

## CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

### **PRESERVING AFRICAN VALUES THROUGH MUSIC: ILLUSTRATIONS WITH FOLKLORE EXCERPTS**

Nnamdi C. Onuora-Oguno (PhD)

#### **Abstract**

In an age characterized by moral decadence occasioned by trends in post-colonial Africa and globalization, it has become necessary for Africans to retrace their steps back to values of old that made Africa tick in respect of social behaviours. Children had respect for elders, an armed robbery was virtually non-existent, robbery was limited to stealing of food items and defaulters were afraid of the stigma by the society when caught. Those who live above board were revered, bravery was eulogized and status was attained. In an age where obtaining by tricks is on the high and is worshipped by both sacred and secular orders, it has become imperative to go back to folklore and examine its essence with a few to re-engineering it to our social polity as Africans.

**Keywords:** Preservation, music, folklores, African values. moral decadence.

#### **Introduction**

Nigeria as part of the African continent is blessed with rich folklore which forms a chunk of oral literature of the country as the most popular black nation in the world. Within the Nigerian nation, the Igbo exist as a tribe of the conglomerate called Nigeria. In the social setting of the Igbo society, folk songs exist. The corpus of folk literature does not function as a mere entertaining outlet but also as a powerful tool in the control of the social order. Before the advent of the colonial masters, folklore was used as instructional materials as well as an entertainment forum. Folk songs and folklore are interchangeable terms but for the purpose of this paper, it is pertinent to say that folk songs are embedded in the folklore of a people –in this case, the Igbo. Folklore generally goes beyond music to involve customs and other ethical values of a race. Okafor (2005) highlighted that the term folk song can also be applied to:

Music that has been evolved from rudimentary beginnings by a community uninfluenced by popular or art music and it can likewise be applied to music that has originated with an individual composer and has subsequently been absorbed into the unwritten living tradition which gives it its folk character (p. 3).

Omibiyi-Obidike(1999) described folk songs as: “The cultural manifestations of a people, society or nation are transmitted orally from generation to generation. It comprises myths, legends literature, folktales, epics, songs, drama, and proverbs.”

Onuora-Oguno (2006) observed that the traditional music of a people is to a great extent a mirror of their culture.

### Common Indices of Folk Songs

- It is an expression of a group of social unit
- Songs are not attributed to a composer
- It is prone to oral improvisation following the nuances of the performers
- It is didactic, for no folk song in Igboland is a mere theatre of enjoyment.

### The Essence of Folk Songs in Igbo Society

Folklore in Igboland draws from the social milieu. In texts of folk songs are references for the rewards of high moral ethics, philanthropic gestures, passing judgement on the actions of people and reflecting on the world, as it should be. To study an Igbo man or his community without a look at his folklore is an exercise in futility because folklore provides a platform for the prime repository of the wit and wisdom of his society. Folk music is therefore music that springs from the womb of a peoples' culture. It is a peoples' unique way of expression but is part of the universal language which is called music. Nketia(1999) observed that:

Our indigenous music and folklore are not relics of a forgotten or abandoned past, as most folklore seems to be in some parts of the industrialized world, but living traditions cultivated and practised actively in traditional contexts by the majority of our people as an integral part of their community life (p. 8).

Traditional music includes instrumental and vocal genres such as songs, sung poetry or recitative, chants and dance traditions usually combined with specific music and movement forms, spoken arts traditions such as those of the special associations, prayers, ritual formulae speech.

### Theoretical Concept

Piaget's genetic theory of cognitive development was adopted for this paper as it suites the Igbo worldview of the practice of music as a social event. Piaget was a biologist who turned his energies to a study of the evolution of children's thinking. Piaget maintained that 3 factors are of special importance in ensuring the appearance of the stages of cognitive development. The factors are a – biological, b-educational and cultural transmission and c - the activities in which a child engages (p.68). Piaget considered that conceptual growth occurs because the child while actively attempting to adapt to the environment organizes action through the process of assimilation and accommodation. In the Igbo cosmos, folklore is part of the social milieu.

### Excerpts of selected folk songs

1. *Nya nya nya nugbo*  
*Kayi feluo fesi*  
*Nyagide nyagide nyagide nyagide kanyi feluo fesi*

The above song originates from the riverine corpus of folk songs and encourages a group and concerted workforce in overcoming an uphill task or movement over the river bank.

2. *Okpa kwao kanyi je inyio Okpa*  
*kwao, kanyi je inyi nnene.*

Song number two is also a call for girls who go to stream together at the signal of the cockcrow

3. *Onuru akwa nwa e, Aa eh*

*Onuru akwa nwa me ngangwa noburo ofu onye nwe nwa.*

Song number three is a clarion call for members of the community to heed to the cry of a baby for a baby is a communal asset. In Igboland, the disappearance or abduction of an individual is not taken lightly by any community. Search parties are dispatched to look for any missing person.

This is a sharp deviation from what obtains today when the travail of an individual does not bother his neighbours.

4. *Onye na ako ede: Ede mara nma okuko*

In the above song, the planter of cocoyam is encouraged for it forms a good delicacy. The song is meant to ease the tedium of labour

5. *Mgbe anyi n'eme inyanga ewo ewo*

*Akpukpu ukwuanyi na ga na kolota kokokokoi.*

Song number five shows the use of alliteration to mimic how young ladies walk to woo suitors on the road.

### **Folklore as a Means of Social Control**

Kings are revered in traditional Africa, lazy people are lampooned. Folklore engenders communal living. In the Ezeagu community of Enugu State, Nigeria, Okafor (2005) stated: The minstrel speaks for the community and draws from collective wisdom. He can also be a pathfinder, a visionary, helping to blaze new trails and to reveal pointers to the future (p. 117).

Folklore provides a platform for musical creativity and social education, for the starting point of the conscious effort to understand the Igboman is his traditional and oral literature, the folktales, songs, proverbs, myths and legends which are the prime repository of the wit and wisdom of his society. Writing on the use of satire by folk musicians, Asigbo (2005) stated:

Offences like minor stealing, lying or other such pardonable misbehaviours are within the ambience of satire to handle. Satire is conceived as highly functional and utilitarian activity. Thus, not only does it serve as an avenue for poking mild fun at social deviants, but it also ensures the release of otherwise harmful libidinous energies (p. 187).

In his writing on Music in Nigerian Education, Okafor (1991) observed that:

Through song texts, a person learned the moral codes of his land, its chronology and history, and the guiding principles and ethics of his land. He also learned about his language, the things his people lived by, and how society worked. All these were learned through music that ranged from simple folk tunes to highly specialized ritual music, including chants, incantations and minstrelsy (p.60).

In essence, traditional education was characteristically integral inexperience, and very functional in purpose.

### **Recommendation**

It is the hope of this study that the education authorities in Nigeria will make folk music a basis of music education in schools, especially the beautiful lyrical songs which are rich in meanings. Music educators can boldly forge new links between folk music and vital modern needs. Epics can be used as illustrations for lessons and lectures in schools and Universities. The late Afam Ogbuotobo in his song *Obi jelu ori* narrated the dangers of stealing. Ozoemena Nsugbe gave a history of Igbo men who were great achievers in his song "power to Nigerian Jews".

Short choruses from folk songs like *Udo di njo, udo adiro nma ojije*, meaning, the rope is a dangerous weapon when used for a suicide attempt, could be developed and used for educational

purposes. The child conjectures and learns faster when feasible examples are used as teaching aids. It will be a worthwhile endeavour if modern educational policymakers and practitioners should seriously examine the elements of folklore and integrate them into educational practices. The contribution of music to the education of the child into adult society is colossal. From infancy, music practices are inculcated into children. Their skills in all spheres of life are improved through instructions and games most often delivered and facilitated through the medium of music (Forchu, 2007: 98). The social background of a large proportion of Igbo men and women has changed tremendously with the establishment of industries and the rush for white-collar jobs in the urban areas. In recent times, events associated with the performance of folklore are now replaced with the performance of many forms of popular music. The advents of television and cable networks have not helped matters either. The moon-light plays (egwu onwa) was very much admired by the Igbo folk in the dry months when the moon-light is bright, clear and appreciated. Various social activities were lined up for entertainment and enjoyment. Activities featured in form of songs, storytelling and games with each activity designed to impart maximum happiness and also educate the participants. The moon-light plays were staged at village squares having much loose sand to reduce pains and injury due to impacts that were usually sustained on dry ground. The hours of egwu- onwa were charged with extreme moments of happiness and learning that took place amid recreation (Ogbukagu, 1997: 244).

### Conclusion

Traditional education in Igboland made tremendous achievements in the life of the individual and the society as a corporate entity. The individual became fully integrated into his society, observing the societal laws and respecting the demands of his society. Through folklore, the child was taught to respect his elders and those in authority. It will be a worthwhile endeavour if modern educational policymakers and practitioners should seriously examine the elements of folklore in Igboland and integrate them into educational policies and practices. The tenacity and discipline which made the Igbo man hold his head high among his contemporaries need desperately to be re-cultivated and folklore should be integrated into new educational practices. Folklore does not only provide recreation, through participation, fitness and efficient body coordination is achieved. Unless a conscious effort is made to make folklore part of our education, we can only follow the West and may never find our bearing.

### References

- Asigbo, A. (2005). Developing and sustaining theatre practice in Igboland: The example of Nwuba Odili. *Nigerian Theatre Journal*, 8 (10), 184 - 192.
- Child, D. (2004). *Psychology and the teacher*. China: Midas printing international.
- Emeka, L.N. (2004). Traditional education in Nigeria. In R.C. Okafor & L.N. Emeka (Eds.). *Nigerian Peoples and Culture*, (4<sup>th</sup>ed.). (pp.217-239). Enugu: New Generation Books.
- Forchu, I. (2007). Music is a product of human behaviour. *Awka Journal of Research in Music and the Arts (AJRMA)*, 4, 93 - 100.
- Nwaubani, O.O. (1997). Traditional education in Nigeria: Aims, content, methodology and Processes. In J.O. Onwuka, & S.C. Ahaiwe, (Eds.). *Nigerian Heritage*. Okigwe: Whytem Publishers (Nig).
- Ogbukagu, I. (1997). *Traditional Igbo beliefs and practices*. Owerri: Novelty Industrial Enterprises Ltd
- Okafor, R.C. (1998). *Ezeagu atilogwu: The legendry Igbo troupe*. Enugu: New Generation Books.
- Okafor, R.C. (2005a). *Music in Nigerian society*. Enugu: New Generation Books.
- Okafor, R.C. (2005b). Music in Nigerian festivals. *Nigerian Musicology Journal*, 1(1), 1 – 37.