The Performative Art of Iyabo Awero's Indigenous Music "Baluu"

Oluwatosin John IBITOYE
Department of Performing Arts,
Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria.
oluwatosin.ibitoye@kwasu.edu.ng; +2347064296296

Abstract

Baluu Music is an indigenous secular music in Ilorin, Kwara state. This indigenous music genre is primarily for entertainment in Ilorin and its environs. This ethnomusicological research looks into the performative art of Baluu Music in Ilorin, Using Iyabo Awero's live band which is domiciled in Ilorin, the Kwara State Capital as a case study. This study adopts the descriptive method of research. The participant-observation and interview tools were used for data gathering and the analyses is done from ethnomusicological perspective. This study also looks into other issues such as etymology of the word 'Baluu', the origin and historical development of this genre, performance norms and practices in Baluu music, musical analyses, indigenous forms and styles inherent in Baluu Music, Baluu Dance, Band ensemble, using Iyabo Awero's live band as paradigm. This study discovers that the Baluu music genre is basically a female oral musical art while the male oral musical art usually regarded as a 'brother' to Baluu, is the Dadakuada music. Our study reveals further that, westernisation, modernisation and the influence of technology did not threaten the existence of the indigenous Baluu music. This is because, Baluu music encumbered acculturation and foreign influence in exception to the influence of Islam on the music. This study concludes that indigenous music as an art should not lose its penchant in the artistic and performance parlance. To this end, indigenous music forms would receive more global relevance.

Keywords: *Performative art, Indigenous music, Indigenous musicians, Secular music, Baluu music.*

Introduction

Music in the performance context can be sacred or secular. In some cases, it can be a combination of both. In the sacred context, music is performed and used for the worship of a god or a supernatural being, rites of passage, rituals and religious imports in ceremonies. In its secular context, music primarily serves the purpose of entertainment. Hence, as musicians perform, audience get entertained and they participate. It is for this reason that, there is variety of musical styles in the world. Bruno Nettl (1964) cited in Ikibe (2010, p. 1) conforms that:

> Music is one of the few universal cultural phenomena, for no people is known which does not have some kind of music. In spite of the great variety of musical styles in the world, there is enough homogeneity in musical behaviours to make identification of music as such possible and simple.

Music being a cultural phenomenon makes it unique to different people, society and culture. Baluu music is identified with the Ilorin people and performed in the context of the Ilorin culture. Ikibe (2010, p. 38) posits that, "to Africans, music and dance form an integral part of the people's culture, thus their performances are best done and enjoyed within the context of the culture where such arts are practised, otherwise, many concepts of music and dance could be misinterpreted and misunderstood". In agreement to the foregoing, Emielu (2012, p. 70) corroborates that:

> Ethnic identities have musical components which define a people in specific musical and cultural terms. Musical identity is to a large extent also, dependent on geographical features- vegetation, topography, climate, agriculture of the environment which defines and constrains musical production and practise.

Thus, this study explores the artistic performances of Baluu music in the context of Ilorin culture where it emanated and developed. Our

interpretations and understanding of this genre was drawn from the paradigm of Iyabo Awero's Baluu music band.

Conceptualising Indigenous Music

Indigenous music which can sometimes be opined or termed as traditional music is a type of music which celebrates and portrays the culture of the people. As noted by Ibude (2014, p. 186), Indigenous music "is the material of sound created by Africans resulting in a form and structure that is meaningful and generally acceptable to the people." Jaiyeola, (2015, p. 103), simply see it as a "term for the traditional music of the indigenous people of the world". Indigenous music puts on display, the cultural characteristics and traits of the society it emanated from. Indigenous music is a traditional music form which is deeply rooted in the African cultural representation and a form of cultural identity. Okpala (2016, p. 87) rightly affirm in her research on Indigenous Igbo Music that:

> Traditional music is so much a part of Igbo culture that majority of the people who live in big cities and other places outside their home town organize traditional music ensembles as a mark of identity, to preserve their culture and to serve as a unifying factor that binds them together.

This explains that indigenous music becomes a part of social life of the people in a culture and as such, the euphoric and ecstatic feeling they get from the music is that which the people cannot be disentangled from, even when they are outside their cultural terrain. This type of music is usually performed in the indigenous language of the people and accompanied with their indigenous instruments. Thence, it cannot be denied that this type of music extensively serves as culture indicator. Thus, this study carefully observes the professional art and practise of the indigenous Baluu music in Iyabo Awero's live band.

Baluu Music

Baluu Music is one of the indigenous music forms which emanated and developed in the city of Ilorin, Kwara state Nigeria. There is no record of the specific date/ period that this music genre originated. It has however thrived and swirled on oral tradition. Baluu music is a female dominated indigenous music group, Abiodun (2012, p. 64) corroborates this when he asserts that 'Baluu music is a female oral musical art in Ilorin, a Yoruba speaking community located in the middle belt of Nigeria.' Each of the female artistes performs the Baluu music with her own idiosyncratic uniqueness and style. The name 'Baluu' is a Yoruba word from the English word, 'Aeroplane'. In an interview with Alhaja Iyabo Awero, the President of the Baluu Musicians' Guild in Ilorin, she affirmed that, the music was named 'Baluu' as a product of the type of dance movement that opens the musical performance which is synonymous to the aeroplane's taxiing movement on taxiways and runways before flying. Hence, the term 'Baluu Music' was adopted for this musical art.

Iyabo Awero asserts that Baluu music and Dadakuada music, another Indigenous musical genre found in Ilorin, Kwara State are two synonymous indigenous genres which predominantly belong to both gender (female and male). While Baluu is a female oral musical art, Dadakuada is a male oral musical art. The Baluu which belongs to female counterpart usually opens with an opening dance called the Baluu dance from which the musical genre got its nomenclature 'Baluu', while the male counterpart sings their version of the oral musical art, called Dadakuada without an opening dance. However, Abiodun (2012, p. 64) noted that 'Baluu music is a collaboration of female and male musical organizations. The vocal section is dominated by female singers (lead and chorus) while the instrumental section is dominated by male drummers (lead and supportive drums)'.

It is believed that Baluu Music originated and developed in Ilorin by a group of female musicians who subsequently transferred the art orally to other generations. However, Adeola (2008, p. 196) noted that Dadakuada, the male oral musical art is "the most popular non- religious musical genre in Ilorin and is believed to have originated and introduced to Ilorin from neighbouring villages". The music is an oral music that falls within the Vidal's categorization of what Islamized music is. Baluu music is a song-oriented musical art that is influenced by the ideology and doctrines of Islam. All the exponents (numbering 62 in Ilorin) are Muslims. The song texts are in Yoruba language with Arabic language in its transliteration form. Abiodun (2012, p. 64).

Using Agu's classification of traditional music in Nigeria, the Baluu music falls under the, 'occasional music' category. Dan Agu had earlier classified the Nigerian traditional music into- three types; the recreational, occasional and incidental music. Agu (2000, p. 82). From this foregoing, we can establish that the performance of Baluu Music is occasional and primarily for entertainment purposes. The performance is determined by the type of occasion which the musicians are invited to perform, which may vary from wedding ceremonies, to naming ceremonies, house warming and many more. Also, another determinant of the type of performance to put up is the location and time of the event.

Iyabo Awero's Baluu Band

Iyabo Awero, popularly called Alhaja Iyabo Awero Baluu or simply Iyabo Baluu is the President of the Baluu Musicians' Guild in Ilorin, Kwara state. She was born in Ilorin Kwara state in 1955. Her mother, Alimotu Sadia Awero was a prominent Baluu musician and one of the first generation Baluu musicians in Ilorin. Her interest in indigenous music started from childhood as a result of her mother's music influence on her. Her sojourn into the

professional practice of the indigenous Baluu music could be traced back to a practical training, genetic and oral transfer of the Baluu music art from her mother, Alimotu Sadia Awero who was a prominent Baluu musician.

As a young girl, Iyabo Awero grew up to know her mother as an indigenous Baluu Musician, learnt the art from her and later formed her own band called 'Iyabo Awero Onibaalu'. The Awero which is part of her stage name till date was picked from her mother's stage name and as such could not be removed even after marriage, as its part of her stage identity. Some of her albums include but not exhaustive, *'Idupe'*, *'Ile Oba Ilorin'* and many more. In an oral interview with her, she affirmed that 90% of the women in her band presently are her own daughters who have also mastered the professional practice of the indigenous Baluu music genre. Hence, it is a household art for which the Awero dynasty is known for.

Performance practices in Iyabo Awero's Baluu Music Band

As noted earlier, the style of performance put up by Baluu musicians varies and depends on the type of occasion or event for which they have been invited. It is worthy to note that, larger percentage of melodic lines in the Baluu music is used as speech surrogate which is a popular feature of African indigenous music. From our study, it was discovered that the Baluu performance is usually in four stages: Baluu Dance, Pre performance, main performance and the climatic point.

Baluu Dance in Iyabo Awero's Band

Usually, the Baluu dance opens any Baluu performance. It serves as an opening glee, holding the audience spell-bound as it serves as tool which glues their attention through the entire performance. The Baluu dance, from which the Baluu music got its name, is a tasking movement which is synonymous to the movement of the aeroplane on taxiway and runway. Before the dancers called "Omo Ijo" ascends the stage, the drummers play in

a form of sound check. Starting in an adagio pace, then builds to a complex, brisk and lively tempo, rolling to frenzy, then drops back to a slow and graceful pace (adagio). The 3-member chorus then, starts a call and responsorial prelude which heralds the dancers.

The dance, a pre-rehearsed choreographed movement starts with the dancers in a squatting position, then leap while twirling in a waist and back movement. The dancers, numbering twelve (12) then assumes a floor pattern, where some dancers give the audience a glaring full-back while some face the audience in a bent and flat back position. The dancers usually tie a veil or scarf around their waist to project their movements in a spectacular and glaring waist twirls. The dancers exit the stage in a leaping movement with shoulder jerks indicating the pick-up of the performance.

Pre-Performance, main performance and performance climax in Iyabo Awero's Band

Pre-Performance

Immediately after the dance, the 3-member chorus with a lead singer sing some monophonic melodic lines with one of them acting as a lead-singer and the other two singing a repetitive response. It is worthy to note that the singers in the chorus section were formerly "Omo Ijo" (dancers) but subsequently graduated into the chorus section as it is part of stages in apprenticeship. While the chorus sing the monophonic melodic lines, the leader of the band takes a sitting position at the centre stage. The repetitive responses from the chorus cue in the leader to start the main performance. In the context of our study, the leader of the band is Iyabo Awero herself.

Main Performance

The pre-performance from the chorus sets the mood and creates the platform for the band leader to come in. The leader of the band starts her musical performance with homage to God and then to her mother who

trained her in the professional art of Baluu music. In her homage to God, she commits the day's performance into the hands of God. She sings:

Call: At'orin Atilu	Both the songs and the ` instruments
Response: O dowo're	We commit it into your hand
Call: Oro mi dowo muhammadu tii j'onse nla	I commit my case into the hands of Muhammad who is the great messenger
Response: O dowoo're	We commit it into your hand

In homage to her mother, she acknowledges her and pleads to her spirit not to sleep but to look down and wish her well in the day's performance. She sings:

Odo to ba gbagbe orison re yoogbe	A river that forgets its source will dry off
Iya mi Awero dakunmase sun lorun.	My mother Awero, please do not forget nor neglect me as you keep on resting in heaven

She then proceeds to pay homage to the elders in the land, singing:

Eru agba ni moba o,	I respect the elders
Dasofunjo eru agba nimoba o	Dasofunjo, I respect the elders
Mo ranti'jo, taa'gba o kan mi o,	I remembered the day that I will also become an elder
Eru agba ni moba o	I respect the elders

Afterwards, the chorus establish a response which the leader elaborates upon in a heterophonic texture. One of such choruses says:

Ase e se tun se ee	We shall celebrate more of this
Ase e se tun se ee	We shall celebrate more of this
Baba tiseyi tan, a o tunshe miisi	After this, we shall celebrate another
Ase e se tun se ee	We shall celebrate more of this

This takes the band leader to singing praises of the client who invited her band to perform. She sings their praises from their individual panegyric, to the family and to their town of origin. In a heterophony, the lead-singer keep elaborating on the established theme from the chorus, using praises, facts from histories, proverbs, philosophical sayings, prayers and good will messages. This builds up into a climax which takes the leader from her sitting position into a standing position. This gives more energy and live to the performance as the overall music atmosphere changes.

Performance Climax

Haven sang continuous praises of the client who invited them to the event, the tempo builds up and heralds the presence of the celebrant(s) to the stage to dance. They dance and spray the band leader some cash in appreciation for the performance as they feel elated hearing their praise songs. Different associations/guilds that are present at the occasion come out to dance in groups as they can be seen in their uniform known as “asoebi”. The performance then builds up to a loud energetic music atmosphere with audience participation in the singing and dancing after which the leader introduces a concluding song, bringing the performance to an end.

Band Ensemble

The basic ensemble used for accompaniment in Baluu music is the gangan talking drum ensemble. The number of the drums in the ensemble however, depends on how large the band is. Primarily, *Gangan*, *Omele* and *Akuba* are used. The Gangan ensemble is an hourglass tension drum of the Yorùbás in Nigeria. Idamoyibo (2008, p. 43) submits that "To the Yoruba, drums can speak; hence the name talking drum is associated with the tension drum". The drums are used as speech surrogate to communicate and pass a message between the drummers, singers and/or dancers on stage. In any ensemble there is always a lead. It is the lead drum that does the talking while others play rhythms and accompaniments. Ikibe & Ikibe (2008, p. 88) observe that when a talking drum specialist plays, those who understand the language could easily interpret it into a vocal language. Thus, there could be dialogue between instrumentalists and singers and between instrumentalists and dancers in African Theatrical Entertainments. This is the case in the Baluu music band ensemble. In Iyabo Awero's live band, there are eight (8) drummers; 5 Gángan drummers, 1 Omele méjì drummer, 1 Akuba and 1 Sákárà drummer. Each of these drummers with their drum has the individual functions they contribute to overall aesthetics of the band's music collectively with their rhythms. All the drums fall under the membranophone family of African musical instruments as classified by Eric Von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs (1914). Hence, it can be said that Baluu music uses primarily, the instruments from the membranophone family as accompaniment. However, these instruments have their sub-division under the wide membranophone umbrella. Ikibe & Ikibe (2007, p. 92) note that "Membranophonic instruments are made from animal skin, treated, dried and stretched over the hollow of a carved wood, metal or an earthen pot".

Gángan is smaller version of the *Ìyáàlù Dùndún*¸ with a leather cord running through both sides of the drum which is used to change the notes and

pitches while squeezing the leather cords under the tension of the arm as the player beats the membrane. It is a directly struck hourglass-shaped drum. It is a double skinned drum as both end of the drum can be played with a curved wooden beater as the player controls the pressure of tension on the leather cord under his arms. There are 5 Gángan drummers in the ensemble with one playing lead and doing the talking, another back-up leads, the three others had their leather cords tied together to have a higher pitch at different range as they play rhythmic accompaniment in counterpoint.

The Omele méjì is a much smaller version of the Gángan drums. It has two omele drums tied together with varying pitch. It has the highest pitch in the ensemble with the sákárà as its tension cords are permanently tied together. The player oscillates between the two drums as he plays one with his left palm and the other with the curved wooden beater on his right hand. The sákárà drum is circle shaped friction drum with the membrane pegged around an earthen made resonating body. The player uses his left thumb to change the tune from behind and causing a friction on the surface of the membrane with the remaining four fingers of the left palm as he uses a flat wooden beater on the membrane with his right hand. Àkúbà drum is an upright vase-shaped drum. It has a 'waisted' body which rests on an open foot. The upper section is conical, while the lower section is curvilinear and tapers towards the foot. This drum has a single membrane. Two àkúbà drums are seated on a metal support while the player plays with both palms, oscillating between both drums.

Apprenticeship in Baluu Music

Being acquainted with the professional art of Baluu musicianship requires some level of training which may be attached to process of apprenticeship. In an interview with Iyabo Awero, learning Baluu music requires the approval of a parent/ guardian giving out his/her daughter to

learn the profession as an apprentice. However, apprenticeship is in stages. It starts from observation, the apprentice starts observing the band during rehearsals and performances, then she moves to the stage of learning the Baluu dance repertoire. Without learning the dance, she cannot proceed to other stages. At this period, she trains on waist flexibilities and flat back posture. Haven learnt the waist twirls and other movements in the dance, she can then proceed to graduate to the chorus section where she will be singing as a back-up singer, learning all the choruses and responses sang by the chorus in each stage of the performance as noted earlier.

The duration of the apprenticeship is however not fixed. It depends on the agreement between the parent/guardian and the Band leader. It varies between 6 months, to one year and it can even span into years. The creative ability and prowess of the apprentice involved matters in learning the indigenous art. In a study of Iyabo Awero's live band on field, it was noticed that a young girl of 5 years, has been introduced to the professional art of Baluu musicianship as she was seen as part of the Baluu dancers. She was already getting used to the waist twirls and flat back position. This was exactly how Iyabo Awero was inducted professionally from her very young age by her mother.

Preservation and Continuity of Baluu Music

It was observed that westernization, modernization and the influence of technology did not threaten the existence of the indigenous Baluu music. This has been possible because the music did not embrace acculturation or any form of foreign influence asides the Islamic influence on the music. Even though there has been constant cultural change in the environment, recordings, oral tradition, and genetic influence from older generation to younger generations, parents to offspring has been the major tool of preservation and continuity of this indigenous music culture. Transcription

and documentation by Ethnomusicologists has also contributed positively to the preservation of this music culture.

Conclusion

The Baluu music is an indigenous genre that originated and developed in Ilorin on the premise of entertainment and a music spice to social events and life. Baluu musicians sing with the Ilorin variant of the Yorùbá dialect, popularly known as Yorùbá Ilorin. This variant of the Yorùbá language is peculiar to Ilorin people. The peculiarity of the language to Ilorin people is a pointer to the origin of the music even when performed outside the shores of Ilorin or Kwara state. Baluu musicians tend to carve an individual niche or style for themselves either consciously or unconsciously as this stands them out and makes them unique in the competitive market of the indigenous music, as seen in our study of Iyabo Awero's band. Finally, over the years, Baluu music has been able to restrain external influence that may ravage the culture or replace some indigenous elements, features and styles embedded in the music.

References

Abiodun, F. (2012). Oral musical tradition in Ilorin culture: Performance analysis of Baluu music. *African musicology on-line*, 6: 64-74.

Adeola, T. (2008). Performance practice and compositional devices in Dadakuada music. *The performer: Ilorin journal of the performing arts*, 18: 196-216.

Agu, D. C. C. (2000). Music in the Nigeria culture: type and practices. In Orjiakor, N.E Unachukwu, G.C & Obiajulu, A. (Eds.). *Challenges of national youth growth and development in Nigeria*, pp. 79-88. Enugu: John Jacobs classic publishers ltd.

Emielu, A (2012). Issues of form and style in Nigeria popular music: A case study of Edo guitar band music. *Journal of the association of Nigerian musicologists*, 6, 60-73.

Ibude, I.O (2014). Emergence and categories of indigenous music practices in first Baptist church Oke'lerin, Ogbomoso. In C. Aluede, K. Samuel & F. Adedeji (Eds.), *African musicology: Past, present and future. A festschrift for Mosunmola Ayinke Omobiyi-Obidike*, pp. 185-208. Ile-Ife: Timade ventures.

Idamoyibo, A (2008). Èsà music and the eloquence of the Bàtá ensemble. *The Performer: Ilorin journal of the performing arts*, 4: 36-47.

Ikibe, S & Ikibe, V. (2007). An ethnomusicological perspective on Ekuechi festival of Ebiraland. The *Performer: Ilorin journal of the performing arts*, 7: 88-96.

Ikibe, S & Ikibe, V. (2008). Communicative potentials of music in African societies. *The Performer: Ilorin journal of the performing arts*, 8: 85-94.

Ikibe, S. (2010). An ethnomusicological insight into Ade P. Dopamu's Esu: The visible foe of man. In Adam, K. C & Peter, M. J (Eds.). *Human*

view of God: Variety not monotony, pp. 48-52. Moi: Moi University Press.

Ikibe, S. (2010). Notating the unnotated music of Idoma folk stories of Nigeria. In Dandaura, E. S & Adeoye, A. A (Eds.), *Culture, identity and leadership in Nigeria*, pp. 230-244. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited.

Jaiyeola, F. (2015). Indigenous music in Nigeria: Its role towards national development. *AE-FUNAI Journal of Humanities and Social science*, 1 (2): 102-109.

Okpala, N (2016). Traditional music in Igbo culture: A case study of Idu cultural dance of Akpo in Aguata local government area of Anambra state. *African Research Review*: *An International Multidisciplinary Journal*, 10 (1), 87-103.