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An Appraisal of Revolutionary Trends in Musiliu Ishola's Works

By

Damilola Mayowa Babarinde *

Abstract

This study examines revolutionary trends in Apala music of Musiliu Ishola, the son of one of the earliest exponents of the music, Haruna Ishola. Individual creativity and contemporary trends in this genre of traditional music are used to measure the innovations in this study. The methodology adopted includes a critical analysis of the works of Musiliu Ishola and the use of available literary materials on Apala music as well as the interview method where certain issues about the music are brought to limelight. Amongst other findings, it was discovered that Musiliu Ishola has created a new genre of Apala music which is better, richer and more appealing in terms of harmony and instrumentation in order to satisfy his audience. This study, therefore, concludes that Apala music should be placed on the same pedestal as other known genres of music so that our heritage (culture) will be properly protected.

Keywords: Apala Music, Revolution, Instrumentation, Audience.

Introduction

Music as an important aspect of man's culture has witnessed dramatic changes in the hands of its practitioners in this our jet age. Omojola (1995, p. 1) posits that:

> Music is an important aspect of a people's culture and since culture is dynamic it can be assumed that Nigerian

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traditional music as we know it today is different from what it was several hundred years ago.

For instance, a closer look into various Yoruba musical genres such as Fuji, Juju, Were, Dadakuada, Apala and others will reveal that it has been transformed from what it used to be when it first began. Apala music, a notable traditional music had seen the light of day through the effort of Musliu Ishola, the innovative son of one of the exponents of Apala music, Late Alhaji Haruna Ishola. Musiliu who is now been called "The Messiah of Apala", has changed the style of the music so much that its patronage has no bound. The instrumentation and use of complex rhythms are so captivating that member of the society, most especially the youths dance to its rhythm unlike before when the music is associated with the elderly ones.

Historical Background of Apala Music

There are various schools of thought about the possible origin of Apala music which is a "swinging, slow spiritual beat with deep talking drums tones, working around shaker bells and a cycling thumb piano ostinato" (www.Afropopworldwide). Balogun argues that Apala started in 1938 with Tijani Ayanlola from Ayangbusi compound at Ede in Osun State. Tijani who was a member of his fathers' band chanted and play the hourglass drum(gangan) effectively. Thus, his skills in chanting and drumming made him popular. As a result of his popularity, he decided to establish his own band. His father sees this as "Paala" which means separation. Therefore, whenever someone ask after Tijani from his father, he jokingly responded by saying: Tijani ti Paala (Tijani that has separated) Thus, that is how Tijani became Tijani Alapala.

Another school of thought, Fanilola asserts that Apala music have been in existence before 1938. This was made known to him in his interaction with Late Ajadi Ilorin one of the earliest exponents of Apala music who confessed that he had been performing since 1930. Ajadi according to Fanilola stressed that like many traditional music no one can point out the originator of Apala.

The prominence of dundun drums in Apala music is another theory associated with the origin of Apala music. Laoye as cited by Fanilola opines that a man named Ayan was the originator of Apala. According to the theory, Ayan is the first to start playing the dundun drum (Hour glass drum) and he taught many how to play the drum in the Yorubaland. Ayan was diefied after his death and it is not strange in Yorubaland to hear someone from the drumming family to have prefix Ayan before his name. The above theory therefore suggested that if Ayan is the first to play dundun drum and the same drum is prominent in Apala music then he is the originator of Apala music.

Omibiyi (1979, p. 51) in her discourse on "Islam Influence on Yoruba Music" observes that:

> Monotonous chanting and microtonal decoration of melodies have been incorporated into the corpus of new musical types, which have become popular for entertainment among Muslim Yoruba; these are Waka, Sakara and Apala. They were probably developed early during this century.

One can deduce from the above that if Apala was developed in 20th century, then it must have been in existence before that century and had been influenced by Islam.

In addition, in our quest to know the origin of Apala music, Alhaji Ganiyu Ishola the first born of Late Haruna Ishola and Musiliu Ishola his son in a separate interviews conducted by the researcher revealed that one cannot trace the origin to any place or person. They both submitted that they don't know where it originated from or who started the music even though they are earning their living from Apala music.

In connection with the foregoing therefore, it is evident that Apala started in the Western Region as a traditional music and the originator no one knows since it is a traditional music, that is, music of the people. Also, Apala had been influenced by Islamic religion, and has undergone series of developments.

Revolutionary Trends in Apala Music

Song Text

Song text in African music is an important aspect of the music Nketia (1975, p. 189) observes that; the treatment of the song as a form of speech utterances arises not only from stylistic consideration or from consciousness of the analogous feature of speech and music, it is also inspired by the importance of the song as an avenue of verbal communication, a medium for creative verbal expression which can reflect both personal and social experience. He goes further to categorise the song text in African music as cradle song, philosophical songs, historical songs, general songs to mention but a few.

The song text in Apala music can be categorised as songs of praise, historical, entertainment, insult and abuse, proverbial and social control. Apala music which was a traditional music from inception makes use of proverbs in his song text. Thus, Adegbite (1997, p. 143) confirms this when he submits that "Apala music is noted for its highly proverbial folklore…"Apart from all these, Apala music makes use of Quranic text in its song text and songs are characterised with refrain of short phrases, call and response or overlapping call and response in which a soloist makes a statement and the chorus responds immediately. Sometimes the chorus from the refrain is short phrase of four, three or two lines with one line complimenting one another.

The song texts of Apala music however, have been revolutionised. One of such revolutionary trends is the use of biblical story in the music unlike when it is only Quranic scripture that the music was using. This Biblical story is evident in one of Musiliu track where he sang about the story of Jabez from the Book of Chronicles and how he made it in life. This song which is religious in nature is one innovation which account for the wider acceptability of the music among Christians. Today Apala music is being played in wedding receptions of Christians. This has demonstrated the creativity and flexibility in Musiliu's work. As Adegbite (1997, p. 150) opines "change means flexibility and flexibility in socio-religious music provides for creativity and continuity".

Also another innovation witnessed in the song text of Apala music is the inclusion of a monologue that is been spoken rapidly, then sung over

a fast strong rhythm which is known as "rap". The introduction of the "rap" style by Musiliu is to compliment the form on ground. Musiliu who is aware of the event and changes in his environment took advantage of it by employing themes of common interest and today, his music is widely accepted among the youths who are always craving for "rap" style. Nketia (1975, p. 189) rightly affirms that the "themes of the songs tend to center around events and matters of common interest and concern to the members of a community or the social group within it".

Moreso, the introduction of Igbo and Hausa languages into Apala music has been an innovation that is worthwhile. Igbo and Hausa people now join the train of admirers of Apala music. Thus, the music has new audience and Musiliu confessed that, he is now being invited for performance in the Eastern and Northern part of the country which didn't happen during his fathers' era. This in turn makes Apala music to thrive better in this age.

Performance Practices

Every traditional musical genre has peculiar practices that are associated with its performances. There are some peculiarities associated with the performance practices of Apala music. Omibiyi (1979, p. 51) reflects that;

> In the performance of Apala singing is emphasized and as such the leader of the group who is usually the lead singer does not play any other instruments besides singing; however he is expected to be versatile in all the instruments. He is, most invariable a professional singer, and sometimes is said to employ supernatural means to improve his voice quality.

www.Nigeria-Arts.net/music/Apala/Haruna_Ishola in reference to the Late Haruna Ishola informs that; Ishola's music was considered very powerful. Among the memorable anecdote were that Haruna Ishola's voice was so powerful that his praise singing could kill its intended recipient if not provided with restraint. The use of rhythms in the performance practice of the modern Apala is more than singing. However, worthy to note also is

the tradition of sitting position in the live performances of Apala music which Musiliu has changed to the standing position in his video clip.

Instrument

One basic feature in Apala music is the adoption of indigenous instruments with no western musical instruments. It is a kind of traditional approach. Central to Apala sound was Agidigbo, a hollow lamellophone thumb piano both plucked and strucked to create a hypnotic ostinato rhythm. There is also the flurring from the lead talking drum (Gangan), the Sakara tones (drum) working around Shaker (Sekere) which all contributed to the elevation of the music. It is important to note that, Agidigbo and Sakara are two prominent instruments in Apala music. According to Olusoji (2005, p. 310)

> Apala music at its conception, used instruments that have been adopted as the trademark of the music. In the hands of its two main exponents, Alhaji Haruna Ishola and Ayinla Omowura, both of blessed memories, one could hear the agidigbo (thumb piano), igba (calabash) and sakara drum (a tensioned drum) adding accompaniment to the music.

Also, as earlier mentioned, dundun drum (hourglass) is one of the prominent instruments used in Apala music. Its prominence informs its relation to the origin of the music. Omibiyi (1979, p. 51) while contributing to the instruments used in Apala music states that: "Iya-Ilu, gangan, adamo, kanango all of which are members of the dundun ensemble and Igba (a calabash cattle) from which a rattle effect is derived" are musical instruments peculiar to Apala music.

Musiliu, However, had introduced some instruments both western and indigenous instruments. The western instruments he (Musiliu) had introduce includes: drum set during live performance, lead guitar and keyboard while the indigenous instrument introduced are bata ensemble and goje one string fiddle instruments into his musical performances. These instruments had really modernised and changed Apala music for better.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation in Apala music is not complex but simple and it is typical of an African music. This is evident in its performance practices. It emphasises singing than rhythm. In Haruna Ishola's music for example, Olusoji (2005, p. 313) submits that "instruments were assigned specific rhythmic roles. For instance, some were specifically given ostinato pattern, time line improvisatory role and so on".

This situation has however, changed in the current Apala music of Musiliu Ishola. The instrumentation in the new Apala gives it a new look. This is as a result of fusion of other musical styles and the incorporation of western instruments fused into the music. It is difficult to hear any instrument being given a time line throughout the music. This is evident in the jazz drum set which is given the time line but it often altered the rhythmic pattern that ought to be constant.

The new Apala centers its instrumentation around complex rhythm. Olusoji (2005, p. 312) asserts that;

> The contemporary Apala and Fuji musicians see rhythm in its totality. They use complex, intricate rhythmic configuration; one can hear a juxtaposition of rhythm going on simultaneously or even poly-rhythmic.

An insight into some of these instruments used by Musiliu Ishola will shed more light:

i. Keyboard: This is a western instrument introduced by Musiliu Ishola. It serves as an accompaniment to the melody. Sometimes it is used to introduce the song that is about to the performed. While introducing the song, it is also harmonising the melody in its chordal progression

ii. Lead Guitar: This is also a western instrument that is used in the introduction of the melody and interludes as the case may be. It often plays the refrain or latter part of the melody while the keyboard accompanies it.

iii. Jazz Drum Set: At the center of Musiliu's music is the jazz drum set. Though it is a western instrument, he (Musiliu) had built his music around the instrument. The jazz drum set, sets the pace for other musical

instruments. It is on its rhythmic pattern which is often altered that other instruments built on. It co-ordinates and guide other instruments.

iv. Dundun Ensemble: Two drums out of the dundun ensemble is used, that is, Gudugudu or Opon and Gangan. The Gudugudu is used to create rhythmic pattern, while gangan is used as emblishment on the rhythmic patterns. Occasional, the Gangan improvised when the need arise. The use of Gangan can be more than one depending on the performance or leader.

v. Bata Ensemble: Like the Dundun ensemble, the Iya-ilu and Omele-abo are the two instruments used in the Bata ensemble. The Iya-ilu which according to Oyelami (1991, p. 4) is a "melody as well as a rhythmic instruments".is used to improvise during the performance of Apala. The Iya-ilu at times imitates what they (chorus) are singing vice versa while the Omele-Abo assists the Iya-Ilu in the reproduction of speech patterns. The combination of all these instruments will definitely create a complex rhythms and intricate rhythmic configurations.

Sociological Effects of the Trend on the Musician

It is important to stress that every innovations witnessed in Apala music is as a result of the changing society. Daramola (2000, p. 61) opines that "change in music may directly or indirectly be link with the change in the environmental or socio-economic position of the society in which such music thrives". Such changes as Akpabot (1986, p. 86) affirms, involves "changes in the behavioural pattern".

A change in music depends on the changing society and how innovative and creative the performer of such music is. Thus, the creativity of such performer always brings something new into the music which then becomes his own innovation. As Bacon (1958, p. 9) rightly observes, individual (performer) "is agent of introducing external innovations".

Music as a profession in times past was relegated to the background. That is why Omojola (1995, pp. 47– 48) states that "in many parts of Yorubaland musicians are sometimes referred to as alagbe (beggars)". However, the situation has changed, many of these popular musicians have acquired wealth, fame and prestige. This is evident in their

personal life and public engagements. Peoples' attitude to popular musician is now encouraging as they now see it as a profession that is lucrative with which one can build his or her image positively and become the favorites of all. It is also profession that is viable economically.

Government now encourages the profession by recognising Performing Musician Association of Nigeria (PMAN) and by giving musicians various awards. Haruna Ishola was a beneficiary of one of such award. He received the award as Member of the Order of Niger (M.O.N) from the then president of Nigeria Alhaji Shehu Shagari. Today Musiliu Ishola is being called the "Messiah of Apala" as a result of his innovations, resourcefulness and creativity. The profession is now a noble one that is more recognised as a lucrative performing art

The performance of Apala music today is one that is largely dictated by the audience. That is, one of the reasons for the revolutionary trend is the society and since the society had accepted it the musician tends to please them and this Musiliu expressed when he sang:

Solo: Taye ba ti n yi
Kama ba won yi
Opon Apala ti sun finally
O ti kuro ni tati jo
Ejo wo eba mi dalu bo le
Alujo ni ki a ma sa

Translation

Solo: If the world (society) is changing
Let's change with them.
Apala music has moved to another level
It is different from what it used to be
Please, let the drums sound
Danceable rhythm is the main thing

The mode of living of Apala practitioners has changed especially for those who made it through the music. Musiliu confessed to the researcher during the interview that dignitaries such as the wife of the then Vice-President of Nigeria Mrs. Titi Atiku now invites them for performance even outside the shores of this Country. One of such

performance was the one that took place in Berlin. Such performances increase their fame and prestige. Apart from these, they are able to make more money, which makes them to acquire wealth, property and live a comfortable life. It gives them more prestige, honour, fame and respect in the society.

Conclusion

Having established the new genre of Apala, we are of the opinion that the new genre can still be further developed. The following are the recommendations for a higher development and for further research in music:

Traditional and popular musicians should be exposed to general musical knowledge. This will in no doubt help them to develop their musicianship, guide them better in their compositions and thus create a larger audience for them even among the music scholar.

Western instruments in Apala performances should be properly annexed with the indigenous instruments. This will enhance the music and not dominate the music, so as not to lose its originality and the African flavour (features of African music). Thus, the musician will be able to carry his audience along.

The video clip of Apala should be packaged in a way that it will promote the culture within the society. Our culture can be promoted via the dancer's costume, dance movement that will depict our culture and not displaying ladies half naked thereby promoting indecency. The music should be properly documented and preserved, so that our heritage (culture) will be properly protected so it will not go extinct.

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