

PERFORMANCE, LITERATURE, LANGUAGE, AND THE ARTS

Essays in Honour of
**PROFESSOR EMMY
IKANABA UNUJA IDEGU**

Edited by:
Gambo Sani | Oyibo Enefolo Nelson

**PERFORMANCE, LITERATURE,
LANGUAGE, AND THE ARTS**

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DEDICATION

To all our teachers whose labours have continued to inspire us to further explore the frontiers of knowledge.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gambo Sani', with a large, stylized flourish underneath.

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CHAPTER TWO

NIGERIAN MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND PERFORMANCE AESTHETICS IN BISADE OLOGUNDE'S (LÁGBÁJÁ) ENSEMBLE

Oluwatosin John Ibitoye

Abstract

This study examines the performance aesthetics in Bisade Ologunde's music ensemble with his use of African musical instruments. Bisade Ologunde, the pioneer of the Africano style of music which is a resurgence of sophisticated African music, is popularly known as Lagbaja, a symbol of the faceless and the voiceless in African society. This study is hinged on the descriptive method of research using his selected works, namely; "Lulu fun won", "Omojayejaye" and "Sweet melody" to draw our analyses and findings. This study discovers that African music performances are not just about drumming as against opinion that African music is all drumming, though Africans are well known for drumming. Lagbaja uses his music as a creative tool to advocate for the faceless masses, to correct and chastise some failings and frailties in the society. Looking at the example of Lagbaja, this paper concludes that creative exploration in the arts is infinite and should not be limited, restricted or stereotyped.

Introduction

African music and musical instruments constitute important features of African cultural forms, theatrical and artistic diversities because music is an integral part of African identity. Ogunade points out that traditional instruments "are the passport of telling the world of her rich musical past and the brave new global vision" (2). A rich network of musical traditions has evolved and developed in Africa. Barber notes

that "music is the first form of popular culture in Africa, which has been noticed and studied outside the African continent" (7). The uniqueness in African music tradition has carved a niche for the African continent amongst others, especially because of the rhythmic and complex nature of African music. This marvels and leaves its audience in awe as different instruments in the ensemble supplies a variety of rhythms, causing aesthetic appeal in dynamism. Thus, this has drawn global attention from researchers and lovers of rich music culture. The creative blend of different instruments in the African ensembles playing concurrently, synergised with vocal accompaniment, dramatic expressions and energetic dance movements creates an artistic, appealing and electrifying atmosphere. This paper examines the aesthetics of African musical instruments in performance using the ensemble of selected works of Bisade Ologunde, popularly known as *Lágbája* as a critical example. Analysis and findings drawn out of three of his most recent music video productions; "Lulu fun won", "Omo Jayejaye", and "Sweet Melody" where African musical instruments are artistically and elaborately used.

African Musical Instruments: Nigeria in View

Unarguably, no discourse on African music can be complete without reference to African musical instruments. It is worthy of note that musical instrument connotes Africa itself due to its semiotic representation of Africa and its culture. Tamara paints a clearer picture when he asserts that "the drum is often used as a symbol to represent Africa. It is used on the cover of books, posters, and web pages as a cliché to flatten our notion of cultural Africa" (1). For this reason, it becomes the heritage and cultural reference of African society. On sighting an African instrument, it can be linked to the culture or society it originated from. Usually, there are carved figures, images and design motifs through which a culture can be located. Onyekwelu opines that "the designing and construction of

musical instruments is an aspect of the African life through which African cultures develop their symbols of identity, and express themselves in their own way" (119). For instance, the *Igbìn* drum ensemble usually associated with *Òrìṣà Obàtálá* is a highly decorated carved drum. Tamara comments that "the *Igbìn* is an instrument for retelling history, for exploring phenomena, and understanding the Yoruba religious canon of *obatala*" (1). African musical instruments are made from leather, wood, metal, e.t.c, and "most are sourced from the environment in which they are found" (Onyekwelu 119). The double-ended wood bells of the Igbo, "the *Agidibo*" is a self-sounding instrument. The *Agidibo* is made of carved wood with a hollow in the body (Ikibe 91). The Africa Mbira (Thumb Piano) also known as *Kalimba* can be found in Nigeria. The Ibos call it *Ubo Aka*, and the Yorubas call it *Àgídígbo*. The Mbira "is made by hollowing out a circular gourd and placing thin strips of metal over it and usually tuned to the heptatonic scale" (Akpabot 16). The thumb piano is commonly found throughout Africa and for this reason, it has several names varying from culture to culture, and from place to place.

The ewe barrel drums, *Ikolo*, the drum of the Igbos, referred to by Adeoye as "the drum of the knowledgeable" (3), the *bata* drum ensemble, and the *Dundun* ensemble of the Yoruba people are examples of series of drums found in Nigeria. Drums play several functions in African music ensemble. Drums are used to imitate the human voice, especially in Yoruba music. These are referred to as talking drums. Euba, cited in Olalusi, explains that talking with the musical instruments is one of the principal characteristics of Yoruba music and since drums are predominant among Yoruba musical instruments, the practice of talking with drums has been carried to a high degree of perfection (148). Drums are used to create rhythms and accompaniments in festive/ceremonial occasions while some are attached to the worship of a god for ritual purposes. For example, the *Dundun*

ensemble is used during ceremonial occasions in the South-Western part of Nigeria and its ensemble comprises the followings:

Iya Ilu (lead drum), Omele Isaju, Omele Atele and Gudugudu. On the other hand, the *Bata* ensemble usually attached to the worship of Sango (god of thunder) comprises the *Iya Ilu* (mother drum), the *Omele Abo* (female drum), the *Omele Ako* (male drum) and *Kudi* (child drum). (www.lagbaja.com)

The names given to these drums are conceived through the roles which they play in the ensemble. For instance, the 'Iya Ilu' is the mother drum; it leads and calls out to other drums in the ensemble. The drums ensemble used in the worship of *Obatala* "are named after his four wives – *Iya Nla*, *Iya Agan*, *Afere* and *Keke*" (Akpabot 97). The tones they produce are representative of the seniority of the wives. This implies that *Iya Nla*, is the most senior wife and the largest drum in the ensemble.

In *Ekuechi* festival of *Ebiraland*, the use of *Opanyi* (Horn) and *Okokoro* (Wooden-flute) cannot be overemphasized. Ikibe notes that "[t]he *Opanyi* is used to play melodies and it serves as speech surrogate in reciting the praises of heroes in *Ebiraland* and also to recount their achievements. The *Okokoro* (wooden flute) serves the same purpose as the *Opanyi* above" (92). "Goje", the string instrument of Northern Nigeria, which Adeoye refers to as, "a string of joy" (4) is a chordophone. This is as a product of the ecstasy, passion, and intense satisfaction the player, the singer(s) and the listeners derive from the appealing sound of the instrument.

Bisade Ologunde's Music Ensemble



Bisade Ologunde, popularly known as Lágbájá, "The masked man", wears mask as an iconic symbol of man's facelessness. The mask and the name symbolise the faceless and the voiceless in the society, particularly in Africa. Lagbaja's music is a product of various influences ranging from traditional Yoruba music to Jazz. Importantly, with the central role African drums, percussions and rhythms play in his groovy fusion, he christened his style of music Africano. Africano as a concept was birthed from the brewing controversy of Ologunde's music style which several has either categorized as Afrobeat, Afrojazz, Highlife or Crossover and many more. Christopher Waterman describes Lagbaja as "a contemporary Yoruba musician whose performative projection of self both incorporates and resists the praise singer cum big man identity of mainline Yoruba juju and fuji stars and the Afro-bourgeois radical charisma of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti". Hixson (2001), writes that:

The musical form in Lagbaja's work bears the imprint of Afrobeat, the musical style created by Nigerian superstar Fela Anikulapo Kuti decades ago. But it also contains the traces of highlife, juju and more traditional music such as Bata drumming. Lagbaja's music also incorporates

rhythms and melodies inspired by western genres such as Rock, Funk and Jazz...

This unending controversy from scholars, researchers, journalists and opinion writers led to a search for unique and fundamental niche, which birth the Africano concept. Lagbaja's Africano is driving a resurgence of interest in sophisticated African music, rich in the traditions of the continent while cosmopolitan in attitude. In a bid to share his African grooves with the rest of the world and make African rhythms understandable and accessible to everyone, Lagbaja developed and produced the first ever comprehensive digital library of "drag and drop" Yoruba grooves called "Africano Manchine". Africano manchine which is an artistic marriage of man and machine, works seamlessly with popular Digital Audio Workstations such as Ableton Live and Pro Tools and plays a major role in his newly pioneered Elektro Groove Music (EGM).

The lyrics of his songs are primarily sung in Yoruba, English or a blend of the two as they are generally acceptable medium of communication in Nigeria. While, many of his songs simply entertain, most are about serious issues. He passes serious messages in humorous ways and continues to use his music as a catalyst for the emergence of a better society. Adegoju agrees that:

Lagbaja has shown unwavering commitment to transforming his society with music that touches on diverse aspects of Nigerian culture and politics. The social issues in Lagbaja's works include: ethnic discrimination and religious crisis, the need to jealously guard Nigeria's hard-earned democracy, the beauty of communal life and fellow human feeling. (11)

Over the years, his music has continued to appeal and fascinate members of the society with the interplay of

traditional drums and western instruments, with the Saxophone in the artistic synergy.

Traditional Musical Instruments in Bisade Ologunde's Ensemble

The impact of African traditional musical instruments in Bisade Ologunde's ensemble cannot be over-emphasised as Africano, his music style, derives its name from the influence of African traditional instruments. In an online interview with Bisade Ologunde on his official website, Lagbaja elucidates more on the traditional musical instruments in his ensemble and the roles each play in the ensemble. These instruments cut across different ensembles of the membranophone and idiophone families, mostly sourced from the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. The African traditional musical instruments employed in his ensemble include:

1. The Bata Drums Ensemble
2. The Dundun Drums Ensemble
3. Gangan Drums Ensemble
4. The Ogido Drums Ensemble
5. The Sakara Drums Ensemble
6. Gong (Agogo)
7. Bells
8. Rattles (Sekere)

The Bata Drums Ensemble

The bata drums ensemble consists of five drums. The cone-shaped bata drums are categorized into:

- i. *Ìyáílù* (the mother drum)
- ii. Omele Abo (female backing drum)
- iii. Omele Ako (male backing drum)

Ìyáílù, the mother drum plays the lead role in the ensemble as a mother figure. It leads the ensemble and does the talking. It produces a low sound with a bass effect. It communicates in proverbs and idioms. It dictates what the Omele Abo and Omele Ako will play. It has two faces with which the palm is

used to play the bigger end which produces the bass effect and a leather beater is used to beat the high pitched smaller end. The Omele Abo (female backing drum) is a smaller version of the lead drum (*Iya Ilu*). It supports, complements and corroborates the lead drum. The Omele Ako comprises of three small Bata drums called: Omele Ako, Adamo and Kudi. These three drums are tied together and are played by one drummer using two flat leather beaters. They produce a very thin and highest sound in the ensemble.



Fig 1: The Bata drums ensemble

The Dundun Drums Ensemble

Dundun, the hour glass drum, which is commonly referred to as the talking drum, has four main drums in the ensemble:

- i. *Iyallu* (mother drum)
- ii. Omele Isaju (lead back up)
- iii. Omele Atele (following back up)
- iv. Gudugudu (baby drum)

The *Ìyáílù* leads the whole ensemble. It does the talking, dictates the pace and determines the song. The drummer beats the drum with a curve wooden stick which serves as the beater and squeezes the leather strings tied around the drums to create variation in pitch, tone and sound. It has a small bell tied around its base called *Saworo*. *Saworo* complements the sound of the *Iya Ilu* with the sound it produces as it shakes. The

Omele Isaju has a fixed high tone with its tension strings permanently tied together while the Omele Atele has a pitch which is fixed to a lower tune than the Isaju. The tension strings are not tied as much as that of the Isaju. Both omeles are played with a curved wooden stick. Their combined groove is the foundation on which the mother drum builds its own rhythm. The gudugudu drum in the Dundun ensemble is a small drum shaped like a bowl. It is beaten with two leather beaters. It functions as metronome in the ensemble.



Fig 2: The Dundun drums ensemble

The Gangan Drums Ensemble

The Gangan drums are smaller versions of the Dundun ensemble. They are mostly called talking drums. They are used to mimic and imitate human speech. They communicate in proverbs and Idioms. The leather cords that run the length of the drums are used to adjust the tones and pitch while squeezed together under the arm. It also has a complete family of Iya Ilu and Omele just like the Dundun family. It is common to see a mixture of drums from the gangan and dundun categories. The dundun has a bigger and deeper sound than the gangan.

The Ogido Drums

The Ogido drum is known as cousin to the gbedu. Ogido is shaped like a konga but with a bigger body and deeper

sound. It produces sound with bass effect. This is why it is referred to as the 'bass drum'. Both palms are used directly to play the drum just like the konga. There are two drums in the Ogido family: ogidonla (big ogido) and ogido kekere (small ogido). The wooden body which is the resonator is carved with images of idols artifacts on the body.



Fig 3: The Ogido drums

The Sakara Drums Ensemble

The Sakara drum is a small drum with a circular body made with baked clay on which the membrane is stretched. Pegs are made around the body of the drum for tuning. Its tone is changed with the finger of one hand while the other hits the face of the drum with a stick. The Sakara family has four major drums:

- i. Iya Ilu
- ii. Omele Chord
- iii. Omele Ako
- iv. Omele Abò

The Iya Ilu leads the ensemble. It does the talking, dictates the paces and rhythmic style. The Omele chord adds flavour with its varying pitches to the tone of the mother drum. It has a much higher tone than the Iya Ilu but still fundamentally restricted to backing. The Omele Ako and Omele Abo have fixed pitches and hold the groove as they converse rhythmically.



Fig 4: The Sakara drums ensemble

It is worthy of note that the drums mentioned in the ensembles above are the basic family. An ensemble could be extended by increasing the number of drums and players. So, in a larger ensemble, one could find several mother drums and many back up drums. Nevertheless, one mother drum still leads the entire ensemble as the principal drum. Generally, all these ensembles of drums played together, complementing and reinforcing one another. The combination of all the ensembles creates a unique polyrhythmic effect and an Africano atmospheric taste. However, out of the entire ensemble, the Bata ensemble plays a vital role. It can be regarded as the **Lead Ensemble**. It leads, dictates the rhythms, does the talking, punctuates and dictates the pace while other ensembles complement and support its work. The idiophones, gong, bells and rattles primarily hold the background rhythm, tempo and metronome.

Performance Aesthetics in Bisade Ologunde's Ensemble

The concept of aesthetics revolves around beauty in artistic works. Lawal sees aesthetics as, "the study of beauty and to a less extent, its opposite, the ugly" (18). Horpers asserts that "an object is aesthetic only when it holds the audience or the reader's attention" (cited by Arinde 155). Ologunde's

ensemble from our research is a conglomeration of varying artistic features. These art forms and features command appeal and an experience of aesthetics. These artistic features include but are limited to the use of musical instruments, costumes, dance and dramatic expressions. They give varying perspectives and interpretations of life. This conforms to Adeoye's view that "aesthetics gives room for the dual interpretation of life" (26). Our analyses and observations in this research are drawn majorly from three of Ologunde's most recent music video productions: "Lulu fun won", "Omo Jayejaye", and "Sweet Melody". We observed the following features in Ologunde's ensemble performance and production where aesthetics is visibly seen:

1. Aesthetics of Drum Rhythm and Poetry
2. Aesthetics of Dance
3. Aesthetics of Dramatic Expressions
4. Aesthetics of Costumes

Aesthetics of Drum Rhythm and Poetry

Rhythm is one of the three major characteristics of music (rhythm, melody and harmony). Rhythm is the backbone and life wire of music. Rhythm is connected to the tempo, time and mood of music and it is usually created with percussions (drums, rattles, gong, bell etc) in different variants. Olalusi asserts that, "the variety of rhythms that could be played from an ensemble of the Yoruba drums brings about aesthetics, and thus invariably contributes to the polyrhythmic structure of the African musical instruments" (148). For instance, in "Lùlùfún won", a drum performance, the video opened with polyrhythmic sounds of the Dundun drums ensemble after which the Iya Ilu, the mother drum calls everyone (other drums in the ensemble) to a halt. This stylistically transits to the Bata drums ensemble with the synergy of a praise singer chanting Lagbaja's panegyric. Lagbaja assumes a mood of excitement

with the accompaniment of bata ensemble. The different drum ensembles used by Bisade Ologunde in his music ensemble are used to play a variety of rhythmic sounds, imitating human voice. In "sweet melody" for instance, the gangan drums played: *Ma korintitun, ma korintitun* "I will sing a new song; I will sing a new song". Also, in "Omo Jayéjayé", the Iya Ilu bata played:

<i>Nifaajilawa</i>	We are at the relaxation centre
<i>Majayeori mi</i>	I will enjoy my life
<i>Mio ran Unkunse</i>	I do not care what Uncle feels
<i>Fa, fa la, fa la la fa la la</i>	Oh! Exorbitantly!

This creates an interpersonal relationship, communication and flow of action between the drummer, Lagbaja and other personae on set. Sometimes, while still in the euphoria and ecstasy of the drums, Lagbaja acknowledges the drummer by saying:

<i>Ose, ayan, omodeyi!</i>	Thank you my drummer!
<i>Oro lo so, o puro</i>	Your words are true, you have not lied!

Aesthetics of Dance

Dance and music are two art forms which are connected significantly. This is because dance moves in rhythm and rhythm is musical. Ododo and Igweonu consider dance as "the rhythmic movement of the human body to time and space, coupled with the exertion of a specific amount of energy" (52). The energetic and aesthetically pleasing dance is evident in Lagbaja's performances when he dances in accompaniment with drum's rhythm and a dance interpretation of the drum's poetic sound. For instance, in his "Sweet Melody", there are artistically choreographed dance with Lagbaja and other dancers on set to the rhythmic sound of the Ogido drums with the gong (agogo) and rattles (sekere) holding the background rhythm. At some point, he performs a solo energetic and

ecstatic bata dance movements in conformity with the lyrics and subject matter of the song, "Sweet Melody". The particular line of the song says:

Call: <i>Awa o korintitun</i>	We shall sing a new song
Response: <i>Orin</i>	Sing

Call: <i>Awa o korinoyin</i>	We shall sing a new melody
Response: <i>Oyin</i>	Melody

The song expresses hope and optimism for better days in the country. Hence, the ecstatic dance which is punctuated by the elated Ogido drummer. Also, in "Lùlùfún won", the bata drums ensemble rents the atmosphere in a frenzied mood and Lagbaja unavoidably, danced bata with prompt energy and swift leg movements as well as shoulder jerks. The praise singer does not help matter as he keeps singing:

<i>Lulu fun won</i>	Drum for them,
<i>Olagbaja Lulu fun won</i>	Lagbaja drum for them
<i>Kiwongba'pe baba re loni'jo</i>	Let them know your father owns the dance

Aesthetics of Dramatic Expression

Dramatic action is evident in his production. The dramaturgy creates an artistic picture of the theme to stimulate a better understanding of the subject matter to the audience. For instance, in "Sweet Melody", we can see a dramatic action of a lady washing and holding the Nigerian flag with "corruption" inscription on the flag. She dips the flag in the bucket, washes and we see a transitional movement into the better Nigeria, free of corruption and any other menace. Also, in "Omo jayejaye", we can see the dramatic actions of a man who lives an extravagant life and finds himself in trouble. Thus, the dramatic picture created here helps in passing the message embedded in the music.

Aesthetics of Costume

The first spectacle in the persona of Bisade Ologunde (Lágbájá) is his rag-like costume. His masked costume is a symbolic tool of communication and appeal in his performance. He wears the mask as an iconic symbol of man's facelessness. In this context, he is giving a voice to the faceless and the voiceless members of the society through his music. His masked apparel which covers his body from head to toe reveals only his eyes, nose and mouth. He wears casual sandals as accessories to symbolise the simple lifestyle of the majority in the society. The masked apparel is usually designed in a combination of different colours of fabric and he wears a variety of them on set. This is obviously inevitable as the costume is his signature and symbol of identity.

Conclusion

As an experimental Nigerian musician, Bisade Ologunde's creative nuances transcend not just the Nigerian cultural terrain, but explore the African cultural scope. Lágbájá's music celebrates African culture in his clamour for social integration and national development. With elaborate use of African musical instruments and a creative fusion of Western musical instruments, Lagbaja's music continues to revive, celebrate and promote African music and culture. African culture will neither suffer neglect nor go into extinction if creatively explored with varieties of musical resources as against the monotonous use of musical resources in order to enhance the overall aesthetics of musical productions.

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