

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF HAND-CLAP ACCOMPANIMENT IN YORUBA CHERUBIM AND SERAPHIM CHURCH MUSIC IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of Hand-Clap Accompaniment in Yoruba Cherubim and Seraphim Church Music in South-Western part of Nigeria in order to explicate the practices and functional values of different patterns used at different stages of musical performance during their church services. This study relies on phenomenological and cultural theories in musicology as premise for discourse. While primary and secondary source of data collection Findings revealed that hand-clap accompaniment as a phenomenon in Yoruba C&S Church music is a tradition that emanated from African musical culture. Apart from fact that hand-clap accompaniment serves as the metronome during the performance, the phenomenon is also valued in terms of the functions it performs as an integral part of Yoruba C&S Church music which includes musical, spiritual, appreciation and gratitude, socio-psychology and entertainment functions during all their liturgical services and outdoor gospel crusades. This paper concludes that hand-clap as a phenomenon in the Yoruba Cherubim and Seraphim Church music in Nigeria is a product of Yoruba traditional musical practice inherited from performance of folksongs and children's moonlight play-songs. The Yoruba C&S Churches adopted hand-clap accompaniment as the most important and integral part of their liturgical music because of the indispensable functional values attributed to the phenomenon. This invariably made the practice a strong musical tradition and symbolic attribute of the Church. This is why the Church is regarded by the Yoruba people as 'Ijo Alatewo' (The hand-clapping Church).

Keywords: Atewo, C&S, Ijo-Alatewo, AIC

Introduction

Since the primitive period, music has always been part of all forms of traditional ritual and religious worships among the Africans. Music varies in terms of mode and musical

instruments involved because African gods and deities are believed to be lovers of music; and each of them has its favourite style of music and instruments associated with it. Scholars have written quite appreciable number of literatures on music in religious worship. Osadolorin Oje (2016) described worship in religious circle as the veneration ascribed to supernatural being and the series of ritual action associated with the exercise.

There are quite good numbers of some of the early African Instituted Churches in South-western Nigeria these include: Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S), Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), and Church of the Lord Aladura (CLA). These churches possess unique qualities that distinguishes one from another which could be easily seen from the way their liturgy is structured, mode of dressing (uniform), background history and experiences of the founder, core mission of the ministry vis-à-vis various beliefs. Irrespective of these differences, Jegede (2013) observes that:

These churches still possess many common identities that justified. Their being distinguished from other group of churches in South-western Nigeria. These attributes include interest in intense fervour for “energetic” Prayer, faith healing and the contextualization of Christianity in African culture’.

Cherubim and Seraphim church (C&S) is one of the early and very popular African Instituted Churches among the Yoruba in the South-West part of Nigeria. This is as a result of its origin and the founder being a Yoruba man. The church has the tradition of wearing white garment with clothed belt of different colours known as ‘*Amure*’ around their waist during every worship session. The colour of ‘*Amure*’ worn by each member signifies the position or spiritual level he or she occupies in the church. Also, it is the tradition of the C&S Churches not to wear shoes, sandals or slippers while worshipping in the church because the church is regarded as holy place.

With the use of oral, observation and bibliography methods, this paper examines the phenomenon of hand-clap accompaniment as an integral part of worship music in Cherubim and Seraphim Churches among the Yoruba society in South-West of Nigeria in order to highlight the performance practice, functions and structural analysis of different hand-clap pattern use at different stages of musical performance during their church services.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts duo theoretical framework in its discussions in this work. They are phenomenological and cultural theories.

The phenomenological theory in musicology advanced by Christensen (2012), is borne out of the combinative of phenomenological philosophies of Clifton (1983), Ferrara (1984) and Ihde (2007). The phenomenological theory in musicological studies implies that, investigation of musical phenomena should be carried out as the way they appear to consciousness, and the conditions for appearance in consciousness. The aim of the phenomenological investigation is to reveal unnoticed aspects of the musical experience. This implies that the phenomenon of hand-clap as accompaniment in Cherubim and Seraphim should be investigated as it appears and all conditions surrounding this appearance to consciousness of the stakeholders.

On the other hand, the Cultural theory in sacred musicology advanced by Adedeji (2014) posits that, the cultural theory considers cultural context and hermeneutics in understanding and application of theological/Biblical and musical principles. According to him, the denial of this dimension was responsible for unnecessary tension that arouse from the domination of Western ideals and their superimposition on non-Western musical practice. 'The cultural dimension seeks to understand God, worship God and communication with him in indigenous languages, musical ideals and worldview. Thus, the linguistic approach in its diverse dimensions is imperative.' (Adedeji 2014: pg.111)

Adedeji (2004) while discussing on the Nigerian Gospel music styles described the indigenous style as that music who derived their musical elements mainly from indigenous musical sources. They include 'native' traditional 'classical' and 'spiritual styles. 'This category differs from others on the basis that they originated here in Nigeria and hence sound more African because of their closeness to the root-traditional African music.' Adedeji 2014)

Oje (2017) observed that The Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Church as one of the African Instituted (indigenous)Churches (AIC), has a peculiar way of worship other than the Western Instituted and Pentecostal Churches in Africa. The C&S Church is more unique and known for the use of white garment (prayer gown), removal of footwear before entering the church, radical prayer (praying with vigour and all seriousness), dancing, clapping, and infusion of local musical instruments, deliverance and physical demonstration of the gifts of Holy Spirit.

Since the pre-colonial period, the people of Africa have imbibed the culture of folklorism, folksongs and other forms of recreational song performances which are basically accompanied with hand-clap. This phenomenon of hand-clap is commonly observed in informal, organized or un-organized musical performances by the amateurs where there is absence of musical instruments. This culture of hand-clap accompaniment from the traditional African musical culture was also adopted by most of the African Instituted

(indigenous) Churches like Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S), C.A.C, Church of the Lord (Aladura), The Apostolic Churches and others as a phenomenon in music for worship.

In agreement the assertion made by the researcher above, Rodríguez (1997) stressed further that:

‘..... there does not seem to be any biblical parallel to hand-Clapping taking place in our churches today. You may ask me, why we do it? I am not sure there is an answer. I suspect that we incorporated clapping into our services from our cultural environment’.

It is therefore, imperative while studying the phenomenon of hand-clap accompaniment in the Yoruba Cherubim and Seraphim Churches in Nigeria to be unprejudiced about the context, performance practices and the innate values of hand-clapping as an important religious musical culture in Yoruba C&S Churches.

Origin of C&S Churches in Nigeria

According to <https://en.wikipedia.org> and Oje (2017), the Cherubim and Seraphim movement church, also known as the C&S, is a church denomination in Nigeria that was founded by Moses Orimolade Tunolase in 1925. Orimolade received considerable media attention when he claimed to have healed a girl, Christina Abiodun Akinsowon, from a long-term trance in which she could neither speak nor hear. After the healing event, Orimolade Tunolase and Abiodun Akinsowon teamed up, as father and adopted daughter, and offered their services to heal and pray for people.

The Cherubim and Seraphim group claims to have dreams and visions that facilitate the connection of God and humanity. In 1925, they said that Jesus Christ had directed them to name their circle of followers’ seraphim, after an angel they claimed to have seen in their dreams. Two years later, they added "Cherubim" to the name of their church, making their congregation the Cherubim and Seraphim.

Several years after the creation of the Cherubim and Seraphim, different denominations following in its traditions broke off and formed new churches. The Church of Aladura, which began in 1930 under the lead of Josiah Oshitelu, was one of the churches that began under "similarly spectacular circumstances" as the Cherubim and Seraphim. By the 1940s, the Aladura movement church had begun to spread throughout the world, from places in Africa to other English-speaking countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

Phenomenon of Hand-clapping in Churches

Generally speaking, the practices of hand-clap in churches either as an accompaniment to worship music or as an appreciation or acknowledgement in response towards points made by preachers have become a common phenomenon among churches around the world. Although numerous Literature had been written against the phenomenon of hand-clap accompaniment in church worship music. According to Jackson (2019), there is no New Testament authority for instruments of music in worship — nor for clapping or dancing. Hall (2016) also stressed that:

‘It is true that there needs to be more enthusiasm among brethren, more amens, hallelujahs and songs or praise. But there doesn't need to be applause, rhythmic clapping or any other type of expression that would move us away from the simple spiritual pattern which God has given us.’

Lewis (1996) is also of the opinion that ‘if the primary task in worship is to make worship conform to Scripture, then clapping and stomping have exactly the same support in Scripture that instrumental music does — none at all’ (Lewis:1996, p.26). Thayer (1958) called it “arbitrary” — a “worship which one devises and prescribes for himself” (168). Danker (2000) also characterized will-worship as a “self-made, do-it-yourself religion” (Danker: 2000 p.276).

In contrary, Earl (2007) a professor of Bible at Freed-Hardeman University, correctly has observed:

“Clapping is a type of percussion very similar to the music we produce on a drum.” (P. 291). He further noted that there is no difference in using “live skin” to make a noise (clapping) and “dead skin” to make a noise (beating a drum). One cannot license the former without endorsing the latter.’

Similarly, Fergusson (2002) observed that a songbook adds no accompanying sound. Clapping does. ‘When one uses a songbook in praise, he is doing nothing but singing. When he begins clapping, he is no longer just singing. He is singing and clapping. Therefore, clapping is not an aid. It is an addition just as an instrument is.’ Also, in contrary to Lewis and Jackson’s assertions, Ayeni (oral interview: 2019) a Prophet of a C&S Church, affirms that, the phenomenon of hand-clap in Christian worship music is scriptural. He made reference to Psalms 47:1, 2 which read thus, "O clap your hands, all peoples; shout to God with the voice of joy. For the Lord Most High is to be feared, a great King over all the earth." He also made reference to Psalms 98:8 reads, "Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the Lord."

Similarly, Alabi (an informant: 2019) in another oral interview, also reiterate that hand-clap accompaniment as a culture in C&S Churches, is in line with biblical tradition as indicated in the Bible in Isaiah 55:12 which read thus: 'For you will go out with joy and be led forth with peace; The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.' He also refers to 2 Kings 11:12 which read thus: 'Then he brought the king's son out and put the crown on him and gave him the testimony; and they made him king and anointed him, and they clapped their hands and said, "Long live the king!"

Hand-Clap Accompaniment in Yoruba Cherubim and Seraphim Church Music

The C&S Church, though founded in 1930 by the former CMS member Moses Orimolade Tunolashe, developed strict indigenous influences, such as the adoption of Yoruba language and Yoruba traditional music as its hymnal form as well as 'hot' hand-clap accompaniment of their music for worship. The phenomenon of hand-clap in Yoruba Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Churches is expounded in terms of its practices and functional values in the worship session of the Churches.

During this field investigation of this work, it was observed that all the C&S Churches visited in Lagos, Ibadan and Ijebu-Ode consists of mainly Yoruba congregation, while their pastors and prophets are also Yoruba. Equally, all these Churches conduct all their services and other worship sessions in Yoruba language. The C&S Church hymn book is printed and sung in Yoruba language; while none of the Churches visited made provision for an interpreter in English language. Apart from songs written in the hymn-book, other songs performances in C&S Churches worship session consists of Yoruba native airs and medley in Yoruba language accompanied with Akuba (single faced twin upright drum), Ogido (single faced big upright drum) and samba drums (a rectangular shaped drum), Sekere (rattle), Agogo(gong) and hand-clap.



(C&S Church members singing and clapping during Sunday service)

According to Awoyemi and Ayeni (oral interview: 2019), most C&S Churches are established by selected men and women of low-income background chosen by God. These men usually start their ministry by organizing religious crusades and revivals under trees, abandoned buildings, and shops or by using canopies. According to them, at the inception, most C&S Churches cannot afford to buy any musical instrument or sound system apart from the use of hand-clap to accompany their songs during worship session. Even in a situation where donation of musical instrument is made to the church, the use of hand-clap remains a strong tradition in C&S Churches and this distinguishes them from other Churches.

Adekunle (an informant: 2019) also explicate further that hand-clap as an accompaniment to songs in C&S Churches is an independent entity which has nothing to do with other musical instruments used. He claimed further that hand-clap, although used for accompaniment; perform other functions which are very essential for the objective and culture of the church. That is why the C&S Churches are popularly regarded by Yoruba people as 'Ijo-alatewo' meaning, the church with hand-clap culture.

Functional Values of Hand-Clap Accompaniment in C&S Churches

Musical Value

Hand-clap as observed during the investigation of this work illuminated that apart from fact that hand-clap accompaniment serves as the metronome during the performance, the phenomenon among the C&S Churches is also valued in term of its musical function. Hand-clap of different patterns are used in accompanying songs. It is as well use in intensifying the steady beat played other musical instruments available in the Church. The sound of the hand-clap also adds different sound effect to the music because it involves the whole members of the Church. In a situation where there are no musical instruments in the Church, hand-clap fill this vacuum by providing supporting rhythm to the songs as well as making provision for dance.

Among the C&S Churches, hand-claps are usually conducted in for performance by the lead-singer either before or after the commencement of the singing. The lead-singer does this by saying:

'Owo, owo, owo, owo, owo, owo'... meaning 'clap, clap, clap, clap, clap' repeatedly until a song is introduced started singing. Hand-clap at this opening section is usually in 4/4 time with four claps of a crotchet eachper bar thus:



or in 12/8 time of two claps of a dotted crotchet each per bar.



Other pattern of hand-clap that could also be used is arranged in 6/8 time with two claps of dotted crotchet each per bar.

Spiritual Value

The phenomenon of hand-clap among the C&S Churches is also valued in terms of its spiritual functions it plays. During each service, the 'Alagba' (Pastor in-charge) or prophet of the Church usually create time for spiritual visitation for divine messages and healing. This is usually done with songs accompanied with or without drumming but with very 'hot' hand-clap accompaniment. According to Ayeni, Alabi, and Adekunle (oral interviews: 2019), the hand-clap plays spiritual functions of supernatural visitation to the Church in form of some members known as 'Aloore' going in trance which manifest in their speaking or chanting in unknown languages which the members regard as heavenly language called 'Aaya'.

It was observed that, at the peak of hand-claps in very high intensity and fast speed during the C&S Church services to create unusual tensed and climaxed mood with the musical performance, few people went in trance by staggering, falling down and speaking in different languages. Some gave their messages in unclear Yoruba dialect while others spoke in strange but similar to Arab language which are translated by the prophet in charge of designated people called 'Atunmo' a person believed to be spiritually gifted in interpretation such languages. The following song is an example of song used, which signifies the aims and nature of Hand-clap accompaniments used for spiritual invitation:

Patewo Yaya

Chorus

A - te - wo yaa - yaa k'o - gun o -run so - ka - le

Hand-Clap

ff

Yoruba

*Patewoyaya, k'ogunOrunsokale
can descend.*

Translation:

Clap your hand loud so that the spirits

The phenomenon of hand-clap accompaniment in Yoruba C&S Church music is very much valued in term of this spiritual function of facilitating the visitation of the Supernatural beings or Angels they call ‘Awon Malaika’ for spiritual battle, healing and messages for solution to life’s spiritual problems.

Socio-psychological Value

Generally speaking, music is believed to plays socio- psychological function on the player and the listeners because music is a human behaviour; that is, it is the product of people living within the society and their musical behavior and experience, including the processes through which music is perceived, created, responded to, and incorporated into their everyday life. On the other hand, research results on music therapy by scholars has confirmed and informed that music is a handful psychological tool in helping people manages physical, emotional, or cognitive problems. Members of Churches are also people living in the same society where the church exists; and some certain music played in the Church also plays positive socio-psychological roles on the members of the Church.

In C&S churches, songs and hand-clap plays psychological functions on the members. This is seen in terms of the involvement of every C&S Church members encouraged through some songs, to get themselves involved in taking part in hand-clapping during musical performances in the church. The following song is an example of songs that plays socio-psychological role on the members of the C&S Churches:

Patewo re o

Yoruba Translation:

Solo: Patewo re o koro re le dayo o Clap your hands for things to change positively for you

Chorus: Patewo reo koro re le dayo Clap your hands for things to change positively for you

Whenever this song is sung in the C&S Churches, members are encouraged to participate in the clapping, believing that Spiritual intervention is about to take place in their lives as indicated in the lyrics of the song. The following is the Hand clap accompaniment pattern used for this song



Other songs in this category include the song 'Atewoyaayaa, ibukunrepete' meaning 'clap aloud for you to receive huge blessings. Hand-clap accompaniment is therefore valued in term of this socio-psychological function it plays on the members of the Church.

Appreciation and Gratitude Value

Another value of hand-clap accompaniment as a phenomenon in Yoruba C&S Church music is observed in terms of its function it plays in appreciating and gratitude to God. Agboti-Jesu (oral interview: 2019) explained that, it is a tradition in C&S Churches not to discourage poor members from attending Church services as a result of their inability to pay tithes and other monetary contributions in form of offering, 'Seed of Faith' and development levies applicable to members of the Church. Agboti-Jesu explained further that:

'Owners of Yoruba C&S Churches usually explain to their member's hand-clap accompaniment, dance and other forms of praises during services could be used as an alternative to the use of money because God values our praise and worship more than money'

This believe and practice is spelt out in some of their songs in order to assure that members can still appreciate and express their gratitude to God through hand-clap accompaniment to songs and dance during thanksgiving session of the Church service. The following song is an example of such songs which pronounces the thanksgiving value of hand-clap in Yoruba C&S Church music:

Atewo Ope Re Da

The musical score for 'Atewo Ope Re Da' is written in 12/8 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It consists of two systems. The first system has a Solo part (treble clef) and a Chorus part (bass clef). The Solo part has lyrics 'A-te-wo o-pe re da' and 'i-jo o-pe re'. The Chorus part has lyrics 'A - te-wo o-pe mi re e'. The second system continues the Solo part with the lyric 'da' and the Chorus part with 'I - jo o - pe mi re e'.

Entertainment/Recreational Value

The phenomenon of hand-clapping as accompaniment in Yoruba C&S Church music is also valued in term of its entertainment and recreational functions during the time for 'Ariya' (the entertainment session) during the Church service. Hand-clap is accompanied with dances in different styles. During performance, members form different clapping-groups comprising of up to four to six members each who spins round while clapping very loud with different body and head movements to entertain and display superiority over other groups. The following song is an example of songs during the entertainment session of the Yoruba C&S Church service:

Abi o L'eye

The musical score for 'Abi o L'eye' is written in 12/8 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It consists of two systems. The first system has a Solo part (treble clef) and a Chorus part (bass clef). The Solo part has lyrics 'A bi o l'e - ye ki lo se to o le pa - te - wo'. The Chorus part is empty. The second system continues the Solo part with the lyrics 'a bi o l'e - ye ki lo se to o le pa - te - wo'.



Yoruba

Translation:

Abi o l'eye, ki lo se too le patewo? Why can't you clap your hands if you are not a witch?

During the 'Ariya' session of the Church service, the C&S Church members use hand-clap accompaniment and dance as physical exercises and recreation to encourage all members, especially those who might have come to the Church with one problem or the other. This constitutes another functional value of this phenomenon in Yoruba C&S Churches.

Research Findings

Findings has shown that hand-clap accompaniment as a phenomenon in Yoruba C&S Church music is a tradition that emanated from African musical culture. Apart from fact that hand-clap accompaniment serves as the metronome during the performance, the phenomenon is also valued in terms of the functions it performs as an integral part of Yoruba C&S Church music which includes musical, spiritual, appreciation and gratitude, socio-psychology and entertainment functions during all their liturgical services and outdoor gospel crusades.

It was also discovered that among the C&S Churches, there are different songs with themes centered on hand-clap which were composed and sung during Church services to dictate the rhythmic pattern or dynamics of the hand-clap accompaniments at different context of performance. Some songs are sung to call for hand-clap, some songs are performed to inspire the members and inform them on the benefits of clapping; while other songs are composed to indicate the entertainment use of hand-clap accompaniment as well as to chastise those Church members that cannot clap actively.

Conclusion

Hand-clap as a phenomenon in the Yoruba Cherubim and Seraphim Church music in Nigeria is a product of Yoruba traditional musical practice inherited from performance of folksongs and children's moonlight play-songs. The Yoruba C&S Churches adopted hand-clap accompaniment as the most important and integral part of their liturgical music because of the indispensable functional values attributed to the phenomenon. This invariably made the practice a strong musical tradition and symbolic attribute of the

Church. This is why the Church is regarded by the Yoruba people as '*IjoAlatewo*' (The hand-clapping Church).

Despite the criticism the phenomenon of hand-clap accompaniment in Yoruba C&S Churches has received from some Christian religious scholars and founders of other new generation Churches, this practice remains the distinguishing factor between C&S Churches and other Indigenous African Churches in Nigeria. Unlike Yoruba C&S Churches, other Church denominations that also adopt the use of hand-clap accompaniment as part of their musical practice, does it occasionally.

It has been observed during the field investigation of this research that the phenomenon of hand-clap accompaniment in Yoruba Cherubim and Seraphim Church music in Nigeria is valued in terms of the various functions it performs during worship services; out of which the spiritual function is most valued. This is as a result of the 'spirituality' status which people generally attached to C&S and all other white-garment Churches; and this spirituality is manifested in form of going into trance by their prophets and prophetesses while songs are accompanied with 'hot' and fast hand-clap accompaniment.

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