced real musical instruments with other objects that are lighter, cheaper and portable with a shape that might be almost the same as the real instrument. The last concept is the use of the real instrument undergoes some modification to make it played automatically without real performers and this will help in the form of exhibits or performing. This study concluded that using technological innovation like augmented reality application and gamelan simulation with leap motion control can increase public interest toward traditional musical instruments. This study therefore recommended that more technological innovation on Nigeria