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Organisational Structure and Performance Practices of Òkítóròkò Music of the Ogori in Kogi State

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Abstract



Ogori is a small community in Kogi State, Nigeria. The people are known for the annual celebration of Ovia-Osese festival where Òkítóròkò music is performed. Several studies have been carried out on Òkítóròkò music. However, little attention has been paid to the organisational structure and performance practices of the music, which is imperative to the rite of passage of the maidens. This study intends to fill the gap with a view to exploring the organisational structure of the performing group, performance practices of the music and its cultural sensibilities during the rite of passage of the maidens. In-depth oral interview with seven purposively selected members of the Òkítóròkò musical group was employed. Findings show that, though, the performance of Òkítóròkò music started as a spontaneous activity among aged women at the inception of the Ovia-Osese festival; it has become an organised musical performance. It also reveals that the Iyiodina

(the custodian of the initiation rite) is in charge of the musical group, while members cut-across the five clans of the community namely; Adubane, Okibo, Oshobane, Opowo and Eni. The paper concludes that the peculiarity of the Òkítóròkò musical group and the performance practices of the music promote the cultural ingenuity and indigenous prowess of the Ogori people to the globe. This is why the paper recommends that adequate attention should be given to the musical practices of the Ogori so that people can learn about the rich cultural heritage of the community.

Keywords: organisational structure, performance practices, Òkítóròkò, Ovia-Osese, Ogori

1. Introduction

The practice of music in Africa is seen to have been associated with humanity from the time immemorial as evident in the cultural matrix of the Ogori people. This is because the indigenous musical performances of the people of Africa in general, occupy a position of great importance in the culture and tradition of the people. In fact, it serves as a medium through which the rich cultural heritage and history of the people are further recognised, as evident in the musical performances of the Ogori people in Kogi State, Nigeria. Ogori is a minority ethnic group in Kogi State with its own distinct identity, language, culture, tradition, custom, norms and value. It is a medium sized town in the Ogori/Magongo Local Government Area (LGA) of the Central Senatorial District of Kogi State, Nigeria. It is surrounded by hills, which rise between 32-196 metres above the sea level. These hills include; *Agada* hill to the North and Northwest, *Omoneyen* hill to the East and *Odiobo* hill to the South and Southeast. Osheidu (1990) described the three non-equidistant open valleys, which provide natural exit and entry accesses into the central valley, which Ogori presently occupies. These entries are Magongo route, Okene route and Ekpedo route in Akoko Edo, Edo State. Ogori community shares boundary with *Ososo*, *Ojah*, *Makeke*, *Ekpedo* and *Olokoto* in the South, *Bekuma*, *Lampese*, *Ibillo*, *Imoga* are in the Southwest, while *Agave* and *Obehirain Okene* covers the Northwest of Òkó speaking areas. According to Kogi State population statistics (2006), Ogori has a total number of thirty-nine thousand, eight hundred and seven people (39,807). The community is divided into five clans namely: *Adubane*, *Okibo*, *Oshobane*, *Opowo* and *Eni*. Each of these clans has a head chief known as *Otaro*. Ogori people are music enthusiasts as music is one of the artistic forms through which their culture is expressed. Traditional music such as Òkíkóròkò music in particular, helps in maintaining and safeguarding the cultural tradition and history of the people, which is preserved and passed orally from one generation to the other.

Of all the musical practices in Ogori community, Òkítóròkò music, being a ceremonial music, is the main musical performance that is performed by women and coordinated by the Íyiodina (the custodian of the initiation rite) during *Ovia-Osese* festival. This festival signifies the rite of passage among the female indigenes of Ogori. The purpose of the festival to the Ogori people is to educate the maidens who had attained the puberty age (14-21 years) on chastity, as well as enlighten the populace on the tradition and custom that guided nuptial rite in the community. The institution of marriage is well cherished by the Ogori people. This is why much emphasis on proper upbringing of the maidens to be morally, intellectually and culturally upright is of paramount importance in the community. Meanwhile, the way and manner in which the Òkítóròkò musical group presents their performances recently have changed from what it used to be in the past in terms of organisation, while the performance practices and context remains intact. Therefore, an enquiry into the organisational structure and performance practices of Òkítóròkò music will deepen the knowledge of the musical tradition of the Ogori people.

There is no doubt that several scholars of international reputes have researched into the national acclaimed *Ovia-Osese* festival among the Ogori people where Òkíkóròkò music is performed annually. Scholars such as Awe (2012), Osiako (2003), Aje (1995), Osheidu (1990), Akerejola (1970), to mention but a few, have contributed extensively to the growth and development of traditional ceremonial music, while existing studies on *Ovia-Osese* festival, *viz-a-viz* the history of the Ogori community has been dealt with. However, little attention has been paid to the organisational settings of the Òkíkóròkò musical group, as well as their performance practices during *Ovia-Osese* festival. The festival is a revered culture among the people of Ogori, used in upholding the moral purity of the maidens in the community. The purpose of this present study is to unearth the uniqueness of the Òkíkóròkò musical group within the purview of their organisational structure and performance practices. In addition, musical excerpts from the performances of the group were examined and analysed. The study highlights the importance of traditional musical settings in promoting the cultural identity and musical heritage of the African society, especially among the Ogori people in Kogi State, Nigeria.

2. Review of Related Literature

The study was based on an assumption that music in African life is highly functional. This study is thereby premised and anchored on functionalist theory of Hubert Spencer (1901), as used by Offer (2019). Offer, in his study, pointed out that Spencer occupied a position, which embraced utilitarianism (p.5). He also reappraised Spencer's account of the emergence of "professionals" and their distinctive "cunning, skill, and acquaintance

with the nature of things," which professionals have brought to bear on what has been experienced in the ordinary social lives of people (p.1.) Spencer's functionalist theory is likened to the functioning parts of society, as organs within a body. This theory addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements; such as norms, customs, traditions, and institutions. While in music, it talks about the connectedness of musical heritage to the entire cultural activities of a community. This is evident in the traditional musical performances of the *Okítóròkò* musical group, which is inevitable in the cultural matrix of the Ogori people.

Nketia (1974, p.24) noted that music that may be performed on any occasion depends on the social event and those involved in it. This is figured out from music in African context which is hinged on the celebration of life and usually performed for specific purposes. For example, a work song is performed only in the context of the work that it relates to; or a religious song which is performed solely for a religious occasion just to mention but a few. This implies that ceremonies in African society are connected with the life cycle such as birth rite, puberty rite and rite of passage of which the *Òkítóròkò* music is an example of such ceremonial music performed during *Ovia-Osese* festival among the Ogori people. Meanwhile, the rite of passage for maidens who have attained the puberty age is also celebrated among the *Akan* people in the Southwestern region of Ghana, while singing and drumming are accordingly performed by adult women. (Nketia, 1974, p.1)

The concept of music as a phenomenon varies from one society to another, which might depend on the role it plays in the culture of the people. It is in view of this that Omolaye (2014) noted "music performance during social events among Africans depends on the socio-cultural norms and tradition of the people involved" (p.2). This is because in African settings, music has been integrated into the daily activities of the people; the usage and functionality of it, consistently, have intrinsic values and alleviates communion experience among the people of the community. In view of the intrinsic experience of music among Africans, Onyeji (2012) posited that it has power to reawaken feelings and moods, make it very effective in reaching the mental and emotional states of human for possible influence in the positive direction, especially about the socio-cultural values and norms of the community. As stated in the above assertion, the performance of the *Òkítóròkò* music encourages mutual interaction among members of the community and strengthens relationships in that the festival, being a cultural cord of unity, binds the people of the community together.

Several scholars have written extensively on the significance of music during festivals among Africans, with emphasis on functions and modes of the festivals. For instance,

Abiodun (2000) described traditional music as “the practice of what is musical and extra-musical in the culture of the people” (p.39). He noted that traditional ceremonial music functions as social agent for transmitting knowledge, entertainment, expression of feelings and thoughts. In view of the above, Udoh (2012) corroborated that traditional music is truly the mirror of the people’s culture, as evident in the performance of Òkító̀ròkò music of the Ogori people. Meanwhile, Nketia (1982) aptly stated that “a community that does not have a vigorous musical life is regarded as a dead community” (p.98). Consequently, Euba (1963) reported that the most important reason for keeping traditional music alive in Africa is the continuity of the various social institutions, which serve as the basis for the performance of their music. As long as these institutions remain active, there is little fear that the practice of traditional music will seriously decline. This is because music and culture are inseparable as confirmed in Okafor (2005) when he stated that “indigenous African music reflects the culture of its people as well as its cultural form in its own right” (p.67). Traditional ceremonial music like Òkító̀ròkò music is symbolic to the people of Ogori which has to be performed in order for the purpose to which the *Ovia-Osese* festival is being carried out is realised. The performance of Òkító̀ròkò music remains a vital feature of the people’s life and has never been performed without a meaning attached to it. Adedeji (1998) noted that many traditional African societies have musical practices which are limited to virgins only. He stated further that such musical practices were, in most cases, linked to a festival in which Òkító̀ròkò music belongs.

The significance of Òkító̀ròkò music is that it is used to educate the maidens on how to relate to their in-laws, raise children in a proper way, take good care of their husbands, cook good food; just to mention a few. It is also meant to entertain the ‘*Iyiodina*’ (the highest women chieftaincy title in the council of chiefs and the custodian of the maidens) during the festival. The functionality of Òkító̀ròkò music encompasses every activity of the people of the community as confirmed in the assertions of eminent scholars examined. From the foregoing, it is obvious that traditional ceremonial music such as Òkító̀ròkò music is of great importance in the cultural matrix of the Ogori people of Kogi State, Nigeria.

3. Method and Process

This paper employed both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The primary method includes an in-depth oral interview with seven purposively selected members of the Òkító̀ròkò musical group. As at the time this research was conducted, the musical group comprised 30 members including the *Iyiodina* (the custodian of the initiation rite). The justification for selecting these seven members was based on their individual roles and experiences in the musical group. Three of which were of 37, 40

and 45 years of age, while the remaining four were of 50, 53, 58 and 62 years of age respectively. The seven purposively selected members of the Òkítóròkò musical group include the coordinator of the group, the lead singer and five purposively selected members from the chorused section of the group. The interview was conducted at the end of one of their rehearsal sessions at the *lyiodina's* quarters in *Oshobane*, Ogori, and after their performance at the *Ovia-Osese* festival 2019 in Ogori, Kogi State, Nigeria. This was done in order to have first-hand information as regards their structural settings and performance practices. Some of the songs rendered were scored in notation form for posterity. Photographs of important aspects of their performances both musical and non-musical activities were made.

4. 0 Findings and Discussion

Without any doubt, Africans usually express varieties of thought and dramatic actions as part of their tradition through various musical activities with a view to propagating the legends and history of the people. This is evident in the roles played by the Òkítóròkò music at the initiation rite of the maidens who have attained the puberty age of 14 years and above during the *Ovia-Osese* festival which usually comes up in the month of April annually. The performance of Òkítóròkò music is solely for the initiation of the maidens into womanhood. The performance of this music during the festival cannot be undermined. It is a taboo for a girl to get pregnant, let alone marry before her *Ovia-Osese*. In the past, if this occurred, such family is ostracized and the girl loses her respect and integrity in the community. This makes the performance of Òkítóròkò music to occupy a position of great importance in the culture and tradition of the Ogori people. The celebration encompasses weeklong activities, which include lessons in homemaking, motherhood, singing, dancing, drumming, feasting and thanksgiving services at various Churches and Mosque in Ogoriland.

The practice of music among Africans has been associated with humanity from the primeval time. This is further explicated by Ihekweazu (1985), when he stated that “music is made to enable man understand his past, contribute to the shaping of the present and future” (p.27). There is no doubt that the Òkítóròkò musical group has its own structure with responsibilities attached to each arm of the group, as the group is divided into three sections; the lead singer, backup singers (who also doubles as dancers) and the instrumental section. The lead singer usually gives the cue, while the backup singers respond to the call in a chorus manner with rigorously dance steps to the rhythmic patterns produced by the instrumental session. Most times, the instrumentalist also doubles as the backup singers during performance. It will interest readers that the performance of Òkítóròkò music usually stands out among other musical practices in Ogori community. With several responsibilities attached to the office of the *lyiodina*,

as member of council of chiefs, she still monitors the rehearsals of the group and their performances as well. The diagram below shows the hierarchical structure and formation of the group. Figure 2 shows the group in action during performance at the initiation rite of the maidens during *Ovia-Ose* festival.



Figure 1. The diagram illustrates the hierarchical structures and formation of the group

(Source: Author, 2019)



Figure 2: A Cross section of the Òkítòròkò Musical Group during performance

(Source: Author, 2019)

4.1 Organisational Structure of the Òkítòròkò Music

This study describes organisational structure as a formation, which outlines how certain responsibilities or roles of an organisation are channelled for effective delivery of its various operations toward achieving the organisation's objectives. The outcome, hence, becomes the foundation on which standard operating procedures and routines rest. Situating this definition to a musical group, Omolaye (2019) described it as the systematic

or hierarchical arrangements based on stylistic peculiarities situated within the ideology to which an individual style of performance or a musical group is identified. In terms of its organisation, Òkítóròkò started as a spontaneous music and developed gradually into a social group. As Nketia (1974) submitted, performing groups in African are either spontaneous or organised. He described spontaneous performing group as people who come together in a freestyle manner to perform during occasion, while he considered the organised group as a set of permanent units within the social organisation which possessed concrete structure. In view of the above assertion, the study discovered that though the performance of Òkítóròkò music at the inception started as a spontaneous music performance, it has become an organised social musical group. The musical group is under the leadership of the *lyiodina* and has continued to gain more members with the aim of promoting the cultural heritage of Ogoriland. Today, they meet at the *lyiodina's* quarters to learn new songs, rehearse, as well as to discuss welfare of members. This further strengthens unity among members of the group.

4.2 Regulations of the Òkítóròkò Musical Group

In any organisation, regulation is very important, being a tool used to control unnecessary flaws committed by members. Also, it paves way for commitment, self-denial and orderliness among members of the same organisation to achieve a common goal. In order to maintain peaceful co-existence within Òkítóròkò musical group, the following regulations made by the coordinator of the group has to be followed. Firstly, every member must show respect to *lyiodina* who is the group leader and abide by her authority. Secondly, every member of the group must protect their integrity in the community. Thirdly, prompt response to rehearsals and performances is mandatory for all members and not voluntary. Furthermore, quarrelling and fighting among members during or after performance is also prohibited. In addition, it is a taboo for members to perform any act that could cause divisions or hatred against the interest of the group. This is why Òkítóròkò musicians are so much respected and cherished in the entire community. Nobody dares to disregard these musicians because of their impact towards promoting the cultural values and tradition of the community. In fact, Òkítóròkò music has no rival when it comes to activities at the initiation rite of the maidens during the *Ovia-Osese* festival among the Ogori people. This is because of its outstanding regulatory principles, which, cannot be matched by any other musical group in the entire community, specifically, during the celebration of the festival.

4.3 Membership and Training

Tracing the origin from the past, members of the group are aged set of women whose average age falls between 45 to 75 years, but at present, membership is open to all married women that are interested irrespective of their age and experience. This is why every maiden in the community is compelled to perform the traditional rite. Agu (2018) buttressed this statement that music creation was, and is still an oral tradition and as a result, accurate listening, observation, imitation and active participation which are very requisite for good musical knowledge and perfection when it comes to training of musicians in the traditional way in African societies. In the same vein, Omibiyi (2001) also affirmed that a learner drummer, singer or dancer first observes his instructor (father, kinsman or leader) in case of a singer or dancer. She discussed further that during the period of instruction, the instructor is always at alert to correct his/her mistakes either by missing the beat or making wrong entries. The learning process has been through oral tradition and personal observations right from childhood. Meanwhile, constant rehearsals and performances with the group, as well as tutelage received from the *lyiodina*, help in understanding the concept, content, context and the concord of the performance practices of the music.

4.4 Welfare of the Òkító̀ròkò Musical Group

The welfare of members of the Òkító̀ròkò musical group is part of the obligations assigned to the office of the *lyiodina*, as she is in the best position among the council of chiefs in the community to monitor and coordinate the affairs of women. In fact, she also delegates some members of the group as the administrative staff such as the general secretary and financial secretary. The office of the general secretary keeps update records of the group during and after performances, while the financial secretary keeps and maintains the financial account of the group. These two officers work proactively to enhance the progress and smooth running of the group. Aside the income the group realised from the performances during the initiation rite, which is shared among members, the *lyiodina* also sees to their welfare, most especially the aged among them who are being given special treatment due to their experience and expertise in the performance of the music. Also, the invited dignitaries and the council of chiefs in the community compensate by financing and giving them materials which are distributed equally among members of the group. Members of this group also deem it fit to carry each of the members burden whenever the need arises by lending out funds to members. Furthermore, contribution of money is also practised by the group to fund themselves in case of urgent need among members.

4.5 Performance Practices of Òkítóròkò Music

In African societies, every musical tradition has its own peculiar practices and these practices vary according to their norms, custom and values from one society to the other. Each of these communities has various cultures and traditions in which their musical performances are embedded, because of the uniqueness and peculiarities in each of the culture. Òkítóròkò music has its own unique performance practices. This makes it outstanding and well recognised among other musical genres practised in Ogori community. This is not farfetched because of its role in educating the maidens on the socio-cultural values and norms of the community. Below is an excerpt showing the cross section of the maidens and the Òkítóròkò musicians.



Figure 3. *Cross section of the maidens and the musicians during performance.*

(Source: Author, 2019)



Figure 4: *Cross section of the Òkítóròkò instrumentalists during Ovia-Osese festival*

(Source: Author, 2019)

The performance practices of Òkítóròkò music usually begins with a slow tempo; thereafter the pace of the music is gradually increased, specifically at the end of the performance as the body movements adhere strictly to the rhythmic patterns of the instrumental accompaniment. The performance usually begins with the lead singer in solo form, thereafter, is responded to by other members of the group including the instrumental section. Among the backup singers, few people are selected as dancers who perform the dance steps simultaneously. At this point, the interest of the audience is aroused and re-invigorated as some of them display their wealth on the musicians and also give them a standing ovation, applaud and stamping in a joyous mood. Their songs are usually in call and response pattern and solo and chorused refrain. Excerpts (Ex. 1 and 2) are songs with the identified forms rendered by the group.

Call

Lead Singer I-yio-di na we si-e, I-yio-di na we-si-e, wo-gbo ne a-ka bo-to,

Backup1 *Response*

Backup2

Backup3

7

Ld/Singer I-yio-di na we si-e.

Backup1 I-yio-di na we-si-e, I-yio-di na

Backup2 I-yio-di na we-si-e, e-ba, I-yio-di na

Backup3 I-yio-di na we-si-e, I-yio-di na

8

I-yio-di na we-si-e, I-yio-di na

12

Ld/Singer

Backup1 we-si-e wo-gbo ne a-ka bo-to, I-yio-di na we-si-e.

Backup2 we-si-e, wo-gbo ne a-ka bo-to, e-ba, I-yio-di na we-si-e

Backup3 we-si-e, wo-gbo ne a-ka bo-to, e-ba I-yio-di na we-si-e.

Ex.1. (Iyiodina We sie)

Solo
 Lead Singer $\frac{12}{8}$ I ye gben I ye gben, - - -

Backup1 *Chorused Refrain* $\frac{12}{8}$ Ni jo-mo be-ke sen n'o vi a ro, -

Backup2 $\frac{12}{8}$ - - - Ni jo-mo be-ke sen n'o vi a ro, -

Backup3 $\frac{12}{8}$ - - - Ni jo-mo be-ke sen n'o vi a ro, -

4
 Ni jo-mo be-ke sen n'o vi - a ro, -

Lead Singer $\frac{12}{8}$ I ye gben I ye gben, - - -

Backup1 $\frac{12}{8}$ - - - Ni jo-mo be-ke sen n'o vi a ro, - Ba-

Backup2 $\frac{12}{8}$ - - - Ni jo-mo be-ke sen n'o vi a ro, - Ba-

Backup3 $\frac{12}{8}$ - - - Ni jo-mo be-ke sen n'o vi a ro, - Ba-

7
 - - - - Ni jo-mo be-ke sen n'o vi - a ro, - Ba-

Lead Singer $\frac{12}{8}$ - - -

Backup1 $\frac{12}{8}$ ma sen n'o vi - a, a - ne - me so - pa,

Backup2 $\frac{12}{8}$ ma sen n'o vi - a, a - ne - me so - pa,

Backup3 $\frac{12}{8}$ ma sen n'o vi - a, a - ne - me so - pa,

2
 ma sen n'o vi - a, a - ne - me so - pa,

9

Lead Singer $\frac{12}{8}$ - - -

Backup1 $\frac{12}{8}$ Ni jo-mo be-ke sen n'o - vi a ro, I ye - gben -

Backup2 $\frac{12}{8}$ Ni jo-mo be-ke sen n'o - vi a ro, I ye - gben -

Backup3 $\frac{12}{8}$ Ni jo-mo be-ke sen n'o - vi a ro, I ye - gben -

8
 Ni jo-mo be-ke sen n'o - vi a ro, I ye - gben -

Ex.2. (I ye gben)

The frequent harmonic type deduced from their performances is polyphony with some element of occasional heterophony pattern in which Nketia (1974) in Simha (2004) considered as purely ornamental. This harmonic type is also refers to as multi-part singing; a situation where one of the parts is refracted by variants of dissonances before it returns to the original key. While the soloist is singing, some members of the instrumental section enter with some improvisations, àjásà-embellishments and vocal-jerk techniques in either speech or melodic tone. This is done to further trigger their dance steps and raise their mood into ecstasy.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Music in African society is inevitable as it plays a significant role before, during and after festival celebration. It is a vital cultural element, which propagates the norms and values of the African society. This is because it carries information about the ways of life and other activities of the community. The performance of Òkító̀ròkò music, which is attached to *Ovia-Osesé* festival among the people of Ogori usually, attracts the attention of indigenes and well-wishers to the history, cultural norms and traditions of the community. This article has unveiled the organisational structure and performance practices of Òkító̀ròkò music as performed by the group. Òkító̀ròkò, being a traditional indigenous music of the Ogori people has been observed as a tool by which knowledge about proper upbringing of a child, especially, the female gender is rolled out. Among other traditional music in Ogori community, Òkító̀ròkò music stands out as a traditional music, which is embedded with detailed information about the culture of the Ogori people. To conclude, as long as the rite of passage of the maidens is celebrated among the people of Ogori, Òkító̀ròkò music will continue to be the pedagogical tool in educating the maidens on the socio-cultural values and norms of the community. It is therefore, recommended that adequate attention should be given to the musical practices of the Ogori so that people can learn about the rich cultural heritage of the community.

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