

## **Transforming African Nations Through Indigenous Music: A Study of Haruna Ishola's Apala Music**

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**Abstract:** Music and music education in traditional society in Nigeria is of antiquity. It has played an important role in the inculcation of values and transmission of knowledge among the Yoruba, one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The moral tone of the society was reinforced by various types of music before the introduction of Western music and the value of traditional music as culture and moral enforcer has not been given any serious academic attention. The thrust of this presentation, therefore, is Apala music in Yorubaland with special emphasis on Haruna Ishola, popularly known as Baba n' Gani Agba, a legend in Apala music. The study presents a discussion and analysis of importance of proverbs used by Haruna Ishola in communication and highlights their significance as an instrument for inculcating moral values, ethical changes, transmission of culture, conservation and agent of culture preservation from one generation to another.

**Key words:** Africa, Apala, communication, indigenous music, proverb, culture

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### **INTRODUCTION**

With the emergence of Western music in African countries, the indigenous musical culture has been blackmailed, bastardized and checked from effective use among the people. However, to an African, music is an integral part of the traditional society which is used in expressing ways of life. Music is used in the transfer of values from one generation to another and also in the growth and nurture of man. Apala music as popularized by Haruna Ishola is an aspect of Africa popular music often described as pop music. Pop is an abbreviation of the word popular. Pop is used for any popular music. Before any encounter with the colonialists, the Yoruba prided themselves on accounts of moral rectitude in all its ramifications, like sexual chastity, preservation of virginity till marriage by girls and the observance of moderation in all aspect of life and respects for elders. The moral tone of the society was regulated through educative values in most of the traditional music, especially in Apala. This is no longer the case as the youth have indulged in all sorts of moral perversion as a result, modernity and influence of foreign music and low patronage of the traditional music. Also, this perverse lifestyle has been caused partially by the individualistic egos which were freely broadcast on home video and television programme through musical video. This decadent culture of the West which is openly projected in our media, promotes violence, drug addiction, gangsterism and get-rich quick syndrome. The outcome

is that a society that was once innocent, humane and conscientious and bound together by a tightly woven cord of kinship and values has now ruptured badly on all sides. There are lots that we can benefit from traditional African music to recover parts of the lost glory.

Through Haruna Isola's Apala music, he had used his type of music in enriching the rich cultural values of his people, he had used his genre of indigenous music to permeates the people's societal beliefs and values, philosophy, historical records, words of wisdom, ethos, proverbs and contemporary issues in his immediate environment and the world at large.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Music all over the world has been regarded as the art and science of combining vocal or instrumental sounds to produce beauty of form, harmony and expression of emotions, values and history. Vidal (2000) states that:

Music over the ages has proved to be one of the indispensable arts cultivated by man for the growth, nurture and transfer of his institutions and values to future generations

To Meriam (1994):

Music exists only in terms of social interaction and it is a learned behaviour. It involves the behaviour of learned individuals and groups of individual

This thus, asserts the fact that music can also be seen as cultural cum political instrument which based its functionality on its cultural context. This simply reflects Yolounfoun (2010)'s view when she opines that music is a connecting link between cultural values of the people and their historical experiences.

However, considering various view points of scholars cited above, music makes use of sounds either through vocal participation or physical manipulation of instruments which carries message in which its meaning stimulates its audience to react in a certain way, either negative or positive. Hence, the music value of each community or society differs from one to another, simple or complex.

In Africa, music is used to petition the deity for individual and collective needs in much the same way that the confession of misdemeanours, committed by devotees are expressed through songs for forgiveness; this quite shows that music in Western form is quite different with indigenous music embedded with African colouration (Yek-Ajenifuja, 2003).

#### **THE DIDACTIC MEANING OF INDIGENOUS MUSIC TO THE AFRICANS**

Akin (1977) observed that traditional music is that class of music which was practiced in Nigeria before the advent of colonialism. Ever before, the advent of modernity and its various influence there was traditional approved effective and accepted musical knowledge which was practiced and passed down from one generation to another as an effective means of cultural propagation.

Akpabot (1976) opined that traditional African music is the unadulterated music handed down by our ancestors from generation to generation. It is widely spread beliefs among the Yoruba that traditional song had been in existence since creation itself.

To an African, music is an integral part of the traditional society which is used in expressing ways of life. Music is used in the transfer of values from one generation to another and also in the growth and nurture of man. Indigenous music is centered on life cycle, such as; birth properties, marriage, death, festival and rites. Zake (1986) once wrote:

Indigenous music, dance and songs as embodies in the entire concept of African culture were a cherish treasure and a source of pride for African people everywhere which would help to identify the African and champion is dignity. Our songs are most meaningful and carry inspiring message that convey the time picture and personality of the African. Any nation which did not have such culture was not a nation

One method of finding out the indigenous culture of the people is to examine how they conceptualize their music. According to Wissler Clark (Ogunbona, 2003), indigenous music is a stable cultural traits and therefore provides a useful basis for determining the diffusion of other cultural traits. For instance, an ancient African drum in a museum may be an object of the art but a musicologist will want to play on it to find out what kind of sound it produce and to what use it is put, an archeologist will be interested in examining the wood work to determine its make and age, a historian will be curious about its historical origin and dispersal pattern while a sculptor will find the carvings and decoration on the body of the instrument of interest. Thus, an original drum becomes a subject of intense study of scholars of many disciplines.

In other words, if a nation or tribe with a fantastic culture refuses to devise means in which it would be transferred to generations, the culture will gradually die, this is where Haruna Isola's Apala music has paid its due in transformation of culture in the last five decades in Yorubaland of Nigeria.

#### **CHARACTERISTICS OF APALA MUSIC**

Apala music is an aspect of African popular music described as pop-music. Pop music is any popular music. Until recently, there was an erroneous impression in Nigeria that pop music comprises only those that had its foundation in Europe. In origin, however, music is adjudged good only when there is public acceptability. Therefore, pop music is any kind of music that enjoys a wide public acceptance. Apala is one such African pop music. Apala music shares a number of features and characteristics with other African popular music. One of such salient characteristics is audience participation. There is no separation between Haruna Ishola and his audience at any formal performance. Indeed, the audience sense of enjoyment and satisfaction provide motivation for better performance or further exploration and creative ingenuity in the artiste. Without the audience, Apala on stage is incomplete, unless during practice on a new album/disc or musical studio.

The element of Haruna Ishola's Apala sound are simple. The music is filled by a pulsating rhythmic made up of 2-3 Omele (variable pitched talking drum, tied to a fixed pitch) played in counter point to each other, Agidigbo, a box thumb/piano whose plugged keys and beaten side form a rhythmic ostinato at the length of music. Textural variety is added through the use of Sekere (beaded calabash rattles) and Agogo (metal bells). The heart and soul of the music emerged from the interplay

between the lead talking drum, his rich baritone vocals and the call and response harmonies between him and his background singers. The resulting effort of the music is so melodic and has a tantalizing effect that it is sometimes easy to forget that its rich sounds are created with only percussion and voice. The elements are simple but the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The Apala music is drenched and soaked in the full power and richness of the Yoruba language and its complex use of proverbs. Metaphors, Oriki (praise song) and other tools of the praise singer's trade.

### **HARUNA ISHOLA'S CONTRIBUTION TO CULTURE AND MORAL VALUES IN YORUBALAND**

It may be instructive to locate at this juncture the Haruna Ishola and the Yoruba being referred to in this study. Firstly, Yoruba speaking communities do not only exist in Africa but also in other countries like Cuba and Brazil. Such Yoruba speaking communities outside Nigeria have been referred to as the Yoruba in Diaspora (Fadipe, 1970). For the purpose of this study, however, references are restricted to the Yoruba found in the Southwestern part of Nigeria in West Africa. The reason for this is not far-fetched. The ancestral home of the Yoruba in the diaspora is taken to be in Nigeria, where the Yoruba culture has been viewed to thrive best. The Yoruba are one of the most advanced ethnic groups in Nigeria with rich cultural values. They have Ile-Ife as their ancestral home and Oduduwa as their eponymous hero (Idolor, 2005).

#### **HARUNA ISHOLA (MON) 1919-1983**

Haruna Ishola Adebayowas born in Igbaire, Oke-sopin Ijebu-Igbo, in the present day Ogun state of Nigeria in 1919. His father was a native doctor and a singer. In 1947, Haruna Ishola developed an interest in music. He collected some boys from his area and formed his own group. Haruna Ishola and his Apala group, shortly after, waxed his first record titled "Orimolusi Adeboye" in honour of the reigning traditional ruler of Ijebu-Igbo at that time. The record, however, was a commercial failure but undeterred, Haruna Ishola took another plunge in the record making business in 1955 with another one titled Late Orimolusi Adeboye, on DECCA (West Africa) records label. This brought him instant fame. Oroki Social Club reported to have sold over 5 million copies is still selling till date. Haruna Ishola was one of the most respected and incisive singers in Nigeria, he adapted and struck to a strong traditional approach as a result of his fame belief in African culture as he rejected

the use of Western instrument in his musical line-up. However, he made use of Yoruba proverbs, idioms and Quranic verses in his songs more than any of his contemporaries. In 1981, he bagged "Baba Music" (Father of Music) award for merit in indigenous music and in the same year in recognition of his contribution to the cultural, social and economic awareness of the country, the then Executive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Commander in Chief of Armed Forces, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, presented him with national award of Members of the Order Of Niger (MON) (Ajetunmobi *et al.*, 2010).

He added another feather to his cap by opening Phono-disk on the 29th of June, 1981. It was the first 24 track musical studio in Africa. Haruna Ishola could be regarded by all standard as an historiographer of African philosophy. His music took him to places that were only mythical to most of the people of his time. Some of the places where he made his mark are Ghana, Cotonue Republic of Benin, Cote d'ivoire, Monrovia (Liberia), Guinea, London (UK), United States of America (USA), Rome (Italy), Stockholm (Sweden), Zurich (Switzerland), France, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Budapest (Bulgaria), Germany and Saudi Arabia. His overseas trip completely eclipsed the opinion previously held that he was a local champion. He reported that not only was there a place for Apala in Europe, he actually got them to participate in his performance. He succeeded greatly in demonstrating to the world that Africa has a contribution to world music, civilization and technology. Haruna Ishola died on November 9, 1983 but not without having among his sons a promising and worthy successor described in the following manner by Benson Ibonye.

Perhaps the greatest young and upcoming musician in the country today is Musiliu Haruna Ishola, the son of legendary Apala-King who is following the foot step of his father. Muslim started from the solid base of his father, through imitations of his father's vocals, reflections, melodic nuances and rhythms renovations. He gradually gathered momentum and confidence to arrest the interest of a large Apala audience. With every successful album released, it became clear that growing Musliu was not only going to maintain the stardom of his father but excel him in all the ramifications.

### **CONTRIBUTION TO CULTURE AND MORAL VALUE**

**His philosophy:** Haruna Ishola's music were laced with philosophical rendition relating to research ethics, educations as an instrument of emancipation and social upliftment, honesty, integrity, life after death and reward of good deed among others.

He was consistently consistent throughout his life times with his philosophical statements that are pregnant with meanings in shaping the African values and cultures. Some philosophical sayings in his music:

Kiniadijegbojuletoni o nfe lo baawodi sere

**Translation:** What confidence does a hen has to play with a hawk.

**Use:** He who dares to set himself up against a man more powerful than him will only destroy himself.

A nju won ko sewilejoi jailarako tan boro

**Translation:** We are superior to them cannot be quoted as an argument in court; a quarrel due to envy is not settled by the passage of time.

**Use:** This is advice to a man who is getting on in the world and whose contemporaries are, therefore, envious of him; he is advised to be careful to avoid misunderstanding with his friends on this account.

Abiyamootaagan, eninsiseota ole

**Translation:** A mother arouses envy in a woman who has no child of her own.

**Use:** One who is working hard in a higher position arouses enmity and in a lazy man.

Aringbereniyio mu oyedele, asaretetekobaoye je

**Translation:** He who walks slowly (acts intelligently) will bring the title home; he who runs (acts recklessly) misses the chance of enjoying a title.

**Use:** It is unwise to make hurried decisions on important matter, one should think clearly and weight the consequences even if it takes time before acting.

Ajanaku kuro ninu mo ri ohun kan firi,  
bi a ba ri erinki a ni a ri erin

**Translation:** An elephant deserves more than caught a glimpse of something; if researchers see an elephant, let us admit we have seen an elephant.

**Use:** When one comes face to face with an important thing, a thing of beauty or virtue, it is better to acknowledge the fact than try to belittle it.

Se mi mbi e l'ogun ore

**Translation:** Offend me and I'll question you is the medicine for friendship.

**Use:** The best way to maintain friendship is to question one another when there is misunderstanding.

Ajati o yo, kii ba aiyo sere

**Translation:** A dog which has just had its food does not play with one which is hungry.

**Use:** A successful man is lively to become an object of envy to his unsuccessful friends so that he must be careful in his dealings with them and also with other people.

Pasan ologinni ko si lowo ekute ile

**Translation:** It is sheer stupidity and inexperience for a cat to challenge a cat to fight.

**Use:** This is said when someone through sheer ignorance of the issues involved, endangers himself and his reputation.

Elete ko paal'aju eni ehin eni li a ngbimoran ika

**Translation:** He who plans the downfall of another does not do so in his presence.

**Use:** We must be careful in all we do as there may be people lying in wait to trip us up.

Eni ti aigbon pa l'o po eni ogbon pa ko to nkan

**Translation:** Those killed by lack of wisdom are numerous. Those killed by knowledge do not amount to anything.

**Use:** This is a warning to people who are foolish enough to think that they know everything that they know everything and are unwilling to take advice from other people. It is wise to listen to the advice of others.

Ika ko fe ki a reru ki a soo, ori eni ni iso ni

**Translation:** The wicked man does not want us to carry our load and put it down; it is as destiny which helps him put it down.

**Use:** No one wishes you well; you yourself must make a special effort to succeed in life.

Bomode ba ju ba fagba a ba agba jeun

**Translation:** A child who pays respect to elders will dine with them.

**Use:** It is always profitable for the youth to respect the elders.

This is just a tip on the ice-berg of Haruna Ishola's philosophical sayings in his music; however, there is no doubt that Haruna Ishola's had used his Apala music in promoting the cultural values of the African nations through his philosophical approach also, when rehearsal have been completed and a level of perfection has been attained, a day for grand performance is fixed. Relatives, friends and well-wishers from far and near are invited to grace the occasion either during naming or burial ceremony. He used the opportunities of the music to re-write extended family community and neighbourhood histories and the resolution of despite and controversies (Idolor, 2005).

### CONCLUSION

Music is a concept, a design and product of mankind. Its presence in Africa societies is an indicator of its valuable roles and functions in their traditional life patterns. Traditional African music, especially Apala is highly philosophical and educative as they contain the core values and history of the people. However, while it is not our position in the study to condemn foreign music we insist that only those aspects that can project African musical peculiarities should be accepted. Composers, arrangers, researchers, broadcasters and performance should be conscious of this identity and protect it accordingly like what Haruna Ishola did. They should use their privileged positions as flag bearers of their professions and culture to ensure a solid foundation that is good enough for future generations to build on. If indigenous music must serve the purpose of mankind,

particularly in ever-changing situation, music practitioners and historians must understand the trend of new thoughts, activities, tastes and institutions in contemporary society and suitably, adapt their practice without losing forms of the peculiarities of African musical identity and heritage.

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