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# Traditional Music: Context for Gender Harmony

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**Abstract:** *Traditional music plays vital roles in the life of the people as means of entertainment and for other ceremonial purposes. One noticeable fact however remains that while the men play all traditional instruments, women are debarred from playing certain instruments as flute (oja) and tom-tom (ufie). This paper explored the place of traditional music in African context and the need for women in playing instruments like oja and ufie. Using some documentary sources, the paper contends that both men and women are alike in terms of music talent and appreciation and women's talent needs harnessing in this 'forbidden' areas. Recommendations were also made.*

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## Introduction

Music is a complex amalgamation of melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre and silence in a particular (intended) structure. It is a sound event between noise and silence, a whole social fact, something in which truth manifest. The explication of the concept music usually begins with the idea that music is an organized sound. But, this characterization is too broad since there are many examples of organized sound that are not music, such as human speech, and sounds that non-human animal and machines make. Many authorities have suggested definitions, but defining music turns out to be more difficult than might first be imagined. The Oxford Dictionary (1992) defines music as the “art of combining vocal or instrumental sounds or both to produce beauty of forms, harmony and expression of emotion.” Since music must be heard and to be fully experienced no amount of reading or talking can substitute for listening to records, tapes and compact disks or repeated hearing of music at a modest cost. However, music is a lively act and is ideally experienced in life performance. It is fully embedded in the stream of daily life of people – male and female on the diverse social, private and group activities. Most works done at home are often accompanied by music. It may not be only and anend in itself, but is also usually a vehicle through which several necessities are carried out and attained, and norms and values of the society transported and diffused at large, hence the important of music in the society. It is therefore very important to note that its role in a given occasion is sometimes tangential and also general.

Although male and female roles in music usually might appear unspecified, in traditional settings, these can be gender specific. Gender is an attribute that socially distinguishes between male and female, and the role expectations permeate all areas of human endeavours (Okoli, 2016). This includes traditional music. Males are dominant figures for cultural life; and women are forbidden from participating in some cultural celebrations (Mbanugo, 1991). This most likely will affect their music preferences and performances. It is the position of this paper that music should know no gender. Male and female alike appreciate music. The paper therefore, has been organized under the following sub-headings:

- Traditional music

- Musical instruments and classification
- Gender and traditional musical instrument performance
- Recommendations
- Conclusion

### **Traditional music**

Traditional music is an indigenous music of a people which deals with the local experiences of man. Akpabot (1986) opined that, “Traditional music is the unadulterated music handed down by our ancestors from generation to generation.” It is a widespread belief among Igbos that traditional songs have been in existence since creation itself. They are songs passed down from one generation to the other by oral transmission. It is not documented. Ariwene (2002) explained that, “traditional music reflect peoples’ pattern of life. It is a song rendered in the peoples’ local language, and accompanied by instrumentals and dancing patterns reflecting their idioms.”

In fact, the description of music in the foregoing shows that traditional music is that type of music which was practiced in Nigeria before the influence of the European. Traditional music is so interwoven with culture that one becomes inseparable from the other. In music, there is culture and culture is equally reflected by its diverse music, which means that culture and music are related in the sense that one can be identify through the other.

### **Musical instruments and classification**

African traditional musical instruments refers to those musical instruments that are indigenously conceived, invented and made by African, for the original purpose of enabling African musical and extra-musical practice. Traditional music which instruments and rhythm comprise songs, dances of Nigerian origin has different types of musical instruments like: Slit-drum (Ufie or Ikolo), Long gong or tom-tom (Alo), Xylophone (Ngedelegwu), thumb-piano (Uboaka), Skin drums of different sizes (Igba), Musical bow (Une), Maracas (Ichaka), Flute (Oja) and many others.

Flute and slit-wooden drums are among the varieties of musical instruments used in making music by men in different occasions or activities like funeral ceremony where an elderly person died. It is also performed during Ozo title-taking. According to Okpala (2015), in Igbo music culture and in most African cultures, instruments are not separated from music. It is part and parcel of the whole process of music making. Oja belongs to the Aerophone family while slit-wooden drum belongs to ideophone family of African musical instruments as classified by Eric Von Hombostel and Curt Sachs.

According to Onwuekwe, A. I. (2011), Nigerian Traditional musical instruments abound in their hundreds and vary from one locality to another. Again, that they perform the same function in their different areas. For example, the kaakaki of Hausa people that is regarded as one of the royal musical instruments perform the same function Ufie or Ikolo from the Igbos, all showcases the arrival or departure of the Emir, Igwe, Obi, Oba and many others. The instrument mentioned above can neither be touched by women nor can be played by them. This instrument, if some women with golden voices are allowed to play it, it will produce wonderful harmonious tunes and melodies.

Agu (2006) observed that classification of African musical instruments as done by Eric Von Hombostel and Curt Sachs (1993) are into four categories. The method of classification was

based on the course of sound generation of instruments (P.86). The main four categories are ideophones, aerophone, membranophone and chordophone.

### ***Ideophones***

Ideophones are manipulated by exerting pressure on the bodies of musical instruments either by shaking (e.g rattles, *ya* in Igbo), by striking (e.g Xylophone, Ngedelegwu in Igbo).

### ***Chordophones***

This type of instrument produces sounds when the stretched string attached to them is caused to vibrate through plucking or striking. Examples of such instruments are Lutes, harps and zithers, musical bow, etc.

### ***Membranophones***

It refers to the instruments that produce sounds when the animal membrane are fastened to a hollow wooden frame and is caused to vibrate by beating or striking either with bare hands or beaters. (Membrane drum of different sizes, Igba in Igbo, sekere, dundun in Yoruba are some of the examples).

### ***Aerophones***

Aerophones are instruments that produce sounds through the activation of air enclosed in them by blowing. Onwuekwe (2011) affirms that aerophones are musical instruments that depend on the vibration of the air column inside the musical instruments for the production of musical sounds. Examples are flute, kaakaki.

### **Gender and traditional instrument performance**

In different parts of the world, women play different types of musical instruments, but here in Nigeria, there are certain musical instruments women are forbidden to play. Men virtually play all the musical instruments. This is as a result of gender stereotyping which debar women from playing certain kinds of musical instruments. Examples of these musical instruments are flute (Oja), slit-wooden drum (Ufie or Ikolo) and many others. In playing musical instruments, there is no pronounced distinction between the male and female. In actual sense, sex difference does not influence human performance. It will not affect performance of musical instruments.

Garai and Schienfeld (1968) in Money (1993) observed that male and female are similar in verbal abilities from pre-school age to early adolescence. That is why, for every renowned male singer, there is equally a female equivalent. It appears however, that among all traditional musical instruments, the flute and slit-drum appear as exclusive of domain of the male, something which evokes the question as to the masculinity of the flute and slit-drum. But why?

Flutes belong to the aerophone family of African musical instruments as classified by Eric Von Hombostel and Curt Sachs. They are type of African musical instrument that function with air. They produce sounds when air is blown into them. Flutes are regarded as local wind instrument. It may be carved out of wood. Flute may be open-ended and may be designed for playing in vertical or transverse position. Flutes are social instruments. They are of three types in Africa in general. They are end-blown flutes, global flutes and long flutes. In Nigeria, the Igbos have *ja* which is end-blown; the 'adiko' of the Yorubas is global, while the Hausa have long

flutes. The Igbo oja is a reed some six inches in length furnished with three holes for fingering—one in front, one at the back for the thumb, and the bottom outlet (Basden, 1982).

Slit-wooden drum belongs to the ideophone family of African traditional musical instruments as classified by Eric Von Hombostel and Curt Sachs. They are carved out of log of the camwood tree. The slit-drum is specifically used for the Ozo title ceremonies. They can also be used in the events and ceremonies involving a member of the title group. Slit-drum has also some ritual status. It may be played only when an Ozo man is an actor or performer. Slit-drum from all indication is a distinct, special and sacred instrument. Okafor, (2005) mentioned that no non-title holder may even tread a measure and no woman may touch the instrument let alone play it. Again, the sound of this instrument confers identity to a select class of moral leadership in Igbo land. Ufie is the language interpretation of the patterns that identify a specific occasion like installation, funeral and festival. On the day of these occasions, Ufie bursts into praise poetry, saluting the titled men, praising their genealogy and family tree. Ufie can also salute the deities and the powers, the valorous ancestors and the exploits of the clans. Ufie can be used to address a deceased man as if he were present and hearing. According to Okafor, (2005), No other member of the society carries such a privilege beyond the term of his natural life. But an Ozo man lives perpetually in his home and kindred groups and is addressed as a very present. Remarkably, while sacredness and heroism are not exclusively preserved for the men, women do not take ozo title, and the thought of playing the ufie therefore is out of the question.

Culture should not be a barrier in playing these musical instruments. Culture is the product of humankind and amenable to change. Culture is not static. If women can attain a high position as men, why it is that women cannot be given chance or allowed to partake in playing musical like oja and ufie which they can play very well. In playing these musical instruments, they will be able to enjoy social status. Okafor, (2005) states that their services are in demand and their reward is generally liberal.

### **Conclusion**

African musical instruments are used for either accompanying the singers, dancers or extra-musical activities like war, public announcement, wrestling, etc. It has been revealed that oja and ufie are valuable African musical instruments that play outstanding roles in Igbo music culture and they are only played by men. Women can neither touch ufie nor play it. Women should be allowed to play these instruments without discrimination. Even men that are playing them are limited thereby cannot meet up with the demand. The services are demanding with little attention.

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