Indigenous musical instruments: Media of communication in Nigerian culture

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Abstract
This paper is aimed at giving an insight into some of the Nigerian musical instruments, their classifications, musical functions, mode of construction as well as their relevance as media of communication. The yearning in people's hearts in recent times for the preservation of the Nigerian rich cultural heritage led to this research. Many indigenous Nigerian musical instruments communicate in languages which performers or dancers understand. This is to say that indigenous instruments such as the 'qja' (Igbo flute) and 'iya-ilu' (Yoruba talking drum) speak non verbal languages which only the performers understand; some of these instruments such as 'qja' (Igbo flute), and 'iya ilu' (Yoruba talking drum) sing praises to heroes and great achievers in the community which are clearly understood by the recipients. This research was conducted through library research and participatory observation. It is designed to enlighten the audience on the role of these indigenous musical instruments a means of communication in Nigerian culture, and the method of constructing them. It is believed that this work will add to the compendium of knowledge on Nigerian culture as well as enlighten the teaming unemployed Nigerian youths on how to construct these instruments and make a living out of this.

1.0 Introduction

Every culture has her musical instruments which she is known for and identified with. In spite of acculturation, industrialization and

Westernization, there is still an inner craving in every culture for her cultural posterity amidst the beclouding effects of the aforementioned trio. In the past, through excavations, some imperishable musical instruments were discovered by artists and this served as basis or clues for identifying and associating them with communities from where the discoveries were made. According to Nguma, Ayoola, Uba & Samkay (2010) "excavations carried out at some sites in Nigeria in the early and mid 1900s revealed that some traditional art forms were produced as far back as early 15th century." (p. 76).

2.0 Classification of Nigerian musical instruments

In the words of Inanga and Soyanno (1991):

> Nigeria has a rich heritage of traditional instruments although for a long time, the impression created by early travelers was that drums were the predominant musical instruments. While it is true that drumming plays an important role in Nigerian music, indeed, Nigerian musical instruments are many and varied and can be categorized into four main divisions, namely; idiophones, membranophones, aerophones, and chordophones. (p. 105).

Onwuekwe (2011) reveals that:

> Curt Sachs and Eric Von Hornbostel came up with a very scientific criterion for classification of African musical instruments. They studied the physical properties of various musical instruments in terms of scientific properties governing the sources of sound production and came up with four organological divisions into which African instruments are classified namely: Idiophones, Membranophones, Chordophones sand Aerophones. (p. 57). Similarly, Nwafor (2010) writes thus:

Africa has a wide variety of musical instruments. They spread all over the length and breadth of the African continent, with complex diversity. Generally African instruments can be classified under the following four categories as follows: Aerophones (All available traditional instruments

consisting of flutes, horns, and trumpets), Idiophones (Instruments that produce sound by the vibration of the entire bodies), Chordophones (String instruments) and Membranophones (Skin drums).

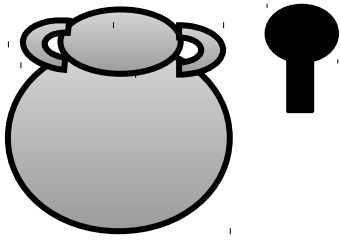
Idiophones

Microsoft Encarta (2007) states:

> Idiophones are resonating percussion instruments made from resonating material that does not have to be tuned e.g. gong, xylophone. The slit drum found in tribal cultures is also an idiophone. It is made of a tree trunk hollowed out through a narrow stick. The bell is a musical percussion instrument, a hollow cup-shaped vessel, usually made of metal but sometimes made of wood, pottery (pot drum), or other material that produces sound. Pot gong (drum) is made of bronze. The simplest ensembles have four or five pot gongs tuned to different pitches. Xylophones come from the Greek word xylon (wood), phone (sound). It is a musical percussion instrument consisting of a series of graduated wooden bars that are struck with mallets, to provide sound. Shaken idiophones are instruments that are shaken. An example is rattle or maracas.

According to Nwafor (2010): "Idiophones are instruments that produce sounds by the vibration of the entire bodies". (p.183). They are played by hitting, shaking or plucking. Examples are: i. Struck idiophones: pot drum (udu), slit-wooden drum (ekwe), bells or wooden gong (ogene), xylophone (ngedegwu). ii. Shaken idiophones: the rattle (ichaka) and iii. Plucked idiophones: 'ubo' aka (thumb piano).

Pot Drum



Membranophones

Skin drums are called membranophones because sound is produced from them by the vibration of stretched membrane. Microsoft Encarta (2007) says:

> Drums are classified as membranophones because their sound is produced by vibrating a membrane. It consists of a skin tied over the top and pierced by a stick. Examples are conga drum, talking drum, tambourine etc. Conga drum is a long, narrow drum played with the palm of the hand and fingers. Tambourine is a small frame drum that is constructed of a single membrane stretched over a circular rim, which usually has metal jingle disks attached to it. It can be played in three different ways: tapping the membrane with fingers, shaking the instrument, or striking it against the body.

Nwafor, (2010), informs that, "membranophones are instruments that use leather or membrane covering at one or two drum-heads." (p. 184).

Aerophones

These are instruments played by blowing air into them e.g. local flute (oja), Hausa reed (aligaita), Hausa trumpet (khakaki). They produce sounds by the vibration of the air column.

Chordophones

These are instruments made of strings or cords and are played by plucking e.g. Hausa violins such as 'goje', 'gurmi' and Igbo zither (ubo akwara).

From the discussion so far made, it is known that Nigerians have a wide variety of musical instruments ranging from idiophones (self-sounding instruments), membranophones, (instruments that produce sounds by the vibration of stretched membranes), aerophones (indigenous wind

instruments) and chordophones (strings/plucked instruments) as shown below:

Conga Drummers in action





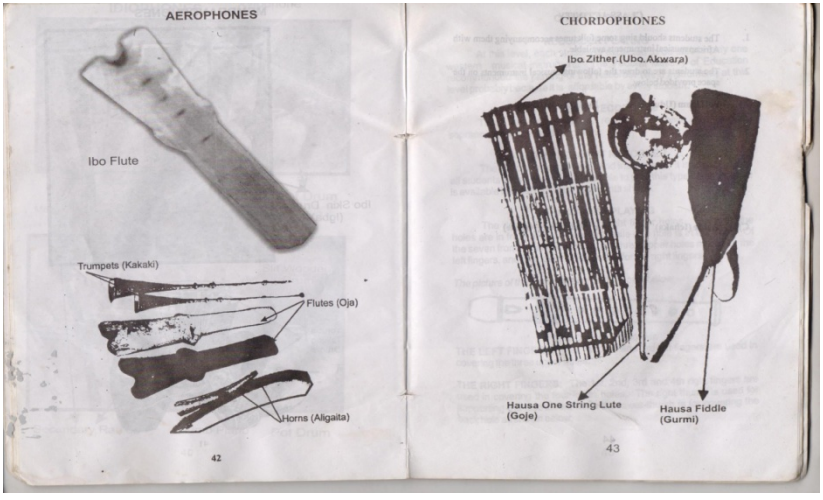
Conga drum

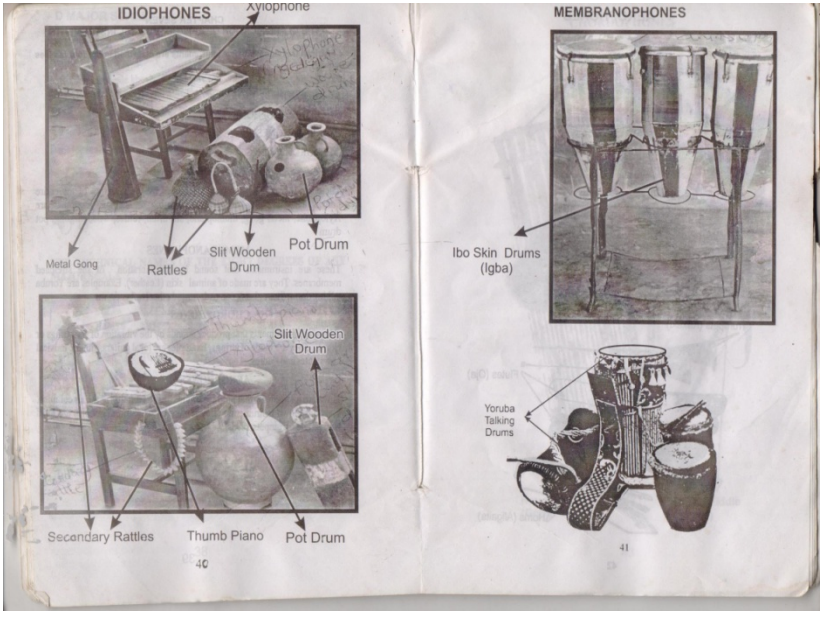
Tambourine





Talking drum


AEROPHONES
Ibo Flute
Trumpets (Kakaki)
Flutes (Oja)
Horns (Aligaita)
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CHORDOPHONES
Ibo Zither (Ubo Akwara)
Hausa One String Lute (Goje)
Hausa Fiddle (Gurmi)
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IDIOPHONES
Xylophone
Metal Gong
Rattles
Slit Wooden Drum
Pot Drum
Slit Wooden Drum
Secondary Rattles
Thumb Piano
Pot Drum
40
MEMBRANOPHONES
Ibo Skin Drums (Igba)
Yoruba Talking Drums
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More Idiophones: The Xylophone **The Thumb piano**





3.0 Functions of Nigerian indigenous musical instruments

The xylophone: ngelenge, ngedegwu (Igbo), kundung (Hausa), ikon (Ibibio)

The xylophone is a melody instrument made of wooden slabs placed across banana stems or wooden box as support and also as resonators when struck with a stick. The slabs vibrate to produce sound. The slabs are usually of different lengths and are placed from the shortest to the longest. It can have 2 to 15 slabs. Xylophones are commonly used by the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria and the Hausa of Northern Nigeria. Inanga and Soyannwo (1991) observe that "the xylophone consists of horizontal slabs of wood placed across banana stems; wooden bough or clay pots which act as supports as well as resonating chambers. The slabs which are of different lengths vibrate when struck. (p. 105).

Functions of the xylophone

The xylophone of two slabs plays rhythmic functions while the type with many slabs plays the melody. It is a medium for communicating the key of music to a group in a choral singing group. It is a solo instrument. It serves as the traditional keyboard instrument.

Rattles: Ichaka (Igbo), Sekere (Yoruba), Nsak (Ibibio)

The rattle is a shaker idiophone and of two types namely:

a. **Primary rattles:** These are hand held and shaken. The basket rattle contains shaken objects such as seeds or pebbles. The gourd rattle is made with shells or beads attached with net on the gourd and produces sound when shaken or struck.

b. **Secondary rattles:** These are attached on the bodies of performers and vibrate when the dancers are in action.

Musical functions of rattles

1. They are used in Nigerian orchestras.
2. They are played in dances and can play regular time patterns.
3. They are played by traditional doctors when communicating with deities.

Metal gong: Agogo (Yoruba), Ogene (Igbo), Nkwong (Ibibio)

This is a local bell made of metal or iron. Most bells are hand held and struck. They are in single, double and even in a set of bells called “Ogenephones”. The Ogenephones are capable of playing definite pitches and are therefore melody instruments. The bells are played with hard stick. The single bell produces monotones while the double bell (ogene mkpi’) produces two tones.

Functions of the metal gong

The ‘ogene’ plays a regular time pattern in an ensemble giving a metronome effect. The ogene is played in masquerade music. It is also

played in indigenous orchestra in Nigeria. It accompanies dances. It plays rhythmic patterns and is also a means of communication; town-criers use it to make announcements in the villages. It is used for rituals by native doctors. Its communicative function also includes alerting dances on when to change their dance steps as in Igbo 'Atilogwu Dance' where the big metal gong (alo) cues the dancers on changing from one dance step to another

Slit wooden drum: Ekwe (Igbo), Obodom (Ibibio)

This is a drum made of log of wood with two openings or lips at the top that serve as resonators. It is common among the Igbo. It is played with stick and is capable of producing two tones when the lips are struck.

Functions of the slit wooden drum

1. It is heard in orchestral music
2. It is a leading drum in Igbo traditional dances
3. It is played in masquerade music
4. It is used for communication such as announcements and summoning villagers to meetings.

The pot drum: Udu (Igbo), Abang (Ibibio)

The pot drum is an earthen ware pot which has an opening at the top. The second type has two openings, one at the top and the other at the side. The type with an opening at the top is struck with fan-like foam while the second type is carried on the lap with the left hand striking the hole at the top and the right hand striking the hole at the side to produce sound. The functions of the pot drum include: accompanying singers, accompaniment to dances, it sometimes plays regular time patterns to keep the beats, it communicates to dancers when to change to the next dance step. It also controls the dancer's body and feet movements.

Membranophones

Skin-drums: Gangan Kalangu, Tambari (Hausa) Iya ilu (Yoruba) Igba (Igbo)

These are drums that have the surfaces covered with membrane (animal skin) and are played with hands or sticks. Some have pegs attached on them which when tightened increase the pitch of the sounds. Examples include iya ilu (Yoruba), bembe, kazagi, kotso and kunituku (Hausa) There are double and single headed drums. The Igbo skin drum (Igba) is a three in one leather drum. There are single ones as well.

Functions of skin drums

Kalangu is used for entertainment; the dundun orchestra is played on festive occasions. The iya ilu talks, improvises and plays various rhythms. The igbin ensemble is used by the 'Yoruba' for religious purposes and also for entertainment. The bembe ensemble is used for entertainment and war. The Yoruba iya Ilu'communicates, used for praising heroes and warriors. It imitates speech

Aerophones

Flutes: 'Oja' (Igbo), 'Sarewa' (Hausa)

Oja: The 'oja' is a wooden flute with holes manipulated by the fingers to produce different pitches. 'Sarewa is an Hausa wind instrument.

Functions of flutes

Communicating to dancers when to change dance steps is one of the functions of the flute. It is also a medium for praising heroes and warriors. Hausa fare and Yoruba Tioko are wooden flutes used for entertainment music.

Horns

These are animal horns e.g. Hausa Kaho for entertainment, Ibibio 'oduk' made of deer horn, Ibibio 'Uta' and side blown.

Igbo Opi

Igbo 'ekpili', Igbo 'odu' Elephant horn which is played for praising heroes, warriors and important personalities.

Trumpet e.g. Hausa 'kakaki'. This is a long metal trumpet used for court music for Hausa emirs R**eed instruments**

Hausa 'aligaita'. This is a metal or wooden reed with a mouth-piece and two reeds like ice English oboe used only by the Hausa. Side blown aerophones are held sideways (horizontally) while blowing them but the end blown aerophones are held straight while in operation.

Chordophones

The lute: Goje, Garanya, Molo, Taburu (Hausa)

Goje: This is an Hausa fiddle with one string. The body is made of calabash with a long neck for stretching the string and contains horse tails. It is used for rhymes purposes in the bom cult of the Hausa. It is used for entertainment; the goje player is capable of producing up to 8 notes with the single string.

Garanya: Hausa garanya has two strings and is plucked.

Molo: Hausa molo has three strings and is also plucked

Taburu: Hausa taburu has four strings and also plucked

Gurmi: This also belongs to the lute family and is plucked

Musical bow (Une): The Igbo 'une' is a carved stick with a stretched string across its ends

The lutes and musical bows are used for entertainment.

Zithers ('ubo' akwara): The 'ubo' akwara is made of strings of grass stalks. The stalks are joined together to form a raft. Zithers are found in Eastern Nigeria. The strings are placed horizontally and fixed at the two ends. They are plucked with the thumbs and used for entertainment.

4.0 Technology/construction of the indigenous instruments

a. Construction of the wooden and skin instruments

Saw, file, cutlass, chisel, mallet are needed for boring, hewing, scooping, and smoothening the wood while constructing 'oja' 'ekwe', 'ngedegwu', and 'igba'. These instruments require air and sunlight to sound well.

b. Construction of the earthen-ware instruments

Ceramic tools for the construction of the earthen-ware instruments include trowel, spade, palette. The clay is mixed, cut, erected, shaped and fired to form a standard udu (pot drum).

c. Construction of metal instruments

The required materials/tools include chisel, plier, mallet, hammer, scissors, and furnace. These are melted on the furnace by blacksmiths to be in liquid form for bending and shaping the metal instruments such as ogene, alo, metal udu, and bells or Igbo 'mgbiligba' The instrument can be cut, opened and required holes put.

d. Construction of shaken idiophones and other roped instruments

They are tied on the waists, ankles or wrists of dancers. It can be used on dundun- iya ilu (Yoruba) and ekpili (Igbo). The tools/materials required for the shaken idiophones include dried seeds, rope, knife, razor blade, needle and chisel. The chisel is used to bore the hole for weaving the instruments.

Ofuani (2011) states that:

> Some Nigerian musical instruments that are prevalent in the workshop-market are: xylophone (the double-slab and multi-slab types), wooden bells ('okpokolo' slit drums (ekwe/ikoro), metal bells (alo, ogene etc.), 'mgbiligba'(bell), ogenephone, wooden rattles, calabash/gourd rattles, basket rattles, musical pots (the foam-pad and the hand beaten types), varieties of membrane drums ('igba') bongo, ogwe etc.), thumb-piano, the Igbo people's wooden flute ('oja'), etc. (p.183).

5.0 Conclusion

The Nigerian indigenous instruments perform musical, communicative and religious purposes. These include announcements, directing performers or dancers on the next step to take, for religious worship, as accompaniments to singing groups, for orchestral indigenous music, as solo instruments, as rhythmic instruments that play regular time patterns as metronome giving ostinato effects. On this Agu (2013) states:

> In a full African performance, there is always one or two instruments that serve as metronome or referent instrument. The instrument constantly maintains the strict rhythmic patterns of

the music which define both the phrase, length and pulse existence. (p. 4).

The materials/tools for their construction are also highlighted in this study. This is necessitated as it can provide lucrative jobs for the teaming unemployed Nigerian youths.

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