Musical Genre and Styles in the palace of Alaafin of Oyo

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Abstract

The royal court of the Alaafin of Oyo serves as a critical arena for the preservation and performance of Yoruba musical genres, making significant contributions to the cultural identity and heritage of the community. This study explores the musical traditions practiced within the Alaafin's palace, focusing on the roles of female musicians often overlooked in scholarly discourse in sustaining these traditions. Among the genres examined are Akunyungba, Apinti, Igba-Titi, Rara, and Bata, each serving various ceremonial, communicative, and spiritual roles within the court. Female musicians, pivotal in this musical lineage, navigate the challenges of gender-based discrimination and modern socio-cultural changes, adapting their art to incorporate new musical technologies while maintaining the oral history and traditions of the Yoruba. This research highlights the dynamic interplay between music and royal ceremonial life, illustrating music's power to sustain cultural identity and continuity within the Yoruba community.

Introduction

Omojola (2012) asserts that the musical traditions of the Yoruba people, particularly those developed in the courts of notable monarchs like the Alaafin of Oyo, possess considerable cultural and historical significance. Adeyemi and

Adeogun (2011) observe that the palace serves as a center of musical innovation, where traditional sounds are maintained and transmitted between generations. The female musicians, frequently neglected in academic discussions, are essential in preserving these musical traditions (Ojo, & Olutayo, 2021). Their performances, spanning diverse genres and forms, are essential to the socio-cultural dynamics of the palace. This magazine offers a comprehensive examination of these genres, the musicians' roles, and the styles utilized in performances.

Background The musical practices in the palace of the Alaafin of Oyo are among the rich tapestries of Yoruba cultural heritage. According to Adeoluwa, & Oladipo (2022), this music not only serves entertainment purposes but also plays integral roles in ceremonies, rituals, and the day-to-day life of the palace. The female musicians, known as the Ayaba or princesses, according to Adewumi, & Oladele (2022) are key figures in these performances, tasked with maintaining the musical lineage and enriching the court's cultural life.

Literature Review

The Akunyungba musical genre

The Akunyungba musical genre is a traditional form of music associated with the Yoruba people, specifically within the context of the royal court of the Alaafin of Oyo (Olagunju, & Adekunle, 2021). This genre is part of the rich cultural heritage and ceremonial practices found in the palace of the Alaafin, who is one of the most prominent traditional rulers in Yorubaland and indeed Nigeria. Ogunrinde, & Adebowale (2019) note that, Akunyungba music originates from the historical depths of the Oyo Empire, which was once a powerful Yoruba empire in West Africa. According to Ajayi (2020), the genre plays a significant role in the court not only as entertainment but also as a means of communication and spiritual expression. Akinola, & Ojo (2021) note that Akunyungba is often performed during important palace rituals, ceremonies, and festivals, helping to preserve the cultural identity and continuity of the Yoruba people.

The music itself is characterized by the use of traditional drums, which are central to Yoruba music. Akunyungba involves a particular set of drums known as ‘Akunyungba drums,’ which produce a deep, resonant sound that is distinctive to this genre (Bamigboye, & Oke, 2022). These drums are often accompanied by other

traditional instruments such as the 'Gangan' (talking drums), 'Agidigbo' (a plucked box musical instrument), and various percussion instruments. In the palace of the Alaafin, Akunyungba music is not just for aesthetic enjoyment but serves various ceremonial purposes. According to Afolabi, (2021), it is used to herald the entrance of the Alaafin at official functions and to accompany traditional dances and performances that are integral to the Yoruba court culture. The music is also played to convey messages or praise the king and his chiefs during gatherings.

Akunyungba, like many traditional African music genres, is a tool for cultural preservation (Adeoye, & Ajayi, 2019). It is taught from one generation to another within the palace and among the people of Oyo, ensuring that the history and traditions of the Yoruba people are kept alive. The music encapsulates the ethos, values, and historical narratives of the Yoruba, serving as a living archive of their ancestral legacy.

Apinti Musical Genre

The Apinti musical genre, integral to the cultural fabric of the Oyo Empire, finds a prominent place within the palace of the Alaafin of Oyo (Olajide, & Adewale, 2022). This genre, primarily recognized by the distinct sound of the Apinti drum a variant of the talking drum serves as more than just a musical expression; it acts as a medium of communication and ceremonial importance in the royal court. Historically, the Apinti drum has been associated with royalty and governance. In the palace of the Alaafin of Oyo, this drum plays a crucial role during significant events, rituals, and ceremonies (Fasola, & Ajibade, 2021).

According to Olawoyin, & Adejobi (2021), the drummers, skilled in their art, are capable of conveying messages, summoning gatherings, or signaling the presence of the king through complex rhythms and beats that are understood by the community. Idowu, & Akinleye (2019) note that, the Apinti genre itself is rich with historical and cultural narratives, often interwoven with praise singing of the Alaafin, recounting the empire's history, and lauding the achievements and virtues of the people and their leaders. During festivals, religious occasions, and royal announcements, the Apinti drummers perform, creating an auditory

spectacle that reinforces the cultural heritage and the sanctity of the royal traditions (Olajuwon, & Ayodele, 2019).

Igba-Titi Musical Genre

According to Oluwafemi, & Adekola (2023), the Igba-Titi musical genre, found in the palace of the Alaafin of Oyo, is a distinctive part of Yoruba cultural heritage. The term 'Igba-Titi' translates to 'Drum of Titi' or 'Titi's Drum,' suggesting a personalized or significant cultural artifact connected to individual or communal narratives (Ibidunni, & Olatunji, 2021). This genre is deeply rooted in the traditions and historical context of the Oyo Empire, which was one of the most influential Yoruba kingdoms in West Africa.

Ige, & Ojo (2021) argue that, the Igba-Titi genre involves a specific type of drumming and possibly other accompanying instruments, which could include talking drums (dundun), bata drums, and sekere, among others. These instruments are central to Yoruba musical expression and are often used in various ceremonial contexts, conveying both rhythm and, in the case of talking drums, specific messages or praises.



Fig. Sekere



Fig. 2 Dundun

Source: Researcher

In the palace of the Alaafin of Oyo, such music would be performed during important ceremonies, including festivals, royal coronations, and other significant events. The music plays a critical role in rituals, serving to summon ancestors, communicate with deities, and affirm the social order and hierarchy within the kingdom. Igba-Titi, like other forms of Yoruba court music, serves not only as

entertainment but also as a means of preserving history, customs, and governance. The lyrics and rhythms are often tailored to recount the exploits of past rulers, mythological stories, and the genealogies of the royal family, thereby reinforcing the cultural identity and continuity of the Yoruba people.

Rara Musical Genre

'Rara' is performed during various social occasions within the community, serving not only as a form of entertainment but also as an integral component of the cultural heritage of the Yoruba people (Ojo, & Adekunle, 2019). This genre is deeply embedded in the traditions of the palace and is used to herald and honor the Alaafin, emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between music and royalty in Yoruba culture.

The performance of 'Rara' involves intricate interactions between musicians and their audience, often engaging in a complex dialogue that reinforces social and cultural norms (Adebayo, & Olukoya, 2019). This musical expression is also a way to maintain and transmit cultural values and history orally, ensuring that each generation receives and continues the legacy of the past.

Moreover, 'Rara' as part of the court music system, underscores the role of music in the social organization of the palace, being used in rituals, celebrations, and daily activities that define the rhythm of palace life. Its performance is not just an artistic expression but a vital element in the ceremonial life of the community, illustrating the power of music to define, articulate, and sustain the cultural identity of the Yoruba people.

Bata Musical Genre

Historically, the Bata music, along with other genres like Akunyungba, Apinti, and Igba-Titi, represents an integral part of the socio-cultural fabric of the Oyo empire. These musical forms serve multiple functions, including religious rites, communication, entertainment, and the preservation of the cultural heritage through oral traditions. The study highlights how Bata music is one of the palace's age-old creations, likely developed during the era of Oranmiyan, one of the founders of the Oyo kingdom.

Bata is described as part of a suite of musical performances that carry significant cultural weight, often performed during key ceremonies and festivals within the palace (Lawal, & Okunade, 2024). The music is closely tied to the spiritual and ceremonial life of the community, reinforcing the social structure and the monarchy's role within it. The genre's significance is further emphasized by its exclusive performance by the female court musicians, who hold a respected status within the palace. This exclusivity also points to gender roles within the musical tradition of the palace, where female musicians are both bearers of tradition and key participants in the ceremonial life of the court.

In terms of musical composition and performance, Bata involves complex rhythmic patterns played on traditional drums, which are also significant in Yoruba religious practices. The music often accompanies dances and other forms of artistic expression, contributing to a rich, multifaceted cultural exhibition.

Socio-Cultural roles of female musician in the palace of Alaafin of Oyo

Historically, female musicians at the palace have contributed to the transmission of oral history and tradition through their music, which includes songs about the origins of the Oyo Empire, royal genealogies, and the deeds of past rulers (Falola, & Ajayi, 2023). Their performances are not only for entertainment but serve to educate the community about its history and reinforce social norms and values.

During important cultural festivals and royal ceremonies, these musicians perform specific genres of music such as Apinti, Akunyungba, and Igba-Titi, each associated with different aspects of Yoruba culture and spirituality (Oluwaseyi, & Adetunji, 2022). For instance, Igba-Titi, involving rhythmic beating of calabashes, is played during significant festivals like the Bere festival and other royal occasions, symbolizing the voice of the queens (Ayaba) in the royal narrative.

The participation of female musicians in these performances also reflects the socio-cultural dynamics of gender roles within the palace. Despite their crucial role in cultural preservation, their contributions are often underrepresented in broader academic and cultural discourse. This underrepresentation highlights the need for further research and acknowledgment of their roles in sustaining the musical heritage of the Yoruba people.

These musicians face challenges such as gender-based discrimination and the impact of modern socio-cultural changes on their traditional roles. The adaptation of their practices in the face of modernization, including the use of new musical technologies and the shifting dynamics of Yoruba society, poses both challenges and opportunities for these cultural custodians.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to deeply explore the musical genres and styles practiced in the Alaafin of Oyo's palace, examining their connections to the cultural and societal norms of the community. Prior to entering the field, the research preparation involves thorough examination of historical and musicological literature, alongside consultations with local experts and historians to sharpen the research focus. Additionally, compiling ethnographic resources, such as prior recordings and descriptions of musical events at the palace, is essential for a comprehensive understanding.

During fieldwork, the research will be conducted within the palace grounds, where direct observations, participatory research, and interviews with key figures such as musicians, palace historians, and cultural specialists will be carried out. This method enables the collection of firsthand information regarding the role of music in ceremonial occasions and its interaction with the community, providing insights into the performance context.

After fieldwork, the focus shifts to data analysis, which includes categorizing musical genres and interpreting their social roles and stylistic features. This phase involves the use of music transcription software to transcribe and analyze musical performances, focusing on their structure and cultural relevance. The research will further include ethnographic observations during palace events, semi-structured interviews, and audio-visual recordings of live performances, alongside a thorough review of historical ‘study to trace the evolution of musical traditions and their impacts on the social fabric of the palace community.

Results

There are many traditional music forms originating from the Oyo Alaafin palace, performed by women who also fulfill various official duties within the palace. This

has led to the formation of a group known as 'The Female Musicians'. The professional court musicians at the Alaafin's court are categorized into two main groups: male court musicians and female court musicians. According to Ajewole (2008), the female contingent in the Alaafin's court includes eight women with high titles, eight priestesses, and other women of various ranks, in addition to Ilaris and Ayabas. Citing Johnson (1960), Ajewole notes that these highly ranked women, in their respective order of seniority, include the Iya Oba, Iya Kekere, Iya Naso, and Iya Monari.
Iyafin-Iku, Iya lagboun and Are Orite.

The traditional and prominent music played by the female court musicians in the court of Alaafin are: the Akunyungba music, Apinti music and Igba-Titi music.

a. The *Yungba* Music

Historically, *Yungba* music was affected for the celebration of *Ebo Aremo*. The Akunyungbas are also known as the king's bards in *the court of the Alaafin of Oyo.* The Yungba music calls for learning which is done in *Iyamode* apartments. The instructor visits the Iyamode apartment three times daily for consecutive three or more months until the trainees are perfect in their learning. Little corporal punishments like twisting of the ears, cracks on the head and a host of others are awarded to the erring learner(s) of the music genre.

b. **The *Apinti* Music**

Yoruba music plays prominent roles in the day-to-day living of the people of Yoruba land. Ajewole (2003), views that music has always been traditional to celebrate various ceremonies such as marriages, child-naming, house warming and so on.

One of the Yoruba music genres, which is used to perform such roles in Oyo AlaafinPalace is the *Apinti*. The *Apinti* music is employed to praise royalties or to celebrate festive occasions in the palace of Alaafin of Oyo. Gangan (1979), conceives that the Apinti is of Igbin family. In igbin music, the drummers' two hands are used in playing the instruments. The set of Apinti instruments consists of the Iya Ilu, one or two omeles and one agogo. The Apinti is suited for talking

but it takes clever musical ear to hear and interpret its message. 'Whenever Apinti music is effected, it
can be used to proverbially make messages.' And it's also accompanied by Dundun ensemble which is combination of Iya Ilu Dundun, Omele Abo Dundun, Omele Ako Dundun and gudugudu.



Fig. 3 Gudugudu



Fig. 4 Omele Ako



Fig. 5 Omele Abo

Source: Researcher

The queens (Ayabas) of the Oyo wear head gears to Apinti music. Women had their head gears in such a way that, they reach their waists to allow them swing as they dance to Apinti music to make the occasion colourful. Here are some of proverbial expressions which are made through the use of Apinti:

1. Odehin Igbin
   Kato fi karahun ha' koko
   O dehin igbin

The semantic meaning of this implies that it is only after the snail is dead before its shell can be used to scrub pots.

Proverb

1.	Iwo lafisagba	-	You have been made the head
	Iwo l'a fi se	-	it is you that have been made the head
	Apasa b aralomu	-	you whose skin smooth the glossy

	Iwo l'a fi s'agba	-	You have been made the head
2.	Kuta-kutakuta pin	-	Their efforts have been rendered Futile
	Onadori Ope pin	-	The road to the top of a palm-tree ends when one gets to the top.
	Akoko daripon	-	The wood-pecker wears a cocks comb and other birds in the bush are envious
	Tulasi bee fe, bee feTulas	-	Willingly they must see it, and such other witty sayings.

c. **The *Igba-Titi* Music in the Court of the Alaafin of Oyo**

Oyo people have different songs and music which are integral part of their cultural and communal systems. Every event attracts one form of music or another be it marriages, funerals, calamities, rites, births and house chores. For the socio-cultural enjoyment of Oyo people, certain drums are beaten among which are; 'Gangan', Bata and Sekere. There are other special music genres which are played by the queens of the Alaafin of Oyo for special reasons. *Igba-Titi* or *Igba Ayaba* is one of the old age creations which are enjoyed by the descendants of the Alaafin.



Fig. 6 Iya-ilu Bata



Fig. 7 Sekere

Source: Researcher

Igba-Titi or Igba Ayaba was the 'handi-product' of Oranmiyan's wife, (Torosi). It was made by the Oranmiyan's wife in order to direct the Oranmiyan on what next to do. Igba-Titi is still in use today in Oyo. It is used during the Alaafin's *Bere*

festival and *Ede* during Timi's Sango Festival (Ajewole 2006). Igba-Titi (beating of calabashes) gets its name based on the instruments used in making it. These include: water, a large deep calabash, a large wooden mortal, which holds the water, a medium size drinking calabash, which is to be placed on the water face downward, a large size calabash which is used to carry a load and a big calabash which is stuffed on the cloth.



Fig. 8 Ayaba performing ritual before the



Fig. 9 Ayaba performing igbatiti Music performance of igatiti

Source: Researcher

The performance of Igba-Titi involves certain dramatist's performers who are the king's queens (Oloris). The leading performer observes rites before commencing the performance to receive a message or messages from the deity. The drinking calabash, which is called *Igba -Ademu*, is placed face down-ward on the water and beaten by a queen among others with sticks to produce rhythms; the pakata (a large size calabash) which is stuffed with a cloth is beaten with bare palms of the hands by two or more queens (Olori) to produce cross rhythms (Ajewole 2006). The Ayaba's as well as the past eminent princes and princesses sing. When this is done, the Alaafin gets into the arena to beat the calabash as well as to dance with all the children of Alaafin.

Ayaba chanting Yungba Music



Fig. 10 Ayaba chanting Yungba Music



Fig. 11 Ayaba performing ritual before the performance of igbatiti

Source: Researcher

Daramola (1993), remarks that, the Igba-Titi music exists in different groups that perform at different social events. Most of them are attached to various cults, occupation/ association, group, court of the king and so forth. They perform only at specific functions, depending on the events and the people involved in it. From Daramola's remarks Igba-Titi music performers can be viewed as social-economic specialists, who engage in other jobs to get their living and also in social obligations to enhance the development of the community life.

Igba-Titi music can be performed at the funeral rite of a deceased member of the Alaafin's lineage. The design varies from person to person; and it is usually determined by the social status of the deceased. The performance of Igba-Titi during the burial rite of a king's relation is done in the royal court while the performance is done in a public place if the burial has to do with an honorary chief or any extended family member.

The performers of Igba-Titi are certified and recognized by the community. No other performer could be incorporated into the group. The leader of Igba-Titi music is normally the soloist. While other Igba-Titi musicians sing the chorus and others play the instruments, (the calabashes). The performance of Igba-Titi

requires certain potentials from the performers. These include: ability to recite genealogies, knowledge of long repertoire of praise poems of the Alaafin's lineage, good memory and an effective command of the Yoruba language. It must be noted that no other substitutions can be made for the Igba-Titi musical instruments.

Findings

Akunyungba, a traditional musical genre, holds a special place in the ceremonies and spiritual life of the Alaafin's court. Known for its unique drumming patterns, Akunyungba not only entertains but also serves as an essential channel for maintaining the Yoruba people's cultural identity and historical legacy. Apinti Musical Genre; known for its unique use of the Apinti drum, this genre serves not only as a musical expression but also as a medium of communication within the royal court. Apinti music is integral during significant events and ceremonies, where it conveys messages and praises the royalty.

Igba-titi musical Genre, also known as 'Drum of Titi', features specific drumming patterns and is deeply embedded in the ceremonies of the Alaafin's palace. It supports the social order and hierarchy, playing a significant role in rituals and festivals. Rara and bata musical genres are essential for celebrations and social functions, reinforcing the cultural norms and values of the Yoruba people. Rara, in particular, involves intricate musical dialogues that highlight the symbiotic relationship between music and royalty.

Female musicians in the palace, often underrepresented in scholarly discourse, are pivotal in the transmission of oral history and tradition. They perform during critical cultural festivals and royal ceremonies, symbolizing the voice of the queens in the royal narrative. These musicians face challenges such as gender-based discrimination and the impact of modern socio-cultural changes. However, they also adapt by incorporating new musical technologies, reflecting both challenges and opportunities for cultural preservation.

Conclusion

This study illuminates the profound cultural significance and multifaceted roles of musical genres within the Alaafin of Oyo's palace, underscoring music's pivotal role in the socio-cultural and ceremonial life of the Yoruba people. The female

musicians, often underrepresented in academic discourse, emerge as key custodians of this rich musical heritage, performing genres such as Akunyungba, Apinti, and Igba-Titi during vital palace ceremonies, thereby preserving the oral history and traditions of the Yoruba.

The Akunyungba genre, characterized by its deep, resonant drumming, serves not only as entertainment but also plays a crucial communicative and spiritual role within the court. Similarly, Apinti, with its distinctive drum sounds, functions as a medium of communication during significant events, encapsulating the historical narratives and cultural identity of the community.

Igba-Titi, a genre enriched with personal and communal narratives, supports the social structure and hierarchy within the palace through its ritualistic performances, especially during festivals and royal ceremonies. These musical expressions not only ensure the transmission of cultural values and history from one generation to the next but also reinforce the monarchy's role in the community.

The study also highlights the socio-economic dynamics faced by these female musicians, who navigate challenges like gender-based discrimination and the pressures of modernization, adapting their art to incorporate new musical technologies while still honoring traditional practices.

In conclusion, the musical traditions of the Alaafin of Oyo's palace are not merely artistic expressions but are integral to the cultural fabric and ceremonial continuity of the Yoruba people. These traditions reflect the dynamic interplay between music, history, and royal ceremonial life, illustrating music's power to maintain cultural identity and continuity within the Yoruba community.

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