Intercultural Creativity in the Composition of "Ikenga"– a Contemporary Igbo Symphonic Orchestral Music

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Abstract

The concept of creative musicology posited by Euba has become the subject for fusion of ideologies in African music creation. This has given Nigerian art music composers the reason to develop complex musical forms in their endeavor to create music(s) that reflect their thoughts and satisfy their audience. This article seeks to investigate the extent to which this concept has impacted on the composers of indigenous art music in Igbo context. Data for this article was drawn from reviews of publications on musical interculturalism and analysis of a representative contemporary Igbo symphonic orchestral work entitled "Ikenga." Findings suggest that, the concept has greatly improved the compositional styles and patterns of indigenous art music in the Igbo milieu.

Keywords: intercultural composition, Nigerian Igbo music, indigenous music idioms, Western music idioms, contemporary symphonic orchestral work

Introduction

African musical culture enables the communities/ societies to exhibit their cultural heritage musically. Musical culture in African societies bears and showcases the belief and value system of the society, thus represents the people. It is in this vein Onyeji (2015:12) notes that "…indigenous African music is the cultural product of the people, not an individual." The Igbo ethnic group is located at the south-

eastern Nigeria. The Igbo community has rich music-cultural heritage they use in various celebrations such as the *ofala* festival which is widely known and attributed to the new yam festival. These music depict the cultural heritage of the people. These festivals feature assorted traditional musical instruments, dance steps, and forms which are mostly composed orally and performed communally (Onyeji, 2015).

With the advents of Christian missionaries in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria in particular, Western education and colonialism modified the quality of indigenous African music (Ofuani, 2022:1). It further marked the beginning of Western civilization in Nigeria. This espionage introduced foreign music cultures to already existing African music culture as westernization pioneered the radical inflow of Western musical instruments, performance, and compositional techniques into Nigerian societies. This move garnered the introduction of the Western system of education in Nigeria, Igbo land inclusive, led to the acquisition of Western music theory and its creative styles, amongst others. The positive benefit of the contacts is, Igbo people musical idioms and creative style have been widened greatly due to the Western musical influence (Onyeji, 2015:8-11). Today, musical creativity in Igbo society has become an intercultural practice, embracing the integrations (vertical and horizontal) of Western and indigenous creative elements. The introduction of the art music genre into Igbo music culture is pivotal to the creation of complex music with possible fusions of idiom, instruments, composition styles, and performance techniques that would satisfy the musical need of its modern audience. This has left the contemporary indigenous music composers in the Igbo region with wealth of ideas and choices to make in creating their music(s).

Composing African Music in the Pre-Colonial Era

African music is "a total package that includes all aspects of the life of man, including his history, genealogy, language, religion, politics, philosophy, art, tools, and all artefacts that define him as a man" (Green, 2019:6). It is a musical depiction of the totality of man. African music is a reflection of the beliefs, and social-cultural background of the Africans (Onyeji, 2015). From these assertions, one can clearly deduce that African music has its roots in the indigenous personality of the African. It is not far-fetched that, the making of African music is highly influenced

by the traditions and events happening with the indigenous African community. This is because, African music is performed mostly in the society during festivals, rituals, and events likewise to celebrate heroic acts or reprove ills found in the societies (Nwamara, 2018). Thus, African music in its traditional sense, is orally composed by the skilled songsmith and rehearsed with the master instrumentalists who is hoped to be the key instrumentalist(s) during performance. These master instrumentalists create rhythmic backgrounds that accompany as well as emphasize specific elements and tones applied by the songsmith. The art of musicianship in the African musicology is aurally retained and transmitted from generation to generation (Onyeji, 2015). Ibekwe (2016) acknowledged this stand when she says "Obviously, the issue of generational transfer can never be over emphasized as its effect is always living among us" (2016:7).

Indigenous African music composers in pre-colonial times adopted and developed structural forms that were alien to the Europeans in the composition of their music. These structural forms of African music are the theories and practices of the society that form the foundations for the composition of African music. Ekwueme (1974:4) said "…because oral tradition was the principal African method of 'recording' theories and practices, researchers had to devise a special way of looking at these cultural practices and analyzing them, in terms intelligible to Western readers." The cultural practices of African society could not be easily determined by mere application of Western techniques of analyzing the forms of African music as a result of the complexity of the cultures. Therefore, Ekwueme concluded that it is only the African musicologist that is most qualified to analyze and set up principles regarding the structural forms of his cultural music because, African music adopts a folk approach which, on its concept, has a different aesthetical value.

It is further clarified by Euba (2015) that, indigenous African music in the pre-colonial era was presented to incorporate dance and music as a whole, where dance was used as an energetic expression of the non-vocal part of the music. Oikelome (2019:3) underscored the role of dance in the African music thus: "It is performed in many cultures as a form of emotional expression, social interaction, or exercise, in a spiritual or performance setting, and is sometimes used to express

ideas or tell a story." Nzewi (1969:2) in Oikelome (2019) referred to Africa music as "…music of the dance." This is because, dance cannot be divorced from music and vise-versa in the African music. Music and dance are usually presented as a whole package in performance and dance helps to explain or amplify the unspoken elements of music.

African Music in the Post-Colonial Era

It is an obvious fact that the advent of the colonial masters in Africa marked the emergence of the Western music educational system in Africa (Onyeji, 2015). Ibekwe (2016) observed that, this system of education did not provide a curriculum for the teaching, learning and mastery of African styles of instrumentation by scholars, but favoured the teaching and mastery of Western instruments and their styles of play. That said, Western education has brought about great changes in the composition of African music by modern creative musicologists. Ofuani (2022) stresses that it brought about advancements in the development and creation of indigenous African art music. Omojola (2001) further explained that, it was the advent of the Europeans into Africa, through the missionaries that brought about the European system of education which further introduced the study of European compositional styles and techniques for music. This espionage set the tone for the introduction of art music with major improvements to the composition styles and techniques in African music. This has set the tone for the grading of composers in African. Thus, African composers can be graded under three broad categories: those who strictly comply to the dictates of the western rules of composition, those that seek a balance mixture of both Western and African musical elements in their composition; and those who, by intent or accident apply the western rules but, greatly adopts the styles of instrumentation, idioms and styles of the indigenous Africa (Mensah, 2011).

The first category of African music composers classify their works as 'Western' as there is nothing 'African' in it. The structures, instrumentation styles and idioms adopted are pure replicas of the Western culture. The only thing that is Africanized with these composers and their works is the identities of the composers. The second category of African composers seek to create a bridge between these two cultures, the Western and the African, by inter-marrying the compositional techniques. These composers adopt the harmonic structures and idioms of the

Western cultures and blends it with rhythmic and melodic structural patterns of the African styles. While, the third composers adopt the theoretical backings of the Western culture and doses his composition with African musical idioms, structures and patterns both melodically and melo-rhythmically (Nzewi, 1997). The importance of an African composer incorporating African harmonic structures and contextual idioms in his/her composition affords his/her audience the opportunity of appreciating his/her creativity and the rich music heritage of Africa and national identity (Nzewi, 1997).

Contemporary Approach to Issues in African Art Music Composition

The contemporary composer is faced with issues of composing or showcasing indigenous African music with their indigenous musical instruments in its fullness. Nketia, (1962) held this position when he said: "…there appears to be a widespread tendency to use these instruments not in large heterogeneous ensembles, but in homogeneous ensembles, or in limited combinations in which one type of instrument predominates." Some writers have attempted to address issues that limit the growth of indigenous African art music. Some of these issues are summarized thus:

Language barrier: In choral music, indigenous African art music is largely influenced by tonal inflection (Onwuekwe, 2011). Ekwueme (1974) noted this feature as one of the predominant features of African music against its European counterpart. Nketia (1974:184) outlined the importance of paying attention to the intonation of indigenous African languages in order not to convey the wrong messages. Madimabe (2014) advocated for the radical adoption of indigenous languages into musical elements like tempos, dynamics, amongst others. Though, Onyeji (2015) may have inferred indigenous African music to mean the music created by the African people for their celebration, his opinion therefore goes to streamline African indigenous music as music primarily designed and performed by Africans and for Africans in celebration of their cultural heritage. Therefore, the use of indigenous languages in their choral music is inevitably a crucial part of the indigenization process. In my opinion, since the creation of indigenous African music is for a particular African society it addresses, then, the interest of the multicultural society is placed on a balance leading to the need for the interpretation or probably, a translation of the message to a common language that

the multicultural society could understand (which is not always readily available). Although, Ofuani (2022b) research findings indicated that sometimes some African composers do not match word tones in their composition but the messages are still understood, it should be noted that matching of word tones are problem to consider in the composition and performance of African choral music, unlike its Western counterpart.

Divergent cultural applications and styles of play indigenous instruments: Udofia (2010) noted that indigenous African musical instruments and their styles of play are peculiar to their place of origin and use. This is inconsonance with Nwamara (2008) observations of different instrumentation styles he noticed with the Anglican Youth Fellowship (AYF) and the Atilogu dance group of the Igbo tribe. Again, Ibekwe (2015) was of the discovery that, some musical instruments are gender specific and culturally defined in terms of use, instrumentation, and learning. She notes thus: "Moreover, musical instruments from African perspective can never be divorced from their cultural values, rituals, beliefs, functions, usages, and prohibitions" (2015:15). The point is that, different cultures apply different techniques of play apply to a particular generic instrument and at different circumstances which makes it difficult to determine the standard technique(s) for indigenous African music instruments.

Shortage or unstandardized production of indigenous musical instruments: The crude traditional ways of organology is highly a contributory factor to the shortage and production of non-standardized indigenous musical instruments. This issue is well elaborately discussed in Ofuani (2011; 2014; 2015; 2017).

Limitation of intellectual resources and manpower to direct and teach indigenous instrumentation patterns: Ibekwe (2015) was equivocal in noting that there are no formal educational structures that provide room for the mastery of the indigenous musical instrument. She said: "There is no provision for the practical teaching and learning of indigenous musical instruments. Students are assigned to different lecturers to learn various Western instruments of their choice, but no such arrangement is made available for indigenous instruments' teaching and learning" (2015: 13). This problem was further worsened by the teacher's lackadaisical attitude towards the teaching and learning of indigenous African musical

techniques. She further pointed out that academic excellence or intelligence does not determine the "learnability" of the indigenous musical instrument pupils. Her point was predicated on the discovery that, all the master instrumentalists of the indigenous music she subjected under review were educated. These limitations to the acquisition of indigenous music instrumentation geared towards the society's perceptions, cultural beliefs, norms, and value orientations to certain musical instruments (Udofia, 2010).

The Concept of Music Interculturalism

Kimberlin & Euba (1995:1) defines intercultural music as "[…] that in which elements from two or more cultures are integrated. The composer of this music usually belongs to one of the cultures from which the elements are derived but this does not necessarily have to be the case." Kimberlin and Euba (1995) disagreed with the notion that composers of this type of music must belong to one of the cultures he derives his elements from. Their argument is hinged on the premise that, most composers of creative music(s) are affiliated to one of the cultural elements they tend to portray in their music. But, this is not mostly true because, intercultural activities can take place between a composer and his compositions. Intercultural activities take place when a composer composes a music that has no affiliation with his origin. Though his music may not be an intercultural music, but because he composed his music in a style that is alien to his origin, intercultural activity has taken place.

Interculturalism is a fusion of two or more cultural ideas, norms, or perspectives (Nwamara, 2018:3). This underscores the fact that musical coherence exists in this fusion. This aspect of coherence or tolerance is further stressed by the definition given by the Spring Institute: **"**Intercultural describes communities in which there is a deep understanding and respect for all cultures. Intercultural communication focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms and the development of deep relationships. In an intercultural society, no one is left unchanged because everyone learns from one another and grows together" (2024:2).

In the later definition, one can deduce that, interculturalism advocates for mutual understanding of the individual elements of the society, and respects each cultural trait that exists in one culture; while creating room for the fusion of other cultural

elements from other cultural backgrounds without affecting the integrity of each other. All elements are presented as one product. In this aspect, a new form of cultural blend is formed. This is at variance with the concept of multiculturalism, which on the other hand fails to recognize cultural integrations but rather, a creation of cultural boundaries that allows other cultural elements to exist independently even within the same geographical sphere.

Music promotes communication (Oehrle, 1996). Cultural divergence in most cases is the reason for various disharmonies and crises (Nwamara, 2018; Crooke et al, 2024). This is because, societal beliefs, norms, and value systems vary from society to society. Crooke et al (2024) believes that cultural harmony can be achieved through music interculturalism which provides the foundation for sharing psychological experiences that abound in music. He cites Berry et al thus:

> For persons of different cultural backgrounds to interact with and to adapt to each other, they need to share some basic psychological [and social] features (processes and capacities). Even though their competencies and performances may differ greatly across cultures and individuals, these basic psychological [and social] features enable individuals and groups to interact with, and to understand each other. These commonalities are required in order to achieve mutual accommodation within plural societies (Berry, 2010: 97).

Akpabot (1986) pointed out that interculturalism helps to foster national unity. This is because, it allows and shares cultural traits building tolerance within a society. Music interculturalism, from my point of view, allows cultural integration of resources and performance leading to wider acceptance and co-existence between the two integrated cultures.

African Pianism

Akin Euba is generally referred to as the 'father of African pianism' (Lee, 2022). African pianism is a concept he coined based on the percussive similitude the Western piano has when compared with the African version like the xylophone, marimba, and thumb piano. Akin explained his concept thus:

> The piano, being partially a percussive instrument, possesses latent African characteristics. Techniques in the performance of xylophones, thumb pianos, plucked lutes, drum chimes, for which Africans are noted, and the polyrhythmic methods of African instrumental music, in general, would form a good basis for an African pianistic style (Lee, 2022:5).

Akin explored the potential of the piano's percussive nature in the creation of intercultural music by fusing African compositional techniques with European compositional techniques. He deployed a creative approach by imitating the instrumentation technique of the Yoruba *dundun* drum. In the creation of his intercultural African music, Akin adopted complex African metric systems, idioms, and strong rhythmic patterns predominant in African compositions for the piano (Lee, 2022). Omojola, (2001) summarized the intent of Euba's creation to reflect his quest for national identity. Omojola said: "Euba later realized the impact Western tradition on his initial musical development and the need make his works culturally relevant to his African background" (2001:5). On this note, Guan Tao (2021), discovered that the study of intercultural music plays a vital role in realizing one's national identity. He summarized his research findings thus:

> The result showed that intercultural music courses (intervention groups 2 &3) significantly enhanced the ethnic identities, intergroup attitudes, national identity of adolescents…In contrast, the regular music courses (intervention group 1), and non-music courses…did not significantly enhance student's identities and attitudes (Guan Tao, 2021:4).

African pianism is an intercultural concept aimed at fusing indigenous African (Nigerian) music concepts built on foundations of folklore as rooted in the African music culture, fusing same with the Western concepts, instruments as well as adapting such fusion for performance in a multi-cultural society. Interculturalism is the window for cross-cultural integration of cultural elements (Kimberling & Euba, 1995) as mentioned earlier. This opens the door to creativity. That is one of the reasons Ofuani (2022) referenced Euba (2014) who considered the concept of "intercultural musicology" at some point as "creative musicology". Ofuani (2022) said that Euba (2014) considers the term "intercultural creativity" as parallel with "creative musicology" and "intercultural musicology." Though the word interculturalism is of political discourse, it was adopted and given a musical

meaning to reflect a musical approach to cultural identity (Kimberlin & Euba, 1995). This concept, in my opinion, tries to express the cultural perspective of music in its indigenous form as it affects the people's interest.

Presentation and Analysis of a Representative Intercultural Music Composition

"Ikenga" is the title of a contemporary Nigerian-Igbo intercultural music composed for the symphonic orchestra by Henry Uche Uzowulu-Ezenwa – an emerging Nigerian-Igbo literary art music composer with Masters of Arts (M.A.) in composition. Henry is a choir director and organist in the Anglican Communion and has composed numerous indigenous anthems for the church.

In the piece – "Ikenga", fusion of Western harmonic principles, styles, and instruments with African indigenous instruments and idioms are creatively explored. The piece abstractly (impressionistically) centers on the theme "heroism" and explores the African imagery scene in contemporary times while streamlining the heroic adventures, gallantry, and praise of the warlords with metaphoric sound patterns. Precisely, the piece is a close abstraction/ representation of the indigenous music of the Igbos from the Abiliba clan in Abia State, Nigeria. The idioms applied therein is a musical depiction of their heroic adventures in their musical culture.

The piece adopts an Igbo title Ikenga, which is a deity that possesses mind of warriors. The name connotes might, difficulty, bravery, or strength. The piece is subtitled "war-lord" which is the personality title attributed to the deity and exhibited by the warriors. The tonality is centered on key E-flat major and comprised of twenty-two (22) musical instruments with eight (8) indigenous African instruments (marimba, slit-drum, conga, clapper-less bell substituted with bongos, hand-bell substituted with bell, wooden-blocks, maracas, pot-drum substituted with bass drum). The Western instruments are Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in B flat, Bassoon, Horn in F, Trumpet in B flat, Tuba, Cymbal, Timpani, Violins (1 & 2), Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass.

The piece commenced with the indigenous instruments, the pot drum marks the first down beat at every 2nd bar. The Marimba adopting a step-wise progression in contrary motions starting at the 2nd beat of bar. Syncopated rhythm was applied

across the percussion instruments between bar 12 to 14. Melo-rhythmically, this creative style helps the composer to reinforce the indigenousness of the piece:
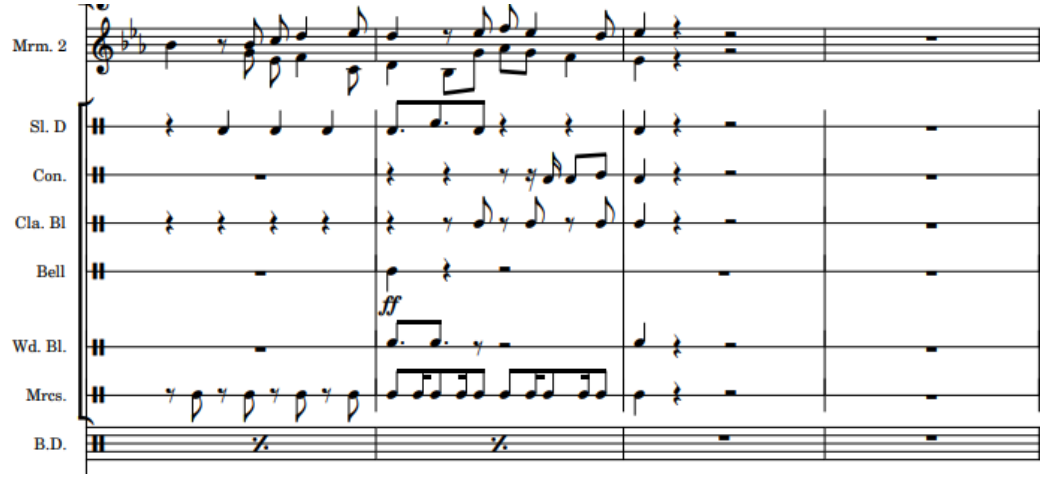


Fig. 1: An example of melo-rhythmic feature in the piece

Fig. 1 is an example of the call; while the full orchestra responded at bars 5 and 6. The composer essentially explored Western idioms from bar 17 with reference to fugue, harmony, and sequence across the instruments:
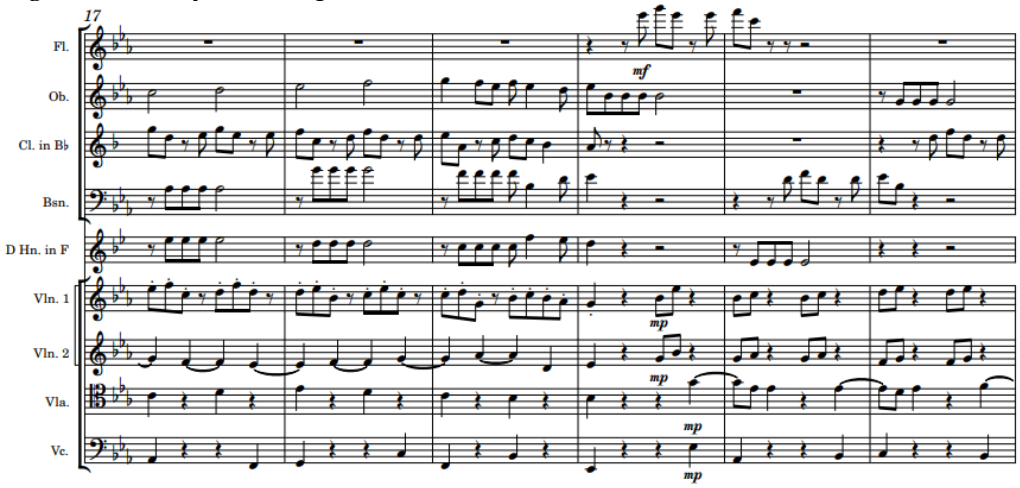


Fig. 2: A fusion of Western and African harmonic and contrapuntal styles

From bar 31, the composer applied "call and response" between the oboe and the strings. Hemiola rhythmic style is applied across the percussion specifically between woodblocks and maracas from bar 31. Minimalism technique is adopted in the marimba minimalism to reinforce the melodic role the oboe and introduced a new motif in melodic form. This melody is established in C minor:
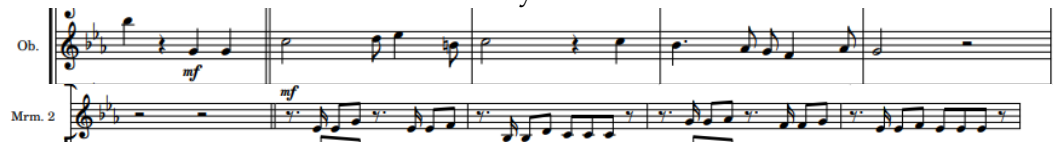


Fig. 3: A rhythmic minimalism excerpt from the oboe and marimba line

The maracas instrumentation technique reveals the deliberate and consistent application of syncopated rhythms via hemiola and shifting of rhythmic structures, thereby creating energetic rhythms and varied textures at various points. This creative style is typical to indigenous music of the Igbos from the Abiliba Clan of Abia State, in the South-Eastern State of Nigeria. See illustration in bars 1, 12-13, 61-65, 71-75, and etc.
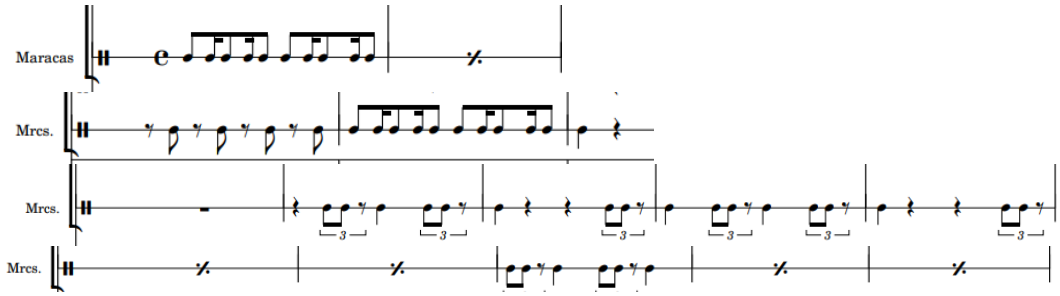


Fig. 4: Some indigenous rhythmic patterns creatively adopted the composition

The creation of melodies were inspired by the tonal pattern of words drawn from the Igbo region. For example, the Horn's melodic line in bar 61 is derived from the Igbo word 'dike n'aba mba n'ike" (warrior responds to threats with strength). The Clarinet also enacts in Igbo language in bar 63 and 64, thus "O ji ọsọ agbakute ọnwụ" translated thus 'he gallantly embraces death':
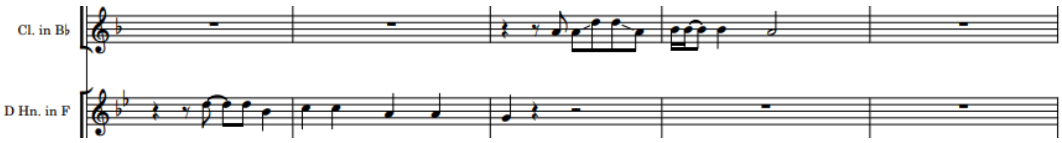


Fig. 5: An example of abstraction heroic adages through the use of the words tonal patterns

Bar 91 is an example of integration of two idioms. The African instrument playing "indigenous rhythmic patterns" (see Ofuani, 2014b) through the application of hot-rhythms fit achieved through the application of complex-rhythmic structures like triplets (hemiola) by the woodblock, maracas, and hocket applied across the conga and slit-drum. While the Western symphonic applied Western idioms such as the application of functional harmony and fugal/ contrapuntal movements:
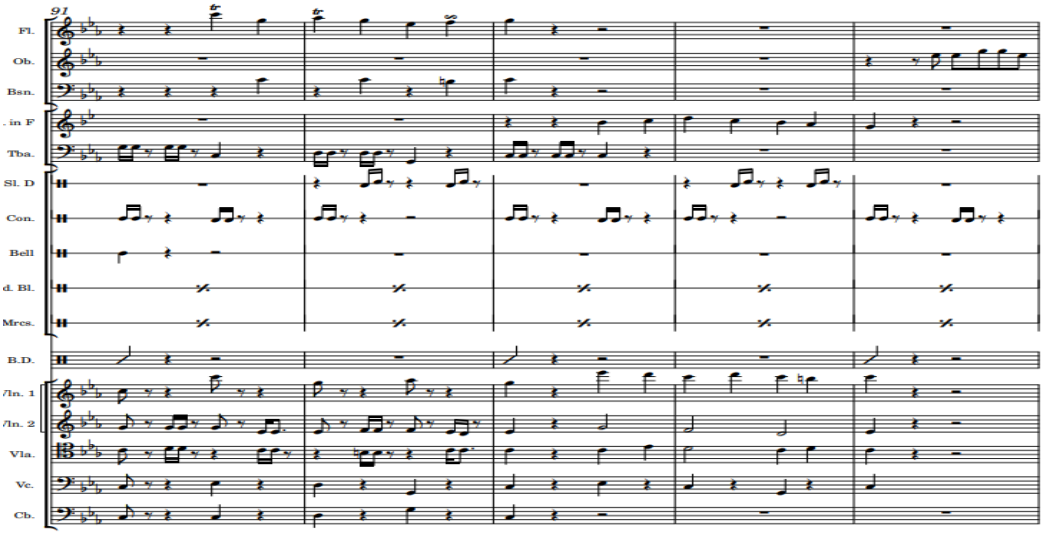


Fig. 6: A highpoint of integration of African instruments and rhythmic patterns with Western harmony

It is my conclusive opinion that, the mixture of African (Igbo) instruments and creative techniques with the Western counterpart qualifies this composition as an intercultural work.

Summary

The composition of indigenous African music requires consistent application of indigenous African idioms creatively. Consistent and deliberate attempts must be made by composers to incorporate writing for the African orchestra. Though few of these indigenous instruments are limited in production, inflexible to move, and techniques of play may vary between regions; the composer is at liberty to recommend substitutes that may be found in any geographical area as this will guarantee "perform-ability" of the composition in the diaspora.

Furthermore, fusion of instruments, styles of play, compositional techniques are possible and pivotal to sustaining indigenous music through interculturalism. This will make the music to be performed and enjoyed within and outside the indigenous homeland and viable structurally and financially.

Conclusion

This research aimed at investigating the possibility of fusing symphonic orchestra with indigenous African orchestra to a greater extent in an ensemble. The question to how successful will the fusion result in proving the indigenousness of the music to qualify same as an indigenous African music is resolved. The point here is that, by adopting only African compositional techniques in such fusion, the ensemble plays the indigenous African idioms only and this qualifies the music as indigenous African music. The researcher delved further into fusion of both compositional techniques of Africa with the West. This enabled the composer to further prove the intercultural nature of his composition through the balance synchronies of both cultures in orchestration and idioms.

Finally, by the choice of indigenous instrument and style of play applied by the researcher in all his compositions, he is able to create an indigenous intercultural African music that still remains valid in Western context and retains its indigenous African straits despite the application of Western music theories and techniques at various points. Therefore, the musics can be performed and enjoyed in any culture as standard scoring technique is used in presenting the pieces and substitutes for limited indigenous instruments are suggested.

Findings

In the course of this research-composition, it observed that:

a) Core application of the Western harmonic rules and rudiments will always drive the music towards Westernization; while strict adherence to African harmonics and rudiments would drive the music towards 'indigenousness'. Therefore, a combination of Western compositional styles with Africa's will eventual create an intercultural art music that would undoubtedly represent the two musical cultures.
b) Indigenous instruments are vital to retaining the 'African-ness' of musical compositions owing to their uniqueness in expressing the percussive nature of African music and complex rhythmic structures are easily executed and expressed.
c) Cultural norms and values (which vary between cultures) impact the application of the style of play of African instruments. It therefore becomes difficult for composers of indigenous music to artistically represent a music culture he is not acculturated or enculturated.
d) Composers of indigenous African music in the Igbo ethnicity are strongly incorporating intercultural elements of music in their compositions through fusions of composition styles, instruments and techniques of play. These are exemplified in works of Onyeji, Nwamara, Ofuani, amongst others.
e) The global community is shifting towards indigenization; composers of indigenous music are better poised to drive this shift through the deployment of creative musical knowledge and cultural heritage towards the creation of intercultural art music. This will create a balance of audience and performance

Recommendations

Composing indigenous African art music comes with its challenges posed by cultural backdrops. These backdrops can be averted by virtue of technological advancements which exists in the multicultural environment. It is highly recommended that, the contemporary indigenous African art music composer should consciously and deliberately utilize these multicultural benefits in championing the advancement of indigenous African art music.

Government should encourage production of indigenous musical instruments to meet with international standards. Teaching of play patterns of indigenous music instruments should be included in the school curricular to guarantee sustainability and academic or formal transfer of cultural music heritage.

Though, Akin Euba, Christian Onyeji, Alvan Nwamara, Sunday Ofuani, and few others have some celebrated works on intercultural music, there exists the need for consistent contributions and compositions of indigenous intercultural music to Nigerian art music repertoire to substantially increase its volume, create the market, enrich the audience and globally champion national peace and unity amongst cultures. This is a wakeup call for all indigenous African music composers to embrace intercultural/creative musicology.

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