

THE FUNCTIONALITY AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICE OF INDIGENOUS YORUBA MUSIC IN AGO-IWOYE' EGUNGUN FESTIVAL

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Abstract

Every African civilization is defined by a traditional celebration that is passed down orally. In many facets of Nigerian communities' festivities, music is essential. For instance, music is a way for the people to show their culture during traditional festivals. The egungun festival, held yearly in Ago-Iwoye, is one of these celebrations. Music plays a crucial role in the festival. This paper informs the function of indigenous music during the egungun festival. Emile Durkeim's functionalist theory serves as the foundation for this essay. The study used interviews, the observation method, and primary data. It also employed scoring and context analysis of selected songs used during the egungun festival. The study found out that Yoruba indigenous music is a key tool used as adjunct to each stage of the egungun festival in Ago-iwoye. The richness of the music helps to appeal in prayer, invoke spirits of the ancestors into the festival, unite every member of the community and promote cultural heritage. The study recommends documentation and archiving of the musical traditions associated with the egungun Festival.

Keywords: Functionality, Performance Practice, Indigenous Music, Egungun Festival.

Introduction

Africans incorporate music into every area of their everyday lives, making it a vital part of their culture. According to Vidal (1989), music plays a significant role in oriental mysticism and has the power to arouse people's inner conscience and consciousness. The most common way that Africans convey their sentiments, feelings, fears, emotions, love, danger, beliefs, and cultures is through music. Sung or instrumental music is widely used in Africa as a more powerful medium for social discourse and communication than spoken language.

Therefore, Singing or playing an instrument may be used to express oneself musically, which is often used as a more powerful social discourse and communication tool than spoken language.

Music in Africa plays important role in religious ceremonies, dramatic and recreational activities, rites and wars. It as well plays an important role during festivals which is mostly common among the Yoruba people of Nigeria.

The significance of music in a person's life cannot be overstated, especially in African culture. Vidal (2000) asserts that music is one of the most often used mediums for people to express their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. In Africa, music is seen as a necessary component of everyday existence and a model for expressing cultural identity. Music is used to convey both happiness and sorrow from the time a child is born until the time someone dies. It is also used for other occasions, such as rites and puberty rituals, in some societies. Depending on the community's cultural and environmental backdrop, different musics are used for various activities that take place there. The use of music in ritual ceremonies is different from the music used for recreational activities. There are different kinds of music for different purposes. According to Tracy (1969), "vocal participation, physical manipulation of instruments, and the rhythmic or dance movement associated with music" are all considered to be part of the definition of music in Africa.

Music can therefore take the shape of vocal or instrumental music. The vocal form could use a chorus made up of boys, girls, men, women, or a combination of the two. In addition to these instruments and combinations of instruments and vocal form, the instrumental form may also use drums, a flute, a trumpet, a xylophone, or a goje. Each community in traditional Nigerian society has its own musical ensembles. (Lawal, 2014). The quantity and kind of social gatherings in a town affect the number of musical ensembles that exist there as well.

The Egungun festival is a prominent Yoruba cultural event celebrated in southwestern Nigeria and some other parts of West Africa. It is a masquerade festival where masked performers, representing ancestral spirits, emerge to interact with the living community.

The Egungun festival is a traditional Yoruba religious celebration that takes place in southwestern Nigeria and among the Yoruba diaspora. It is a significant and vibrant cultural event that honors the ancestors and connects the living with the spiritual realm. Central to the festivities is the use of music, which plays an integral role in shaping the performance practices and functions of the Egungun festival. The Egungun festival has ancient roots, dating back centuries to pre-colonial Yoruba society. Its origins lie in the belief that ancestors play a vital role in the lives of the living, and their spirits must be appeased and celebrated through rituals and festivities. Music has been an essential component of these rituals, serving as a powerful medium to invoke ancestral spirits and establish a connection between the physical and spiritual realms. During the Egungun festival, music serves as a form of communication with the ancestors. Performers, known

as "*olorin*," (singers) use specific musical elements, such as rhythm, melody, and lyrics, to invoke the spirits and convey messages to the community. Each rhythm and melody is associated with a particular ancestor, adding a layer of complexity and meaning to the performances.

A wide variety of traditional Yoruba instruments are used in the performances of the Egungun festival. These could be the *agidigbo* (thumb piano), *bata* drums, *sekere* (a kind of shaker), and talking drum (*gangan*). Each instrument has a symbolic meaning and is chosen with care to produce a soundscape that is harmonious and well-balanced and fits in with the ceremonial atmosphere. Known as "*orin*," singers are an essential part of the Egungun festival's performances. They are in charge of recounting historical events, calling the spirits to join the celebration, and reciting praise poetry (*oriki*) dedicated to the ancestors. Generation after generation, *orin* ensures the preservation of historical tales and cultural heritage.

Theoretical Framework

This study is hung on Functionalist theory by Emile Durkheim. According to functionalism, society is not only the sum of its components, but rather each component contributes to the stability of the whole. Because every part of society is essential to its overall functioning and cannot exist on its own, Durkheim saw society as an organism. When a component faces a crisis, the remaining components must adjust to somehow fill the hole. According to functionalist theory, social institutions, each created to meet a specific need, make up the majority of the various components of society. Functionalism holds that an institution can only exist if it plays a crucial part in the way society functions. An institution will disappear if it is no longer needed. To address evolving or new demands, new institutions will be established. On this note, functionalist theory encapsulates the function of music in festival. The functions of music in festivals are of a different level of investigation from that involved in determining use, for here the search is directed toward much deeper questions. It has been suggested that one of the primary functions of music is to aid in the integration of society, a process of continual concern in human life; another suggestion is that music is primarily a means of release of psychological tension and a tool for religious worship.

Practice in Egungun Festival

It is thought that the dead have an obligation to have the living respect the moral principles set by the clan, community, or family's previous generations. The Egungun are honored in family rites through the masquerade custom and at festivals known as *Odun Egungun*. In contrast to the Egungun society of the region, each family in West Africa has

its own ancestral spirit that they venerate. The family elder, known as the "Olori ebi" in Yoruba culture; specifically, among the Ago-iwoye people, informally or formally, plays a lead role in ancestral rites. Ago-iwoye also adheres to this practice. Ogunmoroti (2023).

The *Alagba* (elder) might not necessarily need to get initiated into the society of the Egungun cult before he takes massive action in the family affairs. In matters that deal with the whole communities, Egungun priests and initiates who are trained in ancestral communication, ancestral elevation and funerary rites are assigned to invoke and bring out the ancestors. They are adorned with adorable costumes as masked figure. Through drumming invocation and dance, the masked figures performers are believed to become possessed by the spirits of the ancestors, as manifested as a single entity. The Egungun is believed to spiritually cleanse the community; through the dramatic acting and miming of the robed priests, they demonstrate both ethical and moral behavior that has occurred since their last visit. Adenuga (2023). In this way, they expose the strengths and weaknesses of the community to encourage behavior more befitting of their descendants. When this performance is completed, the performers of Egungun give messages, warnings and blessings to the assembled spectators.

Music in Africa

African festivals are not merely events; they are living embodiments of cultural heritage, acting as binding agents within communities (Agawu, 2003; Turino, 2008). These festivals, deeply embedded in the fabric of African societies, serve as vital occasions for the expression of shared values, beliefs, and traditions. As Agawu (2003) contends, they act as focal points for community cohesion, fostering a sense of belonging and collective identity. This communal cohesion is particularly evident in the intricate choreography of festival events, where music plays a central role in orchestrating and synchronizing the movements of participants, creating a harmonious expression of shared cultural narratives. Within this vibrant cultural tapestry, the significance of music cannot be overstated. Nketia (1979), have delved into the historical roots of African festival music, tracing its origins to communal rituals and rites of passage. Nketia's work highlights that this music has undergone a transformative journey, evolving from its ancient roots into a contemporary form that serves as a dynamic intersection between tradition and modernity. The sonic narrative woven through festival music becomes a powerful medium for the transmission of historical continuity, embodying the essence of a community's past while adapting to the evolving dynamics of its present cultural landscape. It is in this interplay between tradition and modernity that the enduring relevance and adaptability of African festival music come to the fore.

The multifaceted cultural significance of festival music in Africa is deeply rooted in its ability to encapsulate and transmit the diverse traditions of the continent's communities (Collins, 2012; Arom, 1991). It serves as a vibrant tapestry that weaves together the varied cultural expressions, languages, and rituals of different ethnic groups. This musical tradition is not confined to mere entertainment but serves as a conduit for the transmission of cultural knowledge across generations. As noted by Arom (1991), the melodies, rhythms, and lyrics embedded in festival music act as living artifacts, preserving ancient customs and practices that hold profound meaning for contemporary communities.

Moreover, festival music functions as a dynamic repository of cultural values, myths, and historical narratives, embodying the ethos of the people it represents (Turino, 2008; Jones, 2016). The rhythmic beats and symbolic lyrics are not arbitrary; they are carefully crafted elements that carry layers of meaning, reflecting the worldview and shared experiences of the community. In this way, festival music becomes a vessel for cultural memory, fostering a collective consciousness that strengthens the cultural identity of the community. It is through the performance and preservation of these musical traditions that African societies ensure the continuity of their cultural heritage, fostering a sense of belonging and shared history among its members.

Music in Yoruba Traditional Festival

African music has indeed played a lot of roles in objectifying and unifying the philosophy and religious tenets of the African communities. Nketia (1979) asserts that African music presents a wealth of knowledge and stimulates learning experiences among its audience. It is often well worded in proverbs and idioms so that audience is always given food for thought. The composer also makes use of parables to stimulate audience imagination in acquiring deductive meaning from the performance communication. (Nketia, 1979)

Yoruba music serves different functions in the community, ranging from social, moral, religious to political. It has functioned so much in entertainment as most members of the society were normally intrigued to watch the performances. Yoruba songs, though they have historical facts connected to time, place, events, vice and effects, are not just narratives of detached facts that are functionally ephemeral. They are songs whose poetry focuses on, and employs nature and metaphysical imagery, and well as wise sayings and inveterate philosophical wisdom of common experiences to the Remo people in particular and other cultures that are capable of fixing congruous ideas into the minds of listeners. Laura (1998) comments on the functions of music in the society, arguing that performance as entertainment can make people happy. According to him, songs can make people forget about death and fighting and words of some songs remind people of past times and of other occasions for praise singing, because, praise singing occurs during parties,

celebrations, or other events that call for entertainment. (Laura, 1998). Yoruba music does not aim at providing just temporary happiness in entertainment. It does not give momentary joy that makes people forget about realities of life. It rather presents issues of the moment and provides a stimulus to re-thinking about behaviours that are contrary to the norms of the society and such vice that could even be dangerous to those who indulge in them. It prompts members of the society to examine and address facts about reality.

Music in Ago-Iwoye Egungun Festival

According to Ogunkanmi (2023), One of the many planned annual celebrations among the Ago-iwoye people is the egungun festival. Over time, the egungun festival has contributed to the growth of trade and business and a general sense of unity among the populace of Ago-iwoye regardless of religious views. Members of the egungun family dance to the palace of the ebumawe of Ago-Iwoye and to the market to begin the festivities, and they wear artifacts; symbolic objects that symbolize the departed spirits of their ancestors. Music; through the drums is used to accompany the dance to the Palace and to the market. To note according to tradition is that the first Masquerades that opens the festival were Folumo and Olomitutu and others will continue till the end of the festival.

The masquerades performs, first in the court of the Ebumawe of Ago-iwoye after which all-night ritual performance takes place in the family house of each of the Masquerade. The ritual is often performed within seven days. (Ogunkanmi, 2023). Male group members who adhere to the Egungun's strong religious beliefs typically conduct the ceremonies. It is banned for slaves, those without any particular expertise or experience of Egungun, people who act impolitely in public, people who practice a different faith, and those who are not members of the established community to participate in the events. Women are only permitted to dance around or in front of the Egungun in the same place, but their chants and singing are crucial to the success of the festival and its thrilling events. West African custom holds that the term "masquerade" refers to the activities taken by masked figures, as well as the character in question as played by the individual performing. It is also important to realize that, in an African context, masquerade is an outdoor event that men conduct, and occasionally it's restricted to the Egungun's covert cult.

In Yourba land, the Egungun festival is a unique kind of masquerade that honors the ancestral spirit of the family and brings to memory the lives of the heroes who have passed away. These heroes are especially those who have left a lasting impression on history, those who demonstrated great power during their lifetime, such as warriors, great hunters, kings, etc. Local talking drums and other musical instruments are used during Yoruba festivals. Dance specialists perform and praise songs is often sung to celebrate

valiant warriors and trained dancers for annual festivals. Akande (2023). Egungun is essentially a tangible and verifiable representation of the spirits of deceased ancestors who are thought to have passed on to the next world and occasionally return to the human society for blessings, celebration, and memory.

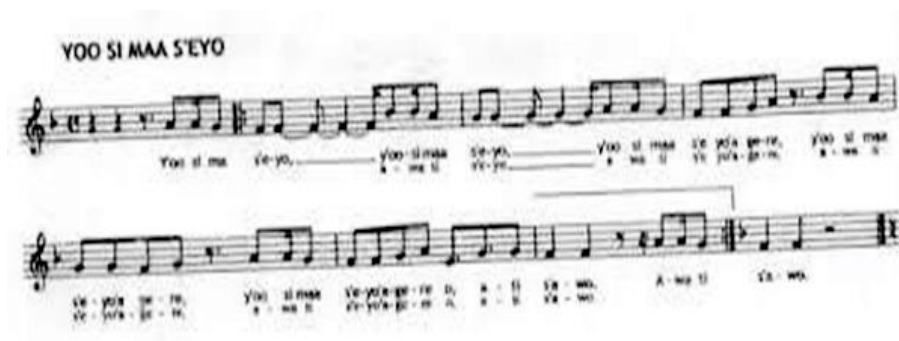
This time of year, is typically busy and auspicious because of the fervent belief that all prayers and heart desires will be granted and that heaven is accessible to the descent and rising of ancestors. It is a firm belief that every request will be answered suitably because the masked figure represents the reincarnating spirit emerging from their hiding place (heaven). The Yoruba celebrate Egungun every year as a way to honor the deceased and show respect for their faith and heritage. It also gives their ancestors a position among the living.

Selected Indigenous Songs used in the Egungun Festival

Okereke



Okereke song is usually sung in the night of the ritual as the children of the Masquerade family; oje family and entire members gather together to sing and rejoice for witnessing another eventful festival for the year. The song is usually accompanied by local drums. There is usually a group of drummers who function during the egungun festival. The leader of the drummers takes the lead as other responds. The song is a well-known song among every family member present at the festival. The music serves as a tool for communal expression, identity reinforcement, and spiritual connection during the festival.



The above song; Yoo si maa s'eyo is also used for celebration during the procession of the Masquerade after the ritual. To note, is the absence of women in the inner court. They gather outside of the court to sing this same song.



Iku oniyale wasong is a prayer song. Mostly rendered on the seventh day of the egungun festival. Every member of the egungun family sings the song, appealing to the god to protect everyone that attended the festival. Everyone takes the song serious and the music is performed with musical instruments such as the agogo (gong) , iya ilu, omele, sakara, bembe and lot more. The music is sometimes performed in circle as there is usually a leader who leads and other repeats.



Ologede Ree is usually song to express the arrival of the Egun(masquerade) and for greetings to people in the community and also visitors who have been invited to grace the occasion. Every member of the family and community sings with excitement to have witnessed another egungun festival. The song is sung with free style dances among children and adult. Sometimes, family members hold themselves in threes or twos to dance. The song is sung several times with intersection of instrumental drums display and solo drumming.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of performance practices and functions of music in the Egungun Festival in Ago-Iwoye has provided a comprehensive and insightful exploration into the cultural richness and significance of music to the egungun festival. Through a meticulous examination of historical, cultural, and musical dimensions, the research has contributed valuable knowledge to the understanding of the Egungun Festival's unique musical heritage. The findings of the study have revealed the intricate performance practices embedded in the festival's music and the function of music. The analysis of these practices has shed light on the nuanced ways in which music is performed, emphasizing the skill, tradition, and cultural importance woven into each musical expression.

Moreover, the research has elucidated the multifaceted functions of music within the Egungun Festival. It has unveiled the roles played by music in the cultural and social dimensions of the festival, demonstrating how it serves as a powerful medium for communal expression, identity reinforcement, and spiritual connection. The functions of music in the Egungun Festival extend beyond mere entertainment, embodying a profound cultural narrative that resonates with the collective memory of the community. The investigation into these influences has provided insight into the dynamic nature of cultural practices, raising important considerations for the preservation and continuation of the festival's musical heritage in the face of contemporary changes.

In conclusion, By understanding and appreciating the cultural, historical, and musical dimensions uncovered in this study, there emerges an opportunity to not only safeguard a unique heritage but also to foster a deeper appreciation for the rich traditions that contribute to the vibrant cultural tapestry of Ago-iwoye as custodians of this cultural legacy, there lies a responsibility to ensure that the melodies of the Egungun Festival continue to resonate through time, connecting generations and preserving a vital part of Ago-iwoye cultural identity. The study on the performance practices and functions of music in the Egungun Festival in Ago-iwoye recommends a need for documentation and archiving of the musical traditions associated with the Egungun Festival. This recommendation involves creating a comprehensive repository that includes audio recordings, video documentation, and written descriptions of the various musical performances. Such an archive will serve as a valuable resource for scholars, practitioners, and future generations, ensuring the preservation of this cultural legacy.

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