Educational and Archival Importance of Documenting Traditional Music

By

Olanipekun Olakunle George
Department of Music, Federal College of Education,
Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria.
lakunlegeorge@gmail.com
+2348035124829

&

John Ajewole, Associate
Department of Creative Arts (Music Unit)
Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos, Nigeria
pastorajewolejohn1@yahoo.com
+2348034882948

Abstract

The safeguarding of traditional music through documented practices, including staff notation and transcription, is essential for the protection of cultural heritage and the promotion of educational initiatives. This research analyzed the historical development of music archiving, tracing the journey from medieval handwritten notations to contemporary digital recording technologies, and highlights the shift from physical archives to digital formats. Ethnomusicology is instrumental in this process, utilizing techniques such as fieldwork and participant observation to engage with music in its cultural setting. The results reveal the difficulties in adapting the inherent variability and intricate rhythms of traditional music to Western notation systems, while also maintaining cultural sensitivity and accuracy in transcription. Although digital technologies have transformed the accessibility and preservation of music, they also present challenges, including digital decay and issues related to intellectual property. This study emphasizes the necessity of achieving a balance between accessibility and cultural integrity in the archival process, ensuring that traditional music continues to enhance global cultural understanding and education.

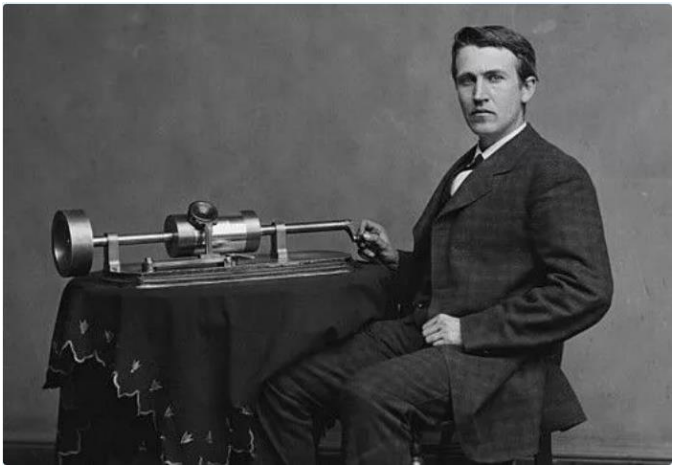
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Background to the study

Music archiving has a profound history that is closely linked to the overarching goals of cultural preservation and historical documentation. According to Alex (2015), collectors, preservers, catalogers, and providers are crucial in archiving music to create historical records. This practice is vital for safeguarding cultural heritage and facilitating musicological research. Nketia, (2000) argue that, prior to the emergence of modern technology, archivists relied on written notation and early recordings to preserve music. Dating back to medieval times (i.e. Western societies), music manuscripts both handwritten and printed sheet music were the primary tools for music preservation (Aniedi, 2011). Significant contributions came from churches, royal courts, and affluent patrons who commissioned and safeguarded these music manuscripts.

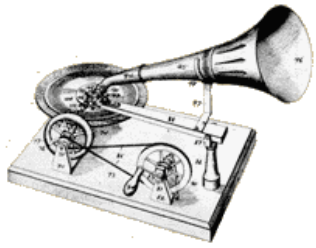
The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed transformative advancements with the emergence of sound recording technologies. The phonograph, created by Thomas Edison in the 1870s, along with subsequent innovations like the gramophone, enabled the recording of music in a format that could be replayed for the first time.

August 12, 1877: Thomas Edison Invents the Phonograph



Source: https://constitutingamerica.org/august-12-1877-thomas-edison-invents-the-Phonograph-guest-essayist-paul-israel/

This technological breakthrough revolutionized the preservation of music by allowing for the accurate capture of performances, including the subtle nuances of individual interpretations (Billington, 2021). As the use of recording technology expanded, various institutions began to establish formal practices for music archiving.



Scrap book [excerpts]



E. Berliner's gramophone



Motorized Gramophone

Source: https://www.loc.gov/collections/emile-berliner/articles-and-essays/gramophone/

According to Euba (1976), Archive of Folk Culture at the Library of Congress in the United States, which was established in 1928, commenced systematic efforts to collect and safeguard recordings. These archives primarily concentrated on folk and traditional music, with the objective of documenting genres and styles that were transmitted orally and thus vulnerable to extinction.

Agawu, (2003) notes that, higher education institutions, conservatories, and public organizations broadened their collections to encompass both musical scores and recordings. Lambrechts (2016) asserts that, the mid-20th century marked a significant increase in the creation of specialized music libraries that not only housed music but also offered resources for academic research. The advent of digital technologies in the late 20th and early 21st centuries revolutionized the field of music archiving. According to Gallinger et al., (2017), the digitization process introduced innovative approaches to preservation, restoration, and accessibility. While digital archiving enhances public access to music, it also poses challenges such as digital deterioration.

Adedeji (2016) notes that, the field recordings are crucial for preserving music, especially in ethnomusicology. According to Schwartz, and Cook (2002), Alan Lomax and other pioneers significantly preserved global musical heritage by recording diverse cultural expressions. These recordings are essential for documenting languages, dialects, and cultural stories that might have been lost. Today, digitalization presents both new opportunities and challenges for music archiving. Copyright issues, metadata management, and the vast amount of digital content require innovative solutions. Efforts to archive music from platforms like YouTube and SoundCloud show how digital consumption and preservation are evolving.

Digital Archiving Techniques of documenting traditional Music

Digital archiving techniques preserve the audio quality and cultural context of traditional music through various methods. According to Onuora-Oguno, & Nwamara (2014), high-quality audio recordings capture the details of music, while field recordings document music in its cultural settings. Nwamara (2017) argues that, video recordings, in conjunction with audio, introduce a visual aspect to the archival process, documenting dances and performance gestures that are frequently essential to traditional music. Metadata is crucial as it offers searchable information about music, performers, and recording contexts, stored in digital formats and repositories following international standards like OAIS (Agawu, 1995).

Digital archiving is not without its challenges and points of contention. Berliner (1993) argues that, the process of digital enhancement and restoration sometimes alter the original sound qualities. This led to debates about the authenticity and integrity of archived music. Improper documentation raises concerns about cultural sensitivity which can lead to misrepresentations of cultural heritage. Nicholls (1996) notes that, the accessibility of digitized music raises questions about intellectual property and the commercialization of cultural artifacts. This is crucial for archivists in balancing accessibility with the respect for artists' and communities' rights.

Snipe (1996) notes that, technological dependency complicates preservation efforts, as digital decay and obsolescence pose significant risks. Digital archiving requires substantial and sustained funding, especially for genres that do not attract commercial interest. This highlights the need for dedicated resources to support the preservation of invaluable cultural heritage.

Impact of Archiving on the Revival of Traditional Music

According to Livingston (1999), archiving protects traditional music from extinction when there are few living practitioners, preserving it for future generations. Askew (2002) notes that, this preservation gives global access to various musical traditions, potentially broadening appreciation and sparking revival. However, Barber (2000) argues that, the selective nature of what gets archived introduces biases that might emphasize certain traditions over others. This sometimes distort the cultural landscape.

Archives, while serving as invaluable educational resources that inspire musicians and scholars alike, inadvertently constrain the natural evolution of traditional music (Castaldi, 2006). Presenting music as static snapshots, archives encourage a purist, unchanging view of music traditions. This conflict with the inherently dynamic nature of oral and performative cultural expressions. According to Charny (2000), the approach risks stifling creativity, as new artists feel pressured to replicate rather than innovate based on archived works.

The revival of traditional music through archiving navigates the ethical terrain of cultural and commercial exploitation. Digital access to archives makes traditional music more widely available. It also raises concerns about commodification and the potential detachment of music from its cultural contexts. Cohen (2012) asserts that, managing musical revivals sensitively is crucial to ensure that originating communities benefit from global dissemination and avoid prioritizing commercial gains over cultural integrity.

The Role of Traditional Music in Cultural Heritage

According to Otondo (2016), traditional music captures and preserves a community's historical narratives and cultural ethos. It conveys history, values,

and social norms often missed in conventional education. DeNora (2012) argues that, songs and rhythms recount pivotal events, impart a profound sense of identity and continuity, and connect people to their heritage. These musical forms entertains and foster community bonds at gatherings such as festivals and dances.

Schippers and Grant (2016) asserts that, the commercialization of traditional music poses significant risks, potentially diluting its authenticity and cultural significance. As it becomes a vehicle for economic gain through tourism and crafts, the emphasis has shifted towards marketable aspects. This makes it risk the original essence of the music. Campbell (2003) posits that, the allure of global pop culture widens generational gaps, challenging the relevance of traditional sounds to younger audiences and raising concerns about maintaining its integrity.

Documenting and preserving music traditions passed orally is critical, as they risk being lost without proper archival efforts. Traditional music reinforces exclusionary practices within communities. This limit participation to certain groups and perpetuating social divides. According to Schwichow, Anna Hellmann, and Mikelskis-Seifert (2022), this complexity requires careful consideration to balance preservation, inclusivity, and adaptation in the face of evolving cultural dynamics.

Methodological Approaches in Ethnomusicology

Ethnomusicology, which studies music within its cultural contexts, uses diverse methods to understand how music functions in societies (Chai, Muhammad, and Yoesbar Djaelani, 2020). According to Zamotin (2020), researchers primarily engage in fieldwork, immersing themselves in communities to observe and participate in music-making. This approach provides insights into the cultural significance of music but time-consuming and subjective.

Agyekum, Kofi, Joshua, and Adwoa (2020) notes that, participant observation deepens understanding by directly involving ethnomusicologists in music performances, gaining insider perspectives but challenging objective observation. Interviews and oral histories complement these observations by adding personal
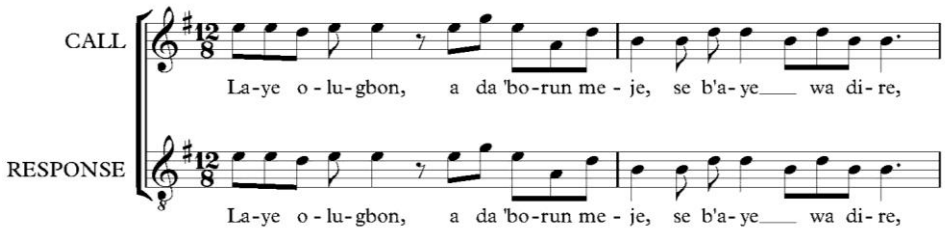
and historical narratives. Scholars however argues that, these methods rely heavily on the subjective memories of interviewees.

Technological methods such as recording and transcription is crucial in ethnomusicology. It allows detailed analysis and preservation of musical performances. Recordings capture and archive music for detailed examination without altering performance dynamics, while transcription documents and analyzes musical elements, although traditional notation may not fully represent all aspects (Booth, 2016). These approaches introduce biases, especially when Western notation systems are applied to non-Western music, potentially misrepresenting the music's true nature.

Ethnomusicology benefits from interdisciplinary approaches, integrating techniques from anthropology, sociology, and history to enrich understanding. This integration according to Vasic (2006), allows researchers to place musical phenomena within wider social and historical contexts. It offers richer insights into the role and impact of music in culture. This broad approach demands expertise across various fields and may dilute the musical focus. Ethical considerations, such as the impact of research on communities and issues of intellectual property, remain paramount, pushing the field towards continuous methodological evolution.

Documenting traditional musical practices through staff notation and transcription

Documenting traditional musical practices through staff notation and transcription is an essential strategy for preserving and studying musical heritage. Staff notation, a standard notation form in Western music, uses symbols to represent pitch and rhythm, while transcription involves converting performed or recorded music into this written form.



This approach faces challenges such as capturing the inherent variability and improvisation typical in traditional music, adapting non-Western scales and complex rhythms to Western notation systems, and accurately representing stylistic nuances.

The benefits of this documentation are significant; it helps preserve musical practices at risk of fading, provides educational resources that facilitate global knowledge exchange, and supports scholarly research. Ethnomusicologists often make field recordings that are transcribed later, collaborating directly with musicians to ensure nuances are captured accurately, and increasingly, they utilize digital tools to assist in analyzing and notating complex aspects of traditional music.

However, the process must be approached with cultural sensitivity and a commitment to accuracy to respect and faithfully represent the music's cultural significance. This involves recognizing the personal and communal value of traditional music and ensuring that transcriptions do not misrepresent or simplify these rich traditions. Through such careful documentation, traditional music can be preserved for future generations while enhancing our understanding of global musical diversity.

Methodology

The study involves musicians, cultural custodians, and audience members. Researcher engage directly and stay for extended periods within the palace of Alaafin of Oyo to observe music performances, local rituals, and the daily routines of musicians. The researcher collected observational notes, video recordings, and audio recordings of these performances. The researcher transcribed audio and
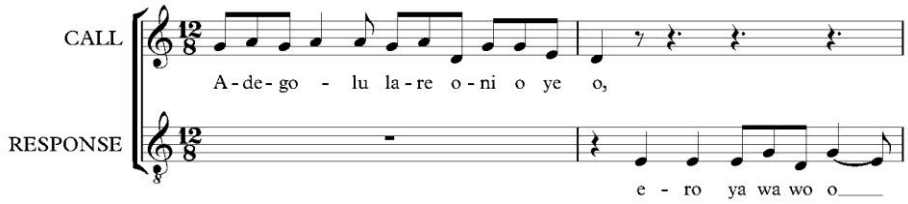
video recordings into staff notation, meticulously noting variations and improvisations that reveal deviations from traditional musical patterns

Discussion of findings

The texture of the female music reflects the syncopation which is created by the effect of interwoven rhythmic accompaniment of the calabashes of the calabashes. The texture creates interlocking rhythm with a singular unified-rhythmic structure. An important thing about is that the calabash beaters and the court bards establish both in the forms of folk text and prose song texts and political text.

Song 1: political song

Adegoolu lere oni o yee o
Ero ya wa a woo o
Olayiwola lare oni o ye o
Ero yaw a wo o
Ero ya, ero ya, baba mi ero ya
Adegoolu oko ayaba
Ounje lo n sagbaa dewe
O johun po mo ojo – Adegoolu
O johun po mo o jo – Atanda



The texts are also based on the use of figurative expressions. The soloist makes use of metaphors, historical allusion and proverbs which exploit the heroic deeds of the past Alaafins. The texts are reflective in the philosophical views of the soloist. To understand the texts, one needs to have acquired some knowledge of oral tradition related to the court of Alaafin. The textual analysis of the selected female court music indicates the following:

Song 2: Praise Music Text
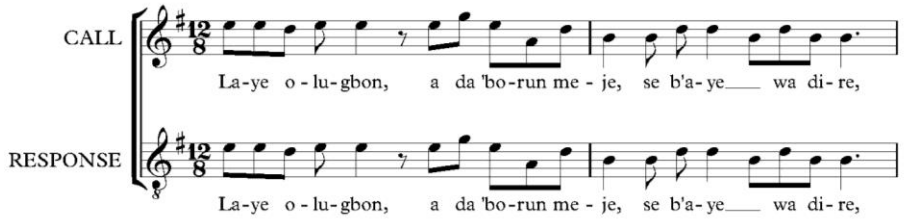
The praise music/songs in the court of Alaafin is not a detailed narration of incidents. They are just allusions to incidents related to the Alaafin Adegoolu:

Adegoolu oko ayaba
Ounje lo n sagbaa dewe
O johun po mo ojo – Adegoolu
O johun po mo o jo – Atanda
O johun po mo o jo – Olayiwola

Song 3: Historical Song Texts

Some of the female court music are historical in nature. They make reference to different events that happened during the various rulerships of some Alaafins:

Laye olugbon, a daborun meje
Se baye e wa dire
Laye Aresa a daborun mefa
Se baye e wa dire
Laye Atanda, awa ti rigba to dun mu
Se baye e wa dire
Kabiyesi re o Adeyemi ki baba o pe fun wa



The text above reflects the modrical happenings during the reigns of the great historical leaders who were prominent during their rulership. The three names identified represent different keeps from difference house commander- Olugbon the king Ile Igbon, Aresa, the King of Iresa and Atanda, the (Alaafin) of Oyo.

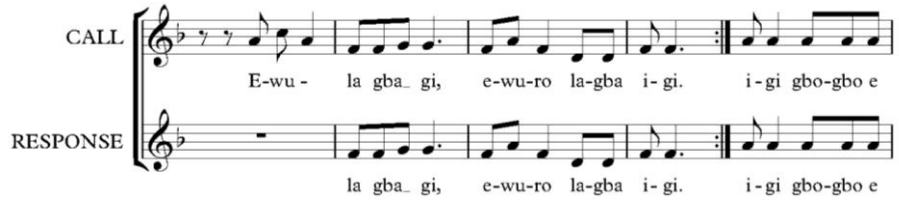
The soloist identified the traditional dresses in wearing the kings Ibowu as well as the good experience of the people during the ruling period of each of the kings more importantly during the Alaafinn of Oyo, Atanda.

Song 4: Entertainment and Informative Songs

Some of the female court music in the court of the Alaafin of Oyo are used to entertain and inform.
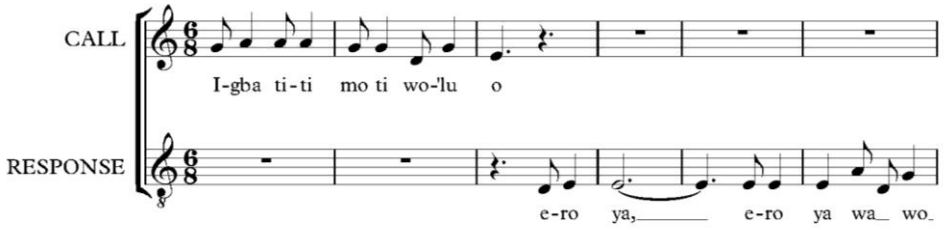
Ewuro lagba Igi

The test depicts the fact that, leader deserves to be honoured and submissive to. The soloist requests from the other people giving of due respect and honour to Alaafin who is being represented by the bitter leave which is the eldest of all trees.



Song 5. Igba-Titi mo ti Wolu o

The text reveals the soloist call to audience who are expected to view the performance. In studying the introductory part of the text, it is noted that, there is a noticeable correlation between words and melodic contour in the text. The melody reflects the speech to we applied by the soloist. This gives meaning to the soloist introduction in the text.



Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of documenting traditional music for educational and archival purposes, emphasizing its importance in preserving cultural heritage. The historical context provided demonstrates how traditional music archiving has evolved from handwritten notations to advanced digital recordings. This is to ensure the survival of musical expressions that might otherwise be lost. This transition not only secures music for future generations but also enhances academic research and public accessibility.

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