

FUNCTION OF MUSIC IN ÒSÀRÀ FESTIVAL IN ILÉ-IFÈ



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Abstract

This study examines the functions of music in Òsàrà Festival in Ile-Ife. It highlights the various functions within the festival such as ‘announcement’, ‘homage’, ‘didacticism’, ‘worship’, ‘entertainment’, ‘request’, ‘eulogy’, ‘evocative and invocative’. The study also showcases the evolutionary stages of the festival, as well as its sustenance for artistic and cultural development among the Yoruba. Both primary and secondary sources of data collection were employed in this study. The primary source comprised participant observation method where audio and video recordings were taken. Interviews were conducted with purposively selected individuals. These include the *Oba Olòsàrà* of *Ile-Ife* (the chief priest in charge of Òsàrà shrine), Alubi Agba (leader of the Olòsàrà music), an elder of Òsàrà family and four musicians. Findings showed that festivals in Yorubaland are accompanied with music at all levels, from pre-festival to post-festival. It was further observed that the function of music in the festival is more than singing, but rather, an integral part of Òsàrà worship. Also, the study identified the musicians as being indispensable before, during and after the festival. Findings further confirmed that festivals in Yoruba-land were often accompanied with music for sustainability and development of Yoruba culture. Not only that. music in Òsàrà festival is one of the major characteristics that add value not only to festival but also the lives of the people of Ile-Ife. The study concludes that music is an integral part of religious and ceremonial practices of any culture. It is an indispensable element in the worship of Òsàrà from pre-festival, festival and post festival period. Owing to its invaluable relevance, music is an integral part of Yoruba traditional festival.

Keyword: Òsàrà, Festival, Function, Yorùbá, Culture

Introduction

The functions of music cannot be quantified in the societal life of Africans. Music remains inseparable from their daily activities. It performs religious, social, political, economic and communicative functions.

A major characteristic of music is that it must be able to add value to the society. According to Merriam (1964), oftentimes, the concept of usage and function are interchangeably used (p.223). He holds that “use refers to the situation in which music is employed in human action, ‘function’ concerns the reasons for its employment and in particular the broader purpose which it serves.” Daramola (unpublished Monograph) further strengthened this assertion and defines role “as an assumed character that is, the usual or expected function of somebody or something, or the part somebody or something plays in an action or event, while function is the specific, natural or proper action that belongs to an agent which could mean one’s appropriated or assigned business, duty, part or office. It could also mean the proper employment of faculties or power.”

Music is part of culture, and culture is a way of life. Hence, much emphasis is being given to music in such annual events as festivals. A prominent activity that surrounds festival is music. Omojola (2014) avers that the role and functions of music is one of the artistic components of Yoruba festivals. Vidal, 2012 further elucidates the first basic function of music at festival thus:

The first significant function of music at a festival may be described as a referential. The referential or symbolic function involves the association of musical sounds and instruments or aspect of them with some extra musical qualities or power (p.265).

Yoruba music itself is a function of Yoruba culture, music is an indispensable part of Yoruba people and it has been accompanied with some other artistic elements. Music in Yoruba culture is a societal need which accompanies every stage of growth and every activity in the society. Olaniyan (2014, p.1) posits thus: For Yoruba music to fulfil its function as an agent of the people’s cultural communion, the music should represent “five dimensional” creative art forms, the five-dimensional creative art

forms are: music, language, dance, drama and visual arts. From the position of Olaniyan (2014), culture is being accompanied with five dimensional creative arts. Music in Yoruba traditional settings can never be overemphasized. It can be argued that people around the world have used music to achieve certain things like rituals, worship, and entertainment. Nettle, 1983 asserts that: The early literature of ethnomusicology often dwells on the presumption that in prehistoric, folk, or indigenous cultures people used music principally to accomplish certain essential things for them, and that therefore this music is functional (p.261).

Music accompanies every activity, most especially in Africa and Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria is no exception. Herzog (1950), cautiously said that “folk song is often said to be more functional in its use or application than cultivated poetry or music (p.1034). Music that can be used in celebrating a cultural event is usually music of the people, for the people and owned by the people. Nettl also argues that: But when Congreve said, “Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, to soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak,” he probably did not mean folk or indigenous music.

As Vidal formerly said that music is referential, it also performs symbolic role as it is obvious that sound of a particular music in a particular culture can represent such culture. Alan Merriam began his innovative ethnography of Flathead music thus:

All people, in no matter what culture, must be able to place their music firmly in the context of the totality of their beliefs, experiences, and activities, for without such ties, music cannot exist (1967a: 3).

Charles Seeger (1977, p.217) concurs by saying that the ultimate purposes of musicology are “the advancement of knowledge of and about music of the place and function of music in human culture.” Adegbite, (1987) asserts that:

Communication between traditional Yoruba people and *Orisa* takes different forms. It may be through private rituals which only the initiated attend, and the aspect that is open to the public through festivities, music is said to form an integral part of communication (Adegbite, 1987 p.21).

Adegbite's assertion implies that, for the general public to participate actively in the worship of some deities either in festival or in any other event, be it social or ritual, music must serve as a means of transmitting or communicating the message from the *òrisa* (deities) to the community. Adegbite (1987) completely corroborates the assertion of Herzog (1950:1034) and this agrees with the explanation of Vidal (2012, p.277) in evocative and invocative of music in the festival. It is noteworthy that Òsàrà musicians or *Alagbon* or *Agbon* singers are used interchangeably to depict singers of the deity (Òsàrà).

Theoretical Framework

Functionality theory of Allan Merriam will serve as theoretical guide for this study. Ethnomusicologist must be able to link functions of music with opinions of people which form their culture and, in their society, as stated by Merriam, (1964):

The functions and uses of music are as important as those of another aspect of culture for understanding the workings of society. Music is interrelated with the rest of culture; it can and does shape, strengthen, and channel social, political, economic, linguistic, religious, and other kinds of behaviour (Merriam, 1964, p.28).

In accordance with Merriam's system of thought, music is an inseparable part of any culture. Music can be found in most human endeavours be they political, religious, economical, entertainment, ceremonial, rituals, creative, occupational, psychological, educational, recreational, socio-economic and communicative. Merriam, (1964) further asserts that: It has been stressed that ethnomusicology involves much more than the structural analysis of music sound, for music is a human phenomenon produced by people for people and existing and functioning in a social situation (p.200).

Music is more than the production of sound; it also represents the society. Music can be seen as part of life; the function of music in the society is more than singing; it is rather in integral cultural trait of an ethnic group. A notable source in understanding human behavior where music is involved is the song text. Texts, connote language behavior, rather than mere music sound, but are integral parts of music. There is a remarkable difference between the language used in music and that of ordinary discourse. Language clearly

affects music, in that speech melody sets up certain patterns of sound which must be followed, at least to some extent, if the music-text fusion is to be understood by the listener.

From birth, music is part of every African's life. For children, music is never gratuitous, but rather a form of musical training that prepares them for adult activities like fishing, hunting, farming, grinding maize, attending weddings, funerals, dancing, and evading wild animals. Okafor (2005:2) statement confirms this:

Music, is of course, a cultural expression and every culture decides for itself what music is or is not (Merriam, 1964; Blacking, 1976). One social characteristic of folk music is that it is a functional integral with life and rhythms of life (Okafor, 2005p.2).

In consonance with Merriam on the role and function music plays in most African setting it is certain that music itself cannot be separated from the community life; which means music is part of their daily routines. Nketia notes that:

In traditional African societies, music performances are commonly seen in a public place, social events or social gathering; these social occasions are different avenues where group of people or community come together for the enjoyment of leisure, recreation, political, and also to fulfil some religious rites (Nketia, 1975).

The above extract explains why every conceivable sound has its place in traditional African music, whether in its natural form or as produced by an object or an animal or by an instrument that imitates. Merriam (1964), Blacking (1976) agree to the fact that being a cultural expression, every society has inalienable right to decide for itself what constitutes music and to what ends such musical constructions are put. Oral tradition also contributes to the functional role of music through orally transmitted songs such as folklore or folk music. Traditional folk music, as easily understood, sprung from the culture of the people and has developed or grown through the years, mutating, enlarging, shedding, but always maintaining its original

gene. As a cultural product, it is also the product of man in his culture and environment. Nettle (1983, p.237) explains that:

Alan Merriam began his innovative ethnography of Flathead music thus: “All people, in no matter what culture, must be able to place their music firmly in the context of the totality of their beliefs, experiences, and activities, for without such ties, music cannot exist” (1967a, p.3). Charles Seeger (1977, p.217) wrote in 1946 that the ultimate purposes of musicology are “the advancement of knowledge, and about music [and] of the place and function of music in human culture (Nettle, 1983, p. 237). [Sic]

One of the functions of music in culture is that it cannot be separated from the people’s lives as it is well proven that culture is a way of life and determines people’s pattern of thought system. Akpabot, (1998) defines culture as a way of thinking, believing and feeling.

In Africa, the music of a people represents the way of life of the people within the community. It is very clear that music is an expression of the culture of the people. Music showcases the identity of people in the society. Alan Merriam² argued that ethnomusicology is the study of “music in culture,” and later suggested that this definition did not go far-reaching; that it is the study of music as culture (1977a, p.202, p.204). This is different, at least in flavour and emphasis, from the concept of ethnomusicology as the study of music, “not only in terms of itself but also in relation to its cultural context,” Much of the literature on the study of music in culture involves the ways in which humans use music, which is therefore said to “carry out” certain functions in human society. It can be argued that people everywhere have used music to do certain things, and at the same time that they thought that music, acting on its own, as it were, is capable of doing something to them. Herzog (1950, p.1034) cautiously said that “folk song is often said to be more functional in its use or application than cultivated poetry or music.” This statement implies that the songs used to specific events in a person’s life and in the course of the year are more “functional” than those pieces used for performance in concerts.

“When we speak of uses of music, we are referring to the ways in which music is employed in human society, to the habitual practice or customary exercise of music either as a thing in itself or in conjunction with other activities. Lomax (1968, p.133) maintains that the principal discovery of his analysis of world music is “that a culture’s favourite song style reflects and reinforces the kind of behaviour essential to its main subsistence effort and to its central and controlling social institutions”.

Functions of Music in Òsàrà Festival

The functions of music vary in each society. Òsàrà has special songs for each deity in Ile-Ife. Consequently, music in Òsàrà festival serves many purposes and it shall be discussed under the following subheadings.

The Announcement

The commencement of Òsàrà festival is done through music. This is actually done in the pre-festival practices. Devotees gather at the shrine where songs are rendered by Alu and his Agbon music group to announce to the people around that Òsàrà festival is around the corner. Part of the announcement of Òsàrà festival is also done whenever they are to meet Agbon and the following songs are sung for the announcement of the festival:

Odun Ko

The musical score for 'Odun Ko' is presented in two systems. The first system features a Solo part on a treble clef staff and a Chorus part on a bass clef staff. The Solo part has the lyrics 'O-dun ma ko o-dun ma de o' and 'O j'o dun e-'. The Chorus part has the lyrics 'A - wo-ro o-dun ko'. The second system continues the Solo part with the lyrics '- si' and 'O j'o dun e - si', and the Chorus part with 'A - wo-ro o-dun ko' and 'A - wo-ro o-dun ko_'. The music is in 4/4 time and includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and accidentals.

Both musicians and devotees always thank their maker (*Ori*), because destiny have placed them within the cradle of the earth's (*Ile-Ife*). A famous and probably the most popular of all Yoruba myths of creation is the myth

that portrayed *Ile-Ife* as the ancient Yoruba empire located in the south western part of Nigeria. According to Ife people, Ile-Ife is being regarded as the epicenter of the earth, the holy city, the home of divinities and mysterious spirits, the source of all Oceans and the gateway to heaven. *Agbon* musicians recognize this fact about themselves not only as devotees of Òsàrà but because they are from Ile-Ife.

Homage

Iba (a respectful reference) is an important concept in the structure of performance in African music and is also peculiar to Òsàrà music. According to the leader of *Agbon* music, he stated thus “I don’t have any song book, I have never written any song in my life yet I have more than 200 songs of the deities in my head, it is very important for me to pay homage (*juba*) to the spirit of the land (*ala le Ile*), otherwise, the performance will not be successful”. After singing a song of homage the song that follows is *Enuwa koko*. *Enuwa* is one of the seven entrances to *Ile-Ife*.

Mo ju ba o

The musical score for 'Mo ju ba o' is presented in two systems. The first system shows the Solo and Chorus parts. The Solo part is in the treble clef, key of B-flat major (two flats), and 8/8 time. It consists of three measures, each starting with a quarter rest followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note Bb4. The Chorus part is in the bass clef, key of B-flat major, and 8/8 time. It consists of three measures, each starting with a quarter rest followed by a quarter note Bb3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note G3. The second system continues the Solo and Chorus parts for three more measures, maintaining the same rhythmic and melodic patterns. The Solo part ends with a double bar line, and the Chorus part also ends with a double bar line.

Didactic

Music also performs the role of teaching culture and moral indicating value during Òsàrà festival. This is done through songs. The following song is used during the festival in order to remind people of the tradition of the people of Ife and the need for all, including devotees not to forget their source.

ASA IBILE

Our Culture

The musical score for 'ASA IBILE' is written for Solo and Chorus parts. The Solo part is in the treble clef, and the Chorus part is in the bass clef. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are in Yoruba.

Solo:

ke ma gba - a gbe o ke ma gba a gbe o

Chorus:

A sa bi le, a

6:

ke ma gba gbe o, ke ma gba gbe

sa bi le ke ma gba gbe o

11:

a sa wa

a sa bi le, a sa bi le ke ma gba gbe o

Worship

The act of praising deities is in two ways chanting or eulogizing (*Oriki*) the deities involved and the other deals with (*Aro*) which is another form of worship peculiar to every traditional religion in Yoruba land. An example of Òsàrà worship song is given below:

Oba ti bi o
erun wa koko
Oba ti wa o
erun wa koko

Entertainment

Generally, entertainment is seen as an act of arousing the interest of individuals, group or community through jokes, music or drama to rouse people's heart thereby raising their mind to ecstasy. The major functions of music among Africans are entertainment and information. Africans enjoy music like air they breathe. The entertainment comes in two folds: the musicians got entertained, even though they were entertaining people; the participants were also entertaining themselves.

Jijo ile re

Solo

ji jo o le re a bi o le jo?

Chorus

ji jo o le re a bi o le

8

Ka yo de ji jo o le re a bi o le jo?

ji jo o le re a bi o le

16

jo?

Translation:

Dance the dance of your house
 Can you not dance?
 Kayode the dance in your house
 can you not dance?

Request

Òsàrà festival presents an occasion where participants as well as devotees believe they could find solutions to their problems. The people request with songs whatever they desired from Òsàrà with a strong belief that their requests would be granted.

Gbemi

The musical score for 'Gbemi' is written in 6/8 time. It consists of two systems. The first system has a Solo part on a treble clef staff and a Chorus part on a bass clef staff. The Solo part has two phrases of 'Gbemi gbemi' with a rest in between. The Chorus part has two phrases of 'A gbe gbe mi ma a goke o' with a rest in between. The second system continues the Solo part with 'Gbe mi gbe mi' and the Chorus part with 'ma a go ke o' and 'A gbe gbe mi ma a go ke o'. A small number '7' is written above the first measure of the second system.

Solo

Gbemi gbemi

Gbemi gbemi

Chorus

A gbe gbe mi ma a goke o

A gbe gbe mi

7

Gbe mi gbe mi

ma a go ke o

A gbe gbe mi ma a go ke o

Eulogy

Another belief system of African Traditional religious worshipers is the existence of the ancestors. Africans believed that their ancestors still live among them and as such recognition is always made during or before any festival. A core element of performance in Òsàrà festival often existing as a celebratory performance or as a solemn ritual offering to the deities given Òsàrà personality and other deities are songs of praise, howbeit, Òsàrà is at the center of the worship. The following are the songs of praise to Òsàrà and other deities in the land. The following song shows the connectivity of devotees to Òsàrà.

Oraluyi Ebora

The musical score for "Oraluyi Ebora" is presented in two systems. The first system features a SOLO part on a treble clef staff and a CHORUS part on a bass clef staff. The SOLO part begins with the lyrics "O - ra - lu - yi E - bo - ra o - ko - le o - wo ge - ge - re". The CHORUS part enters with "O - ra - lu - yi E -". The second system continues the SOLO part with "O - ko - le o - wo ge - ge - re - o O - ko - le o -" and the CHORUS part with "bo - ra o - ko - le o - wo ge - ge - re". The SOLO part concludes with "wo ge - ge - re" and the CHORUS part with "O - ra - lu - yi E - bo - ra O - ko - le o - wo ge - ge - re".

SOLO

O - ra - lu - yi E - bo - ra o - ko - le o - wo ge - ge - re

CHORUS

O - ra - lu - yi E -

O - ko - le o - wo ge - ge - re - o O - ko - le o -

bo - ra o - ko - le o - wo ge - ge - re

wo ge - ge - re

O - ra - lu - yi E - bo - ra O - ko - le o - wo ge - ge - re

Translation:

*Oraluyi mysterious spirit
Built a beautiful mansion
Oraluyi mysterious spirit
Built a beautiful mansion*

Evocative and Invocative

Vidal, (2012, p.196) asserts that each *Orisa* has its form of music which varies in terms of rhythm, tempo, intonation, melodic materials, texts and modes of performance. Daramola (1998:74) also corroborates this by pointing that every divinity has a set of prescribed behaviour. Music is used in *Òsàrà* festival to evoke the spirit into the presence of its devotees because sound is a medium through which spiritual forces may be invited into the midst of the people. The sound of Abebe performs an invocative function

during the festival. Hence while other musical instruments are not allowed to accompany the music, the following music are used to invoke the spirits into the gathering of the people.

OSARA

Solo

o lomo lo la ye o O sa ramo komo de o

Chorus

o lomo lo la ye o O sa ramo

6

o lomo lo la ye o O sa ramo komo de o

komo de o lomo lo la

11

ye o O sa ra mo ko mo de

Òsàrà (Agbegbin yo) has been regarded as a nursing mother, whose motherhood features qualified her to be celebrated as both human and deity. The song above is usually employed in the performance of *Agbon* musicians to invoke the spirit of *Òsàrà* so that people can be blessed.

Alasi

The musical score for 'Alasi' is written in 8/8 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The Solo part is in the treble clef, and the Chorus part is in the bass clef. The Solo part begins with the lyrics 'A la si o, A la si o gbe ra n le ko di de'. The Chorus part begins with the lyrics 'A la si o, A'. The score includes a repeat sign at the end of the Chorus part.

Solo

A la si o, A la si o gbe ra n le ko di de

Chorus

A la si o, A

Mbiti (1969, p.81) comments that:

People report that they see the spirits in ponds, caves, groves, mountains or outside their villages, dancing, singing, herding cattle, working in their fields or nursing their children. Some spirits appear in people's dreams, especially to diviners, priests, medicine-men and rain-makers to impart some information. These personages may also consult the spirits as part of their normal training and practice

The spirit of the ancestors also performs an invocative role in the life of their custodians during and beyond the festival period. The singers also call on the spirits of their ancestors to dwell among them, granting them good fortune. The ancestors participate actively in the affairs of the living.

Ogun

The musical score for 'Ogun' is written for a Solo voice and a Chorus. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The Solo part begins with a melodic line in the treble clef, while the Chorus part is in the bass clef. The lyrics are in Yoruba.

Solo:
 Ogun lo n pa la je je o ki je ro

Chorus:
 O gun o e o ye ye ye o e kun o ma pa da

5:
 Solo: O gun o
 Chorus: O gun o e o ye ye ye o e kun o ma pa da

9:
 Solo: mo ro ka mo ro ka mo ro ka mo ro ka mo ro ka
 Chorus: O gun o e o ye

12:
 Solo: (rest)
 Chorus: ye ye o e kun o ma pa da

Music in Òsàrà festival goes beyond music of the goddess, because different mysterious spirits (Ebora) are present at the festival and are acknowledged.

Conclusion

Òsàrà music is an inseparable element in òsàrà worship. The function of music is indeed considered indispensable in many cultures and societies around the world. Music is an integral part of òsàrà worship, it serves various purposes, its significance is deeply rooted in human history of Ile-Ife people and continues to play a vital role in their contemporary life. òsàrà music performs various functions such as announcement, homage, worship, entertainment, request, eulogy, evocative and invocative in the society. òsàrà music enriches the experience of both attendees and career of culture. Music in Òsàrà festival has helped from pre-festival, festival and post festival period worshipers evoke and amplify feelings, allowing individuals to connect with their own emotions and those of others.

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