

## **Musical Arts and Indigenous Knowledge System: Understanding, Reproducing the Ijala Musical Genre in Yorubaland**

A.A. Idamoyibo  
Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

---

**Abstract:** Musical arts in Africa are a product of an active and a living system that is indigenous. This is so because music is a body of art that is accumulated over time through the system of apprenticeship. Here, a young person works for an agreed period of time often for a very low pay or even most often without any payment in order to learn an art. Ijala is hunters' play, chants and songs as well as their entire way of life. It is genre that is associated in the worship of Ogun-Yoruba god of Iron. Oral interview and observation methods were used as methods of data collection. The range of information arising from the transmission of knowledge through the indigenous system of education is guided in order to eliminate distortion and perversion. The study examines musical arts and the indigenous knowledge system; understanding, reproducing and moderating Ijala musical genre in Yorubaland.

**Key words:** Indigenous, apprenticeship, observation, transmission, eliminate, Yorubaland

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

The growth of musical arts, focusing on the indigenous knowledge system in the spirit of the 21st century may be founded on three major systems which include the understanding of the indigenous system, reproducing it and of course moderating the results arising from the prediction of the age. Exhibiting creative issues in music in an interactive way is necessary for progressive growth of musical ideas in an indigenous way.

Music and community go together in Yoruba tradition. It is seen as a way of life. It is taught and learnt as a search for meaningful social integration. Music making is intended to provide understanding and also explanation for intelligent and meaningful action in all aspects of life. Yoruba music changes as situations of life change. It is socially and historically constructed and subjects to life's tensions and contradictions. The understanding of music requires the understanding of sound qualities and patterns which reflect the values of the past and present ways of life of a people's culture. This sound quality and pattern is what creates impressions that are relevant to social musical reality which comes as a result of the artiste's ways of creative thinking.

The determination for a musical performance situation is cultural and depends on the artistes within the culture who take responsibility for its quality and appropriateness. Yoruba indigenous music is a community property. It belongs to everybody as the

composers are unknown. One may not be wrong to say that Yoruba music is a phenomenon that is still under construction within the contexts of everyday interaction. Music in this area is a combination of singing, dancing, chanting, proverbial sayings and instrumental accompaniment.

Music is a human behaviour that is acquired directly. Children learn by observation, imitation and practice. As a child cannot talk except he/she finds someone to imitate so music making cannot be possible without the presence of a master musician. For music is learnt the same natural way a child learns a language. Music in Yoruba land does not involve the musicians alone. The awareness that the audience serve as musical critics is already an acceptable fact in Yoruba land. The artistes' musical product is judged during and after a musical event. The outcome of the people's judgement often determines the creative ability of the artiste.

### **MUSICAL ARTS IN YORUBA LAND**

Artistes in Yoruba musical tradition acquire performance competence through observation, musical involvement/participation in situations of interactive music making. These are the very sites from which the artistes acquire musico-artistic skill, aesthetic ideas and beliefs by participating in the social-musical activities. Dele Tomori (Isola Opo), one of the best Christian Ijala artistes observes that social-musical interactions take place early in a child's life. He comments that his musical competence and skills and the ability to recognize and

express musical thoughts were aided by his father's musical competence and consciousness. He expresses how prolific his father was in chanting and verbalized drumming. He notes here that one of the fundamental aspects of musical competence is communicative competence.

Dele Tomori sometimes makes some musical and chanting utterances that beat his imagination. He says that would not have been possible if he had not been adequately exposed to indigenous manner of participation in musical performances from childhood. He comments that by attending musical occasions, a child imbibes from his parent the skills of music making, value drumming, judgement, gestural responses that echo one's performance appraisal by the audience and spontaneous musical compositions that are suitable for mood regulation. They also acquire social competence through this timely exposure.

Bisi Adununbarin Keji argues that musical skills entail more than mastery of a musical structure which enables one to make patterned sounds. To her, musical skills involve the understanding of sound patterns which are used in social-musical settings. She believes that even though there are conventional ways of making music an artiste must strive to create his/her own identity by using sound patterns in unique ways. What makes an artiste unique, according to her is the ability to transfer the experience he/she has acquired from his/her involvement in adult groups into tangible musical substance that often gives rise to new innovations in musical creativity.

She also observes that what make an artiste to stand out are the gifts of a good voice quality and a good vocal production of words with appropriate dictions. An artiste must strive to creatively interpret music in context, constructing sound qualities and patterns to suit the audience and the occasion. This is the distinguishing factor in musicianship. She argues further that an artiste can only achieve status through his/her powers to choose or select musical materials, gestures, words, etc., to demonstrate his/her originality in creating an aura based on his/her imaginations and cognitive world.

This is a world that is redolent with meanings associated with the society's physical settings and community history. She explains that a traditional musician in Yoruba land is a selfless artiste who finds great delight in the training of young artistes giving them the proficiency that is required to make them relevant in the future. He/she does not only teach them music but also teaches them how to make music relevant to the continuity of community and spiritual or religious values. Bisi Adununbarin Keji is a product of two chanting traditions: Esa and Ijala. Her father taught her ijala while

her grandmother taught her esa. According to her, ijala is the actualisation and the transmission of life's threatening warfare situations of valiant hunters. She was taught the hunters' chronological songs, dirges, verbal instrumentation and hunters' ceremonial music. She explains that the training approaches to the aspects of specialization mentioned above vary according to the musical requirements for expertise. These can all be classified under traditional method of musicianship that may be termed indigenous apprenticeship system.

### **MUSICAL ARTS AND THE INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM**

Ogunmola Ogundeji whose praise names are Akanni Oke and Omo Oloye Apakuta, meaning the son of the Chief of those who crack stones, argues that the versatility for musical practice requires the following: Spontaneous creation of music on the spot of performance. He argues that if an ijala artiste lacks this quality, he will never be able to satisfy his audience. Performance-composition: he argues that ijala is the vehicle of his performance and the song that sustains the long chant is the fuel. An artist may be able to create good chants but if he/she lacks the ability to compose good songs, his/her chants may be uninteresting.

**Skilled improvisation:** He comments that he can sing a song in four or five different ways using various rhythmic patterns to create various versions each time the song is performed. He says his passionate ways of rendering songs has made him relevant and has given him some social status as an ijala artiste.

**The use of drums:** Ogunmola does not play any musical instruments. Nevertheless, he dictates the drum patterns that he desires as accompaniment in all his performances. He understands the concept of African drumming so well that he verbalizes all his melo-rhythmic lines without limitation. Though he believes very much in his master drummer, he however, suggests some basic melo-rhythm that would enrich his accompaniment.

**Emphasis on call and response and instrumental techniques in performance:** Ogunmola believes that the chanter and his drummers should inter-change the call and response roles between the leading voice and the instruments in musical performances. Though he has seen situations where the chanter would want to play the call role mainly to him, it is not ideal. The synthesis between the chanter and his drummers create an ideal musical spectacle that stimulates audience positive support.

**Lyrical content:** Ogunmola disagrees with artistes who use the content of the books of psalms and proverbs mainly as chants. He says if a chanter is vast in oral poetry he/she would be able to determine the content of his/her chants and create them.

**Interpretive skills for musical quality or effectiveness:** He says further that an apprentice might take after the skills and techniques of his/her master as the common saying goes, like teacher like pupil. But if a pupil is well tutored, he/she has no reasons not to be effective in his/her own distinctive way of making music. He asserts that his apprenticeship with his master for years made him competent in interpretive musical performance. He is a critic of oral poetry, beyond being a poet himself. He has been invited to several places to judge ijala musical festivals/competitions in Oyan, Oyo, Ofa, Iwo and Osogbo. He concludes that an apprentice needs to acquire the interpretive performance skills before seeking freedom from his/her master.

#### **THE PHILOSOPHY OF YORUBA DRUM MUSIC**

Yemi Alajede, a versatile ijala master drummer observes that Yoruba traditional music has a basic underlying musical philosophy. He also observes that the music is in various types with different styles that functions under different musical situations. One of the musical philosophies is that the ability to make music is from God and that he gives it to whomever he deems fit. He says that he has a younger brother who does not understand the concept of music making however, he understands the concept of woodcarving and drum making. In Yoruba land, creative potential is said to be innate in every person but it may remain dormant in whoever fails to activate it.

Yoruba believe in the ability of Ayan, god drumming (or a legendary drummer). They believe that it was Ayan who handed down artistic-musical drumming traditions to the drummers and that whoever refuses to pay homage to him might lose his drumming skills. Alajede's belief on the philosophy of music agrees with Nzewi's argument that:

Artistic vision unfolds along a four stations of creative logic. The journey into artistic creativity is an infinite process which starts at the fertile plane of creative philosophy along which germinates creative intention which informs the negotiation of creative rationalization manifested at the terminus station of creative fulfilment at which a fresh journey in creative re-performance of the same material is initiated (Nzewi, 1991)

If we understand the writer, his emphasis is on creativity. He argues that though there is a basic creative philosophy in Africa, there is also a basic creative intention or motive which in the context of Ijala in Christian worship is to praise, worship, adore, appraise, to entertain and to heal. However, the theory of creative rationalization is different from the others. This is because it requires some ratio of intelligence on the part of the artiste. The manipulation of his skills depends on his musical ability and his performance device.

#### **AVENUE FOR CREATIVE MUSICAL GROWTH**

Jide Ayarinde whose praise name is Ogindan ree omo olohun orin meaning. This is a lion with a sonorous voice, asserts that no matter how good an artiste may be if he is not encouraged and affirmed by both older and younger artistes of his time, he might lose confidence in him/herself. He says that the creative musical growth of every personality is enhanced by the encouragement of older artistes and the affirmation of one's ability by the younger artistes. He admits that it is natural for some other artistes to be envious of one's musical abilities and so discredit one or label one as a musically ungraced artiste. However, the acknowledgement of one another in situations where there are opportunities for everyone to participate and contribute to the advancement of the musical traditions of one's culture will eliminate strife and bring about unity among musicians.

He regrets that many artistes are not willing to develop themselves these days. He says that he was a student of baba Akeem, an expert drummer and he never hesitated to draw from the creative intelligence of his master whenever necessary. He says even though he has gained his freedom and he is now having his own apprentices, he still goes out with baba whenever his services are required. He says he has listened to the performances of many master drummers and he has come to conclude that every master drummer has his own unique ways of dramatizing his skills on the drums. He concludes, saying that every artiste should strive to cultivate a mastery of music making that will attract little or no criticism at performances.

Adeolu Ogundipe in his views emphasizes that the presentational contents of traditional Yoruba music in performance is a combination of the artiste's creative ability and the integration of the knowledge of the traditional music of his culture. He says whoever is able to apply the principle of musical creation of his culture in his music is a traditional artiste. He says the reality of the traditional elements of music in ijala is indeed an essential formation of presentational content. According to him, the knowledge of oral tradition is an enhancing factor in ijala rendition. To him, the social-historical reality of the

themes of whatever chant a poet wants to render must be remembered as well as presented in contexts. If the poet is versatile in oral tradition, his/her countenance will be calm but if otherwise, he/she will always struggle to remember one thing or the other.

### **MUSIC ART AND COMMUNICATION**

Ogundele Adeoyo, a medical doctor who is vast in ijala rendition is of the opinion that musical rendition entails the affective and effective musical communication. The recreational value and re-interpretations of musical conventions take into account what is appropriate for social contexts in music making. To him, music is a poem. It can be interpreted in many ways. The artiste and the audience derive multiple musical meanings from musical presentation, depending on their mood at the time of the performance. Being a medical doctor, he understands that for the audience to be able to give appropriate meaning to music they must attain certain requirements that include the following: they must develop their perceptual skills which mean that there is need for a critic to take note of every development in a musical situation. He must be able to state specifically what he regards as good or bad music. He must also not be bound by his/her beliefs only in the assessment of a musical performance.

**Cognitive understanding:** A good listener is expected to devise a technical method of processing music. He/she is not expected to be mono-causal in his/her approach. He/she is rather expected to be versatile in his/her understanding of the genre of music, the structure, the song formation, melodic and rhythmic devices, instrumental ensemble, etc.

Ajani Ogun, a notable ijala poet argues that musical creative talent is a gift endowed in the artiste by God. It is the Almighty God that gives the gifts to enable the recipients to render good musical services to mankind. According to him, it does not matter how much a person desires to master music if he/she is not endowed, he/she will never achieve any height musically. Musicians are said to be lazy in time past because people hardly notice the efforts they make in music making. Whoever is a musician must then have music running in his blood and must also be able to receive music from a supernatural source.

### **MUSICAL ARTS AND IJALA MUSICAL GENRE**

Ijala is the hunters' chant/song chant. It is a traditional music is primarily vocal as it is text-based and secondarily instrumental. This does not mean that there are no sections that are purely instrumental in the performance. The drum interludes are meant to provide

sustenance for the chants and the song sections. There are many different kinds of vocal production in Yoruba music, raging from gracefully soft to unusually loud and nasalised production to energetic vocalizing. In ijala chanting genre, the voice quality must modulate between speech and voice range. It must be clear and rich in quality. Most of the songs that accompany ijala chanting are uncomplicated and are created within the smallest number of musical factors such as intervals, rhythm form, etc. On the contrary, Yoruba instrumental music is quite rhythmically technical, complex and vigorous, depending on the mood of the drummers.

Ijala traditional music is distinct in its character and nature, depending on its usage. It may serve as an aspect of worship in the church. It may also serve social functions, artistic functions, psychological functions, ritualistic functions, etc. Ijala music plays a significant role in the daily lives of the Yoruba. According to Swooned music has many facets for its aspects include the historical, social structural, functional, physical, psychological cultural, aesthetic, symbolic and others. He therefore, asserts that music must be studied from all the perspectives above, since no single perspective would seem complete without the others. Traditionally music in the culture of the Yoruba people functions in two different ways, secular and sacred. It functions secularly as in entertainment to celebrate birth, marriage and death. On the other hand, it functions sacredly to celebrate the gods in worship, festivals, rituals and rites.

### **MUSICAL ARTS AND THERAPEUTIC DEFENSE**

Music as an emotional experience affects the quality of life and adjustment of an individual's self-existence. The treatment of psychological disorders through the use of music has been proved to be very effective. This music therapy technique is different from psychiatric methods in that it controls the nature of the muscular contractions involved in terms of the consequences of the patient's behaviour. The kind of music that is played for healing is always slow and it has the capability to create the right atmosphere for conscious processes, achieving new insight or effecting fundamental personality change. Private and public hospitals now encourage the use of music to eliminate the oppression of demons in psychosomatic disordered patients.

Music is used as a balm in Ijala chants to insure sustenance and restoration of good health and to cure illnesses. The use of music for this purpose has a medicinal and psychological power that permeates into the very soul of the sick person. Music is also used in Yoruba land as a calming agent for the insane or mentally unbalanced patients. This may be achieved through the

use of songs that are performed over and again in a chant like pattern. It is also used for soothing purposes to calm a pregnant woman that is about to deliver.

### **MUSIC AND SOCIAL UNITY**

Music in Yoruba land serves an important function in their society achieving social unity or oneness that makes people to experience a unique atmosphere of togetherness. Music permeates the social life of the people. It creates an avenue for socialization, enabling people to interact with one another. Yoruba sing to express joy as an outcome of success, childbirth, etc. and to show gratitude to God in praises and thanksgiving.

Nketia (1979) observes that music is an avenue for expression. The Yoruba believe that dance must go with music because the enjoyment of music is intensified by motor response through the feelings, increased involvement and the propulsion that articulates the beat that physical movement generates. Music can also be said to be an exercise as a musician would hardly perform without dancing to the rhythms of his music. Some musicians demonstrate the completeness of physical prowess or thrilling qualities of being perfectly attuned rhythmically, musically and temperamentally.

Music is a creative art, a specific form of social consciousness in human activities that shows aesthetic compositions. Yoruba music is beautiful and the beauty is achieved through the use of compositional elements such as syncopation, hemiola, augmentation and diminution of phrases, repetition, recycling and ornamentation. The applications of these features together with the instrumental combination stimulate higher level of physical expression and communication.

### **MUSICAL ART AND MARRIAGE CEREMONY**

Among the Yoruba, marriage ceremony is an expression of joy and sorrow musically. The bride though happy to be married is also very sad to depart her parents' home. The expression of her moment of sadness is always revealed in the chant song titled Ekun Iyawo' (bride's sorrowful song). Ekun Iyawo is a vocal song that is not accompanied by any instrument. The bride renders it on her wedding day. The presentation of the chant requires good knowledge of a lady who is well groomed in Yoruba culture. There is hardly a traditional marriage in Yoruba land that does not feature the presence of the drummers.

The marriage of the daughter of a chief hunter (Olu ode) is always a great scenario as other hunters gather to perform the ijala. In a situation like this, they wear their special regalia with the dance paraphernalia displaying the beauty of the hunters' heritage. Conversations between the groom and the wife's family are equally musical. The

representatives of both parties employ song dialogue instead of the spoken dialogue. The drum mainly plays ceremonial and social roles during traditional marriages, by functioning in call and response patterns. The groom's drummers often play the call pattern while the bride's drummers play the responsorial pattern. The two drumming groups come together at the end of the ceremony providing dance tunes only. They do some praise singing too in order to make more money besides the money that both families paid to hire them for the occasion.

### **MUSICAL ART AND PREPARATION FOR A MAJOR HUNT**

Traditionally in Yoruba land, the preparation for a major hunt requires some musical chanting and singing performance. Akitipa or ilu ode, the hunters' drumbeat, features prominently in this regard. Hunting in the traditional setting is done in groups at different categories. We have ode aperin (elephant hunters) wolf hunters, buffalo hunters, hyena hunters and antelope hunters, etc. This does not mean that an antelope hunter cannot graduate into buffalo hunting grade; it depends on his hunting skills and maturity. At the end of the hunting game, the different grades of hunters come together to chant the praises of Ogun, the god of war and iron implements. And also to sing the praises of their forefathers who were great hunters.

The intent is of course, to ensure victory. This agrees with a proverb in Yoruba land that goes thus: Ode to p eran to s'etutu nitori eyi ko, nitori omiran ni, meaning A hunter that performs rituals after a successful hunting adventure is actually creating an avenue for breakthrough in future hunt. The music of adoration of Ogun is ijala, hunters' guild chants. The ritual is quite musical and the performance is peculiar to the hunters only. They sing songs with rigorous rhythmic patterns after their hunting adventures while the women wait patiently to prepare the meat. In the evening after the meal, the hunters gather again to perform social songs. This time, dundun ensemble is used to accompany the songs. They sing mainly of their day's hunt. The chief hunter (olu ode) is usually at the forefront singing solo, describing the experience before the successful hunt while the others sing in responsorial form mainly. They most often respond, using animal mimesis. This takes on an immediate and practical character in many of the hunting songs and dances. This is the situation in many towns in Osun state, Oyo state and Kwara state.

### **TEAMWORK ACTIVITIES**

The stylistic elements adopted in the music that accompanies teamwork activities must be found suitable

to the work it facilitates. One of the significant ways of influencing people to work in Yoruba traditional setting is to provide an atmosphere that is suitable for it. In the music of teamwork activities, certain elements such as rhythm are conditioned in the nature of the work. The time signature of the song is also expected to closely align with the symmetrical motions of the work. The evenly spaced sounds of the workers movements are sharpened and sustained by the songs. For work music to function appropriately there must be a leader whose duties are:

- To function in a kind of directive capacity
- To play the leading role or take the solo parts of the work songs

The leader is expected to perform these two roles most of the time. The songs are often in call and response pattern, otherwise known as responsorial musical form which is so prevalent in the music of organized teamwork. Another important element of work music is the text. According to Kedebe (1982) in the discussion of the relationships between texts and music, the performer communicates ideas to his/her listeners through music. He argues that purely instrumental music because of its illusive and intangible nature may be harder to comprehend than vocal music. Meaning in vocal music is often direct as long as the text sung is constructed to convey ideas and it is directly integrated with the melody. Melodies are even sometimes used primarily to convey the message of the text. In this case, the text is considered more important than the melodies. Music in teamwork activities is in vocal form, though sometimes with drum accompaniment. It communicates to the team members through the texts or chants enhanced by the use of melody.

### **FUNERAL RITES AND MUSIC**

Death in Yoruba belief is a translation to another world. The Yoruba in bidding the dead farewell would remark:

Mo j' okun mo j' ekolo  
Do not eat millipede or earthworm  
O n ti won je l'orun ni o ba won je

Whatever they eat in heaven is what you should join them to eat. Death, in Yoruba culture is seen as a debt that everyone must pay. It is seen as the end of a man's physical existence and the beginning of his spiritual existence. Although, it is a painful thing to lose loved

ones however, the family of the dead is expected in Yoruba belief to perform some rites. It is believed that if these rites were not performed the deceased would not rest in peace eternally. Those who lived well believed to have achieved the purpose of their existence are accorded full burial and funeral rites with designated funeral music. The deceased's children more often than not sponsor these rites.

In some cases, the services of professional musicians are engaged to add colour to the ceremony. Among the hunters in Yoruba land when a nimrod passes on, the fellow hunters of the deceased perform the funeral dirge iremoje, to pave way for him and to enable him become an ancestral hunter in the world beyond. Iremoje is a performance in form of chants/songs where the great achievements of the dead hunter are brought to focus in the dirge chants performed with the hunters' ritual drums.

### **CONCLUSION**

Musical learning through the indigenous system has been known, over the years to be practically oriented, productive and relevant to the community in which it exists. This is gradually being over run by the Western system of education that is theoretically oriented in Africa, though taught as balanced education is the other world.

Poverty has affected and is still affecting formal education in Africa. This is responsible for the bias in practice. Every child wants to go to school even those that do not have sufficient intellectual ability to do so successfully. Those who learn through apprenticeship are vast in the skills they acquired too.

Every form of education is important there is need for this to be emphasized in order not to endanger the apprenticeship system that has been known to be effective, accurate, financially rewarding and technologically relevant to the time. Musical composition in local language especially chant/music genre, the art of drumming, drum making, crafts in general require a place in entire African continental studies as once emphasized by Kedebe (1982) and Babalola (1976) regarding African literature.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The researcher acknowledge the contributions of the following artistes for information that was provided for me between March 2009 and November 2010. Some of the information was provided on the field when the artistes

were performing while some were provided at the respective homes of the artiste. Dele Tomori (Isola Opo), Bisi Adununbarin Keji, Ogunmola Ogundeji, Ogunmola, Yemi Alajede, Jide Ayarinde, Adeolu Ogundipe, Ogundele Adeoyo, Ajani Ogun.

#### **REFERENCES**

- Babalola, S.A., 1976. *The Content and Form of Yoruba Ijala*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp: 395.
- Kedebe A., 1982. *Roots of Black Music: The Vocal, Instrumental and Dance Heritage of Africa and Black America*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, pp: 162.
- Nketia, J.K., 1979. *The Music of Africa*. Victor Gollance Ltd., London.
- Nzewi, M., 1991. *Musical Practice and Creativity: An African Traditional Perspective*. IWALEWA-Haus, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, pp: 164.