

**SECTION G**  
**MUSIC, LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

## CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

### MUSIC AS A UNIQUE TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN EMEKA NWABUEZE'S ECHOES OF MADNESS

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#### **Abstract**

Drama is an indispensable instrument for social commentary. The dramatist does not write just to express ideas, rather plays are written to inform, educate, or even to entertain. Effective communication is a paramount objective of every playwright. Hence every playwright strives to devise a means of communication that would be most effective for his or her target audience. This paper examines the use of music for effective communication in EmekaNwabueze's Echoes of Madness. Using the analytical method of qualitative research, the paper explores how Nwabueze, in the play utilizes music to pass his message across to the target audience. The paper discovers that music can be used in place of words to communicate effectively in a play text. It then concludes that music is an essential element for a better understanding of a drama text. The paper, therefore, recommends that playwrights should use music in their plays to aid the audience's understanding of the plays.

Keywords: Communication, understanding, effective, audience.

#### **Introduction**

In Poetics, Aristotle identified the six elements of drama as plot, character, theme, diction, music and spectacle. Music and songs play a very important role in the development of a drama text. As Aduku Armstrong rightly observed, "apart from the entertainment content they bear, they also function meaningfully in conveying messages and meaning" (90). Thus Ekwueme defines music as; A phenomenon using the medium of sound which is organized and manipulated into socially accepted that communicate intelligibly, and meaningfully, verbally or nonverbally, ideas, feelings, emotions and events to the people (1).

For Oshionebo and Akazue, "music is the art by which a composer through a performer as an intermediary communicates to a listener certain ideas, feelings or state of mind...created to stir and influence the listener (70).

The impact of music in creating meaning to ideas is not farfetched. According to Paul Ogugua music; Conveys meaning at times more than a word or sentence in a language can convey because of the problem of language and the "must" for language to obey the rules of syntax and grammar which music does not obey and yet conveys meaning (113).

This means that the writer does not need to give so much explanation for the message to be passed across. One or two sentences are enough to create the desired message. Ekwueme acknowledges this by saying that music can be understood across linguistic barriers. According to him, "purely instrumental music for example can convey a message to all and sundry irrespective of colour,

race or creed (18). Also in support, Oshionebo and Akazue posit that: Music has the power to create feelings and emotions quickly and effectively. What a book will require many sentences to describe can be conveyed in music by just one measure of chord (76).

Since comprehension is basic for the drama to be appreciated by the audience, this paper examines the employment of music by Emeka Nwabueze for the effective creation of meaning for a better understanding of the play, *Echoes of Madness*.

### **Synopsis of the Play, *Echoes of Madness***

The play centres on a community faced with the problem of choosing a replacement for the dead chief priest of a powerful and influential deity, Avujah. According to tradition, rituals are performed to decipher the choice of the gods, who must be installed within a specific number of days. However, this all-important ritual is thwarted by Akamonye, to achieve his selfish aim, in compliance with the village diviner. A wrong successor is pronounced in the person of Obiora, Akomonye who is based in the United State of America. Obiora's return from the land of his sojourn coincides with the burial rites of the late Eze Avujah and the villagers see this as divine confirmation of his mandate.

When informed of the decision of the gods, Obiora rejects the offer to the disappointment of the community, especially his selfish uncle Akamonye. The resultant effect of this rejection is the tension, manipulations, intrigues and near anarchy witnessed in the community. Peace is later restored after the selection and installation of the right person, but before this, a lot of water has passed under the bridge.

### **Music, an effective communication in the play, *Echoes of Madness***

Music is a prominent feature of Nwabueze's plays. The majority of his plays are introduced with music and song. The play *Echoes of Madness* opens in the shrine with a funeral dirge to usher in the body of the late chief priest of Avujah, the great deity. This music is used to set the tone and mood of the play to help the audience align themselves to the solemnity of the subsequent events of the play. This music interrupts the divination of Osuofia, the village diviner who is forced to listen attentively to make meaning. As Nwabueze describes the scene thus "he opens the goatskin bag he is carrying, brings out his divination instruments and peeps into them. There is a faint sound of traditional music coming from a distance. He listens; the music gains in brilliance and begins to sound clearer and more distinct" (1).

One important observation in the above is that the playwright does not need to give much description of the music for one to understand what is happening unlike the other actions of the diviner that are given detailed explanations, the playwright only mentions that sounds are heard and this is enough to attract the needed attention. The importance of music in the development of this scene is demonstrated in the playwright's subtle explanation of the musical transition. The impact of the sound of music is so strong that the village diviner has to abandon his task to listen to the message. Thus Osuofia shouts in realisation: Osuofia: Funeral music!! (1)

The playwright uses music to set the mood and tone of this scene. The sudden death of the chief priest of the Avuja deity is announced with funeral music. This is used to position the audience in a better sphere to the tone of the play. The dirge is later transformed into jubilation dance when the diviner suddenly shouts, in a trance, that the dead are not dead but asleep. Nzeduba then pleads with the singers thus:

Nzeduba: Then sing for him that died and is not dead. Dance for him that sleeps in the casket on his way to kiss the souls of our ancestors (4).

This scene is marked with sadness and jubilation. These two contrasting emotional feelings are harmonized by the playwright with musical effects thus making it easier for the audience to flow effectively with the transition while sustaining their understanding of the story.

Music energizes the soul and prompts it into action. According to sound spect.com, "music has the power to create such energy; it taps into hidden emotions, abilities and expressions" (np). Nwabueze employs this in the character of Dimgba, the village youth leader. As he is moved by the sonorous voices of the singers, Dimgba performs the traditional 'idaiya, a very energetic dance step to appreciate the singers, despite the solemnity of the scene. This traditional solo performance helps to bring more life into the play, creating an enabling atmosphere for the transition from mourning to jubilation. This transition is needed because for traditional Igbo society in which the play is set, elders don't die; they only transit to join the ancestors hence the mixed emotions witnessed in the announcement of their death. Without music, this transition will require a lot of explanations with words and actions for it to be meaningfully achieved. But with music, fewer words are used by the playwright and the message is passed. Thus he writes, "Dimgba now charged, breaks into a song. The others join. They sing and dance around the stage" (4).

In movement two, the playwright uses music to create suspense. As the ritual for bringing back the new EzeAvujah home from the United State of America is going on in the shrine of Avujah, the unexpected arrival of Obiora, the chosen one with his Black American wife, Brenda, into the shrine is heralded with music. Nwabueze explains:

The youths sing and dance around Obiora and Brenda. They are excited.  
Osuofia stands up, walks to Obiora and hangs a long red cloth on his neck.  
The drums beat. The songs rise in tempo. They dance and begin to leave (9).

The reality of this situation is concealed by the playwright with the effect of music. Obiora and his wife, under the influence of music, believe that they are receiving a befitting welcome from the villagers. This suspense also applies to the audience who are also made to believe that Obiora is being welcomed as the successor of the late EzeAvujah. The singing and dancing becloud the minds of Obiora and his wife that they did not ask questions regarding the reception and the unexpected gathering at the shrine of Avujah. This is a deliberate use of music in place of words by the playwright to create an atmosphere of suspense that helps in the development of the dramatic theme of the play.

Amid the jubilation, Obiora appreciates his people ignorantly:

Obiora: Thanks for the beautiful welcome my people. I'm flattered.

Brenda, also captivated by the sound of music amused.

Brenda: What a fantastic welcome. I wish I had my camcorder. Man, aren't they cute?

All these utterances are a result of the effect of music on the characters. The playwright deliberately uses music in this scene to create suspense in order to sustain the tempo of the play. In Movement Three, the effect of music has worn off on Obiora and his wife and full realisation has taken place. The elders now visit the family to inform them officially of the decision of the

'gods' and Obiora's need to be initiated. Obiora bursts out:

Obiora: Me? Initiated? In a dream or real life? You guys are not making any sense to me (12).

Nzeduba tries to explain to him;

Nzeduba: our meaning will be clearer to you when we finish. Anyway, you came to the shrine and accepted our salutation accordingly and the pre-initiation ritual. It is now time for you to come for the final initiation rites (12).

Obiora still finds it difficult to come to terms with this scenario. He continues to persist that he never accepted any oracular pronouncement and will never accept to be the chief priest of any deity.

Nzeduba then queries:

Nzeduba: ...Our son, what do you think we were doing at the shrine? Dancing the fool's dance? (12).

For Obiora, what happened at the shrine is a mere celebration for the return of an illustrious son and he states so:

Obiora: you were celebrating my return. I mean you were welcoming a deserving son back from his academic campaigns abroad. What do they call it? Yea! The Golden Fleece. You were welcoming a deserving son who has returned with the Golden Fleece (12).

This conversation is deliberately postponed by the playwright in the previous scene using musical effects. He concealed this realisation to enable him fully develop the plot of the play. In Movement Nine, the solemn nature of Ojinnaka's selection and subsequent installation as the authentic replacement for the late EzeAvujah is highlighted achieved by the playwright, with the help of music. As the elders gather in front of the shrine for the selection, after discovering that the previous oracular pronouncement is twated by the village Diviner under the influence of Akamonye, soft music is heard from the shrine house. Later it rises to brilliance as the name of the new chief priest of Avujah is revealed by the two village custodians. While the new chief priest is being dressed by the two custodians, there is singing and dancing. The solemnity of this all-important ceremony is accomplished with music, not words.

In Movement Ten, the death of Akamonye in the hands of his nephew, Obiora is also highlighted by the playwright with a solemn rendition of a traditional dirge emanating from the backstage. This music is used by the playwright to create an emotional feeling in the audience and aid in a better understanding of the text.

### **Conclusion/Recommendation**

Music in every drama text matters a lot and "it is hard to imagine a play without music" (Soundspect.com np). This paper through the analysis of the play, *Echoes of Madness* by EmekaNwabueze has reaffirmed the importance of music in the development of a drama text. The paper argues that music is a powerful communication element in a play. Music helps the audience to connect to the story for better understanding. The dramatist being a societal watchdog needs to communicate effectively to the target audience, hence the need for effective communication. Music according to Oshionebo and Akazue, functions as a multi-dimensional organ and as a means of expressing personal thoughts and feeling...(78). Regarding the

interface between music and drama. This paper recommends that using music in the development of dramatic themes can aid better understanding and appreciation for the audience,

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