

CHAPTER 11

PROFESSOR AGATHA ONWUEKWE'S ENDEAVOURS IN MUSIC COMPOSITION, EDUCATION, AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper discusses Professor Onwuekwe as a composer and an icon to humanity whose impact on many lives have left indelible memories through her efforts in music creativity, education, and human capital development in Nigeria. Findings reveal that her compositions, accumulated experiences, and documented works serve as rich resource materials for music performers, analysts, teachers/ pedagogues, researchers, and scholars.

Keywords: Music composition, Education, Human capital development and Professor Agatha Onwuekwe

Introduction

Onwuekwe's creative commitment towards the growth of intercultural creativity in Nigerian art music is conceptualised as a mutual cultural synthesis of African with Western musical materials/elements in modern Nigerian works are divulged in this section of the paper through analysis of some of her compositions. (Ofuani, [2022](#)). Note that, although some Nigerian

composers incorporate materials/elements from other cultures of the world; synthesis of those of the Europeans is more popularly prevalent given the early foundations/ influences of Western colonialism, Christian missionaries, and education in Nigeria (Omojola, 1995:11-24).

Prof. Onwuekwe has composed pieces for SATB chorus, solo voice with piano accompaniment, solo instrument with piano accompaniment, etc. from which three pieces, one from each of the media, were selected to represent and illustrate her creative commitment. She also has some pieces for the orchestra.

The selected piece 1, entitled "Square of Numbers" was composed in 2007 for solo soprano voice with piano accompaniment, in F major, time 3/4. As the lyrics suggest, the song is basically pedagogical. The mathematical times table can be easily learnt, memorized, and recited through learning/singing of the song. This suggests that performance and appreciation of the piece would be more meaningful among children and teachers alike. As such, the melody was intendedly created to progress and expound through a downward tonal sequence technique. The technique becomes necessary here as it helps to eliminate the use of multiple melodic materials that would have made the song, its learning process, and rendition to be extraneous to the performers – children; while the rhythmic as well as the melodic fluency/ simplicity are effectively optimised. Thus, through tonal sequence technique the entire melody in the piece geminates from the model (bars 1 & 2):

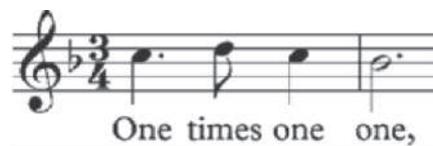


Fig. 1: The model subjected to sequences throughout “Square of Numbers” song

This model pattern is replicated through a three-fold downward tonal sequence with a variation on the third fold(at bar 8), providing the conclusion of the progression. More so, the model and its sequences are maintained throughout the song, consisting of 24 bars, with rhythmic variations that are creatively adopted to accommodate the overlapping syllables of the text. Structurally, the sequence is repeated thrice in the piece with "perpetual variations" (Uzoigwe, 1994:158). This endows the piece "Square of Numbers" with numerous stepwise (tone/semitone) downward tonal sequences of the model shown in Fig. 1. Therefore, the song can be rhythmically and melodically rationalised into a set sequence, thus:

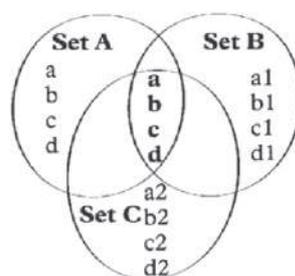


Fig 2: Set analysis of the “perpetual variations” of the Set A

This style of creative minimalism endows the tune with continuous conjunct movements which simplifies the learning and singing of the piece as well as favours children music-making abilities, appreciation, and fantasies. Monotony that would have been occasioned by the incessant repetitions is entirely eliminated through the use of "perpetual variations" (Uzoigwe1994:158) and tonal sequences. The creative background for the utility of "perpetual variations" in the piece is within the composer's indigenous cultural orientation as most Igbo (African) songs are characteristically short, repetitive (cyclical) with "perpetual variations" essentially utilised to accommodate overlapping texts/syllable(s) and eliminate monotony during performance. By this, the song serves the purpose for which it was composed as it is simple to learn, easily committed to memory, and generally suitable for children.

The Set A (bar 1-8) is the first cycle, Set B (bar 9-16) the second cycle, and Set C (bar 17-24) the third cycle in the piece. The 'a' is the universal set that represents the model utilised for all the tonal sequences. Consequently, 'a' represents bar 1-2 with its variations as 'a1' (bar 9-10) and 'a2' (bar 17-18) in which the augmentation technique is explored for variations; 'b' symbolizes bar 3-4 with 'b1' (bar 11-12) and 'b2' (bar 19-20) as the variants; 'c' denotes bar 5-6 with its variations as 'c1' (bar 13-14) and 'c2' (bar 21-22); and, 'd' represents bar 7-8 with 'd1' (bar 15-16) and 'd2' (bar 23-24) as the variants. The sequential progressions and variations follow this structure:

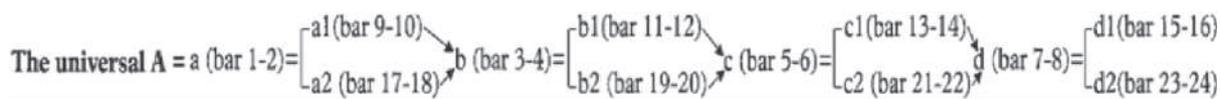


Fig 3a: Set representation of the progressions of the universal model in “perpetual variations”

Similarly, the progressions and alterations of the universal model through “perpetual variations” is elucidated in Fig. 3b. It aptly reveals that bar 1-2 is variationally replicated throughout the piece. How the model rhythmically and tonally permutate in the piece is also glaring in Fig. 3b. Basically, all the patterns are mutations of “A” fit achieved through sequential and variational ordering of “A” – the universal model. So, “A” is a liberal set from which a1, a2, & a3; b1, b2, & b3; c1, c2, & c3; and d1, d2, & d3 generate and they are ultimately similar, the tonal and rhythmic variations notwithstanding. Furthermore, a1, a2, & a3 are identical to each other. Same is evident in subset b1, b2, & b3; subset c1, c2, & c3; and subset d1, d2, & d3:

Fig. 3b: Musical representation of progressions of the universal model in “perpetual variations”

Aside, through a disguised Alberti bass pattern, the piano accompaniment music supplies some contrasting lines that optimise the rhythmic, contrapuntal, and harmonic aesthetics of the piece. Most fundamentally, it provides the metrical pedestal on which the singer leans for vocal firmness, harmonic illumination, and tonal stability.

Like “Square of Numbers” the selected piece 3 (E Flat Alto Saxophone Solo) maintains the minimalism style – a notable technique in most of her compositions.

The image shows a musical score for 'E Flat Alto Saxophone Solo' by Agatha Onwuekwe. The score is in 3/4 time, key of D major, and marked 'Allegro'. It features an Alto Saxophone part and a Piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a triplet of eighth notes at measure 16. Dynamics include 'f' (forte) and 'mp' (mezzo-piano). The piece is titled 'E Flat Alto Saxophone Solo' and 'Agatha Onwuekwe'.

Fig. 4: Onwuekwe's style of minimalism through multiple sequences in “perpetual variations”

The minimalism style, elongated through multiple sequences in perpetual variations, allows Onwuekwe to keep her compositions flowing with admirable simplicity. The concept of simplicity in this creative context does not mean “weakness” or “unsophisticated” because a phenomenon, such as music, can be simple but strong and efficacious as far as it serves the immediate objective for which it is created. Therefore, a simple piece of music composed for pedagogical purpose is strong, sophisticated, and beautiful to its purpose if it accomplishes it effectively; likewise, a technical piece for learning purpose, as well as virtuoso piece for demonstration of expertise etc. Actualisation of a set creative purpose/ objective remains a dominant factor in determining what is sophisticated in compositional creativity as it is never simple to create a simple music. Thus, musical style, purpose, culture, and etc. that embody a composition could be less-valued when compared to compositions with different creative goals; but what remains constant is the question: "can this or that piece/ music be useful in achieving the set objective(s) for which the composer conceived and created it?"

Onwuekwe's compositions, particularly "Square of Numbers"; "Jehova bu Onye Na-azu m Dika Aturu"; "E Flat Alto Saxophone Solo"; and etc. have been performed/played to achieve the set purposes that relate to pedagogy, learning, evaluation, entertainment, skill acquisition, and spirituality. For example, "Square of Numbers" serves edutainment purposes for learners,

children, and teachers alike. On the other hand, according to Onwuekwe (2023: oral interview), the performances of "Jehova bu Onye Na-azu m Dika Aturu" in various Churches, inspire hope and spirituality to the listeners / worshippers. Besides, "E Flat Alto Saxophone Solo" piece has been performed in concerts, classroom, and evaluation/ examination contexts, especially in Department of Music, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Thus, Onwuekwe's desire to educate, entertain as well as spiritualize people through music is strongly achieved through her peculiar compositional missions/ objectives, styles, and creativity.

It is a common knowledge that Sub-Saharan African music composers, who use an indigenous tone language, are faced with the creative challenge brought about by the tone nature of their various languages in the bid to maintain the syntagmatic meaning of word/ phrase/ sentence. But while some of the composers have chosen to match the tone contour of word in their compositions, some depend on creative logic, while some take a mixture approach (Ofuani, 2022). Agatha Onwuekwe belongs to the Igbo creative school that supports and follows the linguistic considerations in music composition wherein the elements (tone, rhythm, syllabification etc.) of word reign supreme than the musical (Ekwueme, 1974).

Onwuekwe follows the tonal structure of word; particularly in the tune of her vocal music compositions in Igbo language (see Onwuekwe, 2004). For example, a thorough scrutiny of her compositions – especially the selected piece 2 (*Jehova Bu Onye Na-azum Dika Aturu*) – based on tone-tune theory, as delineated in Ekwueme (1974), shows that she faithfully maintains the natural speech tone pattern of word. Thus, Professor Onwuekwe is a language purist with reference to Igbo music composition.

Her Contributions to Music Education

Music education is a branch of knowledge that is concerned with the acquisition and dissemination of musical information and skills. It involves all the activities that revolve around the teaching and learning of music (Okafor, 1991; Elliot, 1995; Onwuekwe, 2014; Sunday-Kano, 2016). The main keywords in the above definition are knowledge acquisition and dissemination.

a. Knowledge acquisition:

Over the years, Prof. Onwuekwe has attained great heights in the music profession through her stanch efforts towards seeking knowledge and advancement in scholarship. In 1983, she took up music studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where she bagged the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree in Education/Music, in 1986. To further her knowledge acquisition and skills in music, she proceeded for postgraduate studies in the same institution and earned a Master (M.Ed.) degree in Administration and Supervision, in 1997; with another Master (M.A) degree in Music Theory and Composition, in 1999. Still not satisfied with her educational attainments, she embarked on a doctoral programme at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and obtained her first Ph.D in Music Theory and Composition, in 2007. Thereafter, she bagged a second Ph.D in

Educational Management and Policy from same institution (in 2008). Thus, becoming one of the few female Nigerians to bag two PhDs as well as two Masters (M.A) degrees from Nigerian University.

She has attended national and international conferences and has many publications in reputable journals and chapters in books. She has also served in several eminent positions in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. For instance, she was the Head, Department of Music in 2010, Sub-Dean, Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, 2008 to 2010; Member, Welfare Committee, Faculty of Arts Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; member, Guidance and Counselling Committee, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, etc.

Professor Onwuekwe is a member of learned societies and has received several scholarly awards for her contributions to the development of music in Nigeria. This includes: Post-Doctoral Fellowship of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) /African Humanities Programme (AHP), in 2010, a very prestigious award; Fellow of Nigerian Musicologists (FANIM); Fellow, Society of Music Educators of Nigeria; member, National Association of Curriculum Theorists; member, Association for Promoting Quality Education in Nigeria, amongst others.

Agatha served as an adjudicator at Christ Holy Church International Youths' Band competition, Ndoni River State in 2015; Christ Holy Church International Women singing competition, Abuja and Ghana in 2008 and 2010 respectively; Awka Diocesan Musical Festivals, 1996-2002; Anambra State Children's Carnival in 2001; among others. This helped in improving performance standards as many of the participants learnt to develop better creative skills through her comments and recommendations as the adjudicator. As a performer (alto singer) she presented and participated in performances at several events. For example, she performed Christmas Carol Songs and pieces from Handel's Messiah at the university auditorium on the 19th of December, 2008

b. Knowledge dissemination:

Professor Onwuekwe's commitment in nurturing creativity and imparting musical knowledge and skills in learners is laudable as her intellectual contribution in the academia is colossal. For example, she has been internal and external examiner to many institutions in Nigeria and has also contributed in the Nigeria's industry of knowledge advancement which is particularly glaring in one of her major books (Onwuekwe, 2017) on the rudiments and theory of music – which has consistently become a companion of Nigerian music students as well as teachers.

She also disseminates knowledge through creative compositions. The pieces serve as pedagogical materials in several schools/ institutions which has helped in promoting music education in Nigeria. Amongst them are:

S/N	Title	Medium	Year of Composition
1.	Mathematical Tables: Two to Twelve Times Table and Squares of Numbers	Voice and piano (252 bars)	2007
2.	E-flat Alto Saxophone Solo with Piano Accompaniment	Voice and piano (208 bars)	2007
3.	Oh, what a Wonderful Father the Almighty is	Choral (156 bars)	2007
4.	“Jehovah Bu Onye Na-Azum Dika Aturu” (The Lord is My Shepherd)	Choral (120 bars)	2007
5.	Eze Nke Otito Na-abia (The King of Glory Comes)	Choral (61 bars)	2006
6.	Everybody Welcomes You	Choral (strophic)	2004
7.	Biography of Rev. Fr. Jude Thaddeus Chidurao Offodum	Choral	2009
8.	The Trumpets of the Last World Judgment are Already Sounding	Choral	2010
9.	Ogbanje	folk opera, female voices	1980
10.	Ihe Ukwu Mere N'Isulo (A Great Thing Happened in Isulo)	Choral	1979
11.	The Vice Chancellor's March for Chamber Orchestra	orchestra	2004
12.	Song of the Soldiers	orchestra and chorus	2006
13.	Let us sing to the Glory of the Lord	Choral	
14.	Igbo Amaka (Igbo is good)	Choral	2015
15.	Let the Earth Resound	C h a m b e r Orchestra (76 bars)	

Table 1: Some Compositions by Agatha Onwuekwe

More so, Professor Onwuekwe has disseminated knowledge through teaching/lecturing. This she passionately carried-out as a music lecturer at Department of Music: College of Education, Awka; Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe; and NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka with huge output in the supervision of research works at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels. To this effect, Dr Sunday Ofuani testifies that Prof. Onwuekwe was his doctoral thesis supervisor (2013-15). From this date span of his doctoral programme, one could figure-out the overwhelming speedy, but critical, attention she gave to him and his submissions. Not only Dr Ofuani enjoyed this attribute of hers as many PhD holders she supervised can attest to it too. She is committed to

her duties, mindful of her supervisee's predicaments and ameliorates same within her possible reaches.

Her Contributions in Human Capital Development

According to Cowell (1996:376), Human capital is “the stock of acquired talents, skills and knowledge which may enhance a worker's earning power in the labour market”. Malaysia official book (2006) cited in Ofuokwu (2011:37) refers to it as “individuals who are knowledgeable, confident, possessing noble values and high morality, ethical, well-mannered, disciplined, dynamic, innovative, creative, healthy, patriotic, just, progressive, resilient, and competitive”. To Wikipedia it “encompasses employee knowledge, skills, know-how, good health, and education”. Therefore, human capital development deals with improving the quality output of a workforce in terms of productivity of service. Of course, it includes intangible assets from a person's talents and experience. Consequently, the following elements must be taken into cognizance: skills, creativity, education, work experience, personality, employee's well-being, personal resilience, and loyalty. Incorporating the aspect of “developments” into these definitions, Orife (2011:144) considers human capital development as “the stock of competence, knowledge, and personality attributes embodied in the ability of humankind to perform labour with the aim to produce economic value”; while Ojakovo (2016:330) perceives it as “the process by which men acquire basic skills, experiences and knowledge to function effectively and contribute to the economic growth and development of their society.” Also, Mowarin (2011:54) explains that “the essence of human capital development in Nigeria is to encourage talented Nigerians to acquire skills in relevant disciplines to enable them become relevant to the society”. Ofuokwu (2011:36) adds “it is through the educational system that the acquisition of relevant and practical skills that adequately equip the youths and graduates for meaningful and specialized engagement in the labour market is introduced”.

Human capital development in Nigeria precisely involves acquiring and increasing skills and education critical to the development of the country. Consequently, it is crucial for the following strategic roles it plays in national development:

- Increase in the number of knowledgeable workers who can add value to the economy;
- Improvement in knowledge work (as opposed to routine work) which presupposes a high level of theoretical knowledge, combined with creative ability for productive application;
- Acceleration in the rate of national growth and development.
-

Professor Onwuekwe has been an outstanding resource person through whom a stream of music educators has evolved at different levels. For example, her teaching both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels has contributed in producing many graduates of music – 30 B.A., 15 M.A., and 20 PhD graduates – to completion and by so doing has encouraged and promoted the intellectual development of some Nigeria's citizens.

Her impact in this area creates a milestone influence on the practice, ethics, and principles of education which has positively added to the economy in the business of musical knowledge production. In terms of manpower development, Prof. Onwuekwe has tutored and mentored music scholars, such as: Dr. Chinyere C. Esimone (Associate Professor, Department of Music, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka); Dr. Sunday Ofuani (Head, Department of Music, Delta State University, Abraka); Dr. Albert G. Alfred, Dr. Precious Omoko, (Lecturers: Department of Music, University of Port Harcourt); Dr. Austin-Okoli Josephine (Teaching in the United States of America); Dr. Ezeugwu Felicia Onyebuchi (Lecturer, Department of Music, University of Nigeria, Nsukka); Dr. Iruoma Amaka Ugoo-Okonkwo (Lecturer, Department of Music, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka) and a host of others to enable them acquire the skills needed to be productive in musical career, leading to manpower development.

Furthermore, her long-term experience in the field of music education is a big asset when we consider the subject of human capital development. This is because human capital development functions effectively through experienced hands. In this regard, Prof. Onwuekwe's experience cannot be overlooked, vis-à-vis music education and formal training required to foster human capital development.

Conclusion

This study revealed that Prof. Onwuekwe has contributed significantly to the growth of music education, composition/ creativity, and human capital development in Nigeria. Her students, mentees, and colleagues have benefited immensely from her wealth of experience which has positively promoted the Nigerian economy in the business of musical knowledge production. As a pedagogue par excellence, she is one of Nigeria's erudite music scholars and composers who have contributed immensely to the frontiers of knowledge in her peculiar area of discipline and creativity. With over thirty years of teaching and research experience, she has impacted greatly on the academic and moral standards of students.

Apparently, in the area of music pedagogy, she has earned a reputation of providing continuous guidance for excellent and globally standardized academic work. Within few decades, she ascended the peak of her career; what is most likely termed a success. However, a truly successful person is revealed by the quality of his/her successors. Over the years, many great minds have evolved through her mentorship, of which these authors are privileged and proud to be among. Beyond being a mentor, she has set herself as a role model and proven to be a mother to many. The beauty of her personality stimulates admiration and her inter-personal relationships speak voluminously about her attribute of motherhood. Intriguing to all is her tenderly love, calm, compassionate, and patient spirit; unique attributes which have kept people around her. The expression of her motherhood has encouraged many for growth and development. Despite her

high academic and social prestige, she has maintained a humble spirit, simple and approachable to all; a quality she has preserved that defines her true personality.

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Appendix 1: The Full Score of "Square of Numbers:

Square of Numbers Agatha Onwuekwe
2007

1st cycle

Voice: One times one one, two times two four, three times three nine,

Piano: [Musical notation]

7

2nd cycle

Voice: four times four six-teen, five times five twenty five, six times six thirty six,

Piano: [Musical notation]

13

3rd cycle

Voice: seven times seven forty nine, eight times eight sixty four, nine nine eighty-one,

Piano: [Musical notation]

19

Voice: ten ten one hundred eleven eleven one three two, twelve times twelve one-fourty four.

Piano: [Musical notation]