

**PART B**

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**AFRICAN MUSIC: A LIVING ART IN  
CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

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**Abstract**

*The gamut of the entire musical art is pronounced with supreme moral influence and has always been a source of pleasure, recreation and entertainment. To the typical African, the vivaciousness associated with music as a universal language and a form of communication, elicit emotional responses, provoking thought, study and familiarity for comprehension. Against this backdrop of eulogizing African music as a living art, this discuss examine the fulfillment of what usually makes the typical African and his kith and kin-the African-American-to tick spontaneously at the sound of music garnished with African flavor.*

**Key words:** Musical Styles:- Rhythm, and musical instruments

**Introduction:**

The term African Music refers to the musical practices of all indigenous peoples of African. Important stages of an African person's life are often marked with music. These are lullabies, children game singing and music for adolescent initiation rites, weddings, title-taking ceremonies, funerals and ceremonies for the ancestors. Among the *Yoruba* of Nigeria, the mother of twins must perform a special repertoire of songs and in *Ghana* there are songs

for teasing Bed Wetters and for celebrating the loss of a child's tooth. The *Tutsitribe* of *Rwanda* has song for boasting, songs for young women when they meet together, songs to flatter girls, songs about cattle and many more. This explains why Akpabot, 1996:40 said that, "from the day an African is born up to when he attains manhood, marries and eventually dies, music plays a very important part in his daily experiences. This justified Yehodi Menuhin in Hosien 1961:6 in saying that, "We are music as much as we are anything else." Beazley 1987:540 has a touch of anthropology in his simple definition of music as he says "music is sound arranged for instruments or voices in many ways and for many purposes exhibiting a variety of forms and styles both from place to place and from age to age."

Africa is a huge continent with hundreds of ethnic groups. Its people sing and play many different kinds of music. Some people, such as those of the Southern deserts have many simple songs, others such as those of the Congo River Basin have complicated singing and instrumental music. The East Africans specialized in music played on Xylophone, while the tribes of the West Coast have developed the art of drum playing to a very high level of skills.

The portion North of the Sahara, largely Arabic speaking, has musical culture substantially Middle Eastern in character and is thus discussed in the article as the near and Middle East.

### **Musicianship**

Western and African civilizations justify distinctions between folk and art music, however traditional African music is transmitted orally and its compositions are subject to constant change through the process of communal i.e. creation and because improvisation is particularly well developed. Following is a brief summary of the geographical distribution of traditional musicianship in Black Africa.

(1). The Bambuti Pigmies of *Zaire* seems to have no musical specialties. All individuals participate in all types of music, though no doubt the musical talent of some is recognized and plays a role in performance.

(2). Among the Bashi in *Zaire*, five classes of musicians form a hierarchy, from the versatile instrumentalists who make much of their living by playing at ceremonies and functions, down to players of slit drums, players of rattles and bells, song leaders and finally amateur members of singing groups.

(3). The *Hausa* of *Northern Nigeria* had courts where preferential drummers and double-read instrument players performed in honour of the king (Emir), a practice similar to that of the *Watitsi* of *Burundi*, where a drum ensemble

played whenever the king (Emir) appeared in public. Professional drummers are also associated with the religious cults of West Africa, each deity having its distinctive set of drums and rhythm.

(4). The *Chopio* of *Mozambique* has large orchestras of Xylophones led by professional soloists-conductors cooperating closely with composers and choreographers, whose names are used to identify pieces.

(5). The musical specialist of the *Venda* of *Transvaal* of South Africa are often the teachers of initiation schools through which young people must pass.

(6). In some societies, such as the *Bansogyen* of *Zaire*, social deviants may devote themselves to music, which thus becomes an approval venue of individuals who cannot follow the societal roles. In general, musicians are regarded as indispensable but are accorded low status. Men occupy the main musical role, but women are also very active, particularly in vocal music.

### **Musical Styles: Rhythm**

The metronome sense is never absent from the spirit of the African, for this rhythmic idea, Akpabot 1986:43 cites "If you watch a group of Africans pushing a truck full of merchandise or making a clearing in the bush with their cutlasses you will find yet another example of rhythm helping to ease the burden of labour in the form of worker songs"

Most prominent in African music is the importance of music. Nettle in Randle 2001:18 cites, "the accompaniment of singing with hand clapping which provides simple, unified structure, but instrumental performance, usually including a percussion ensemble, normally involve the interaction of independent lines with a governing matrix, a technique known as **poly rhythm** which is most developed in West Africa. Percussion ensembles in West Africa may consist of two double metal bells, one of which begins and leads the performance, a rattle, and two drums, each performing characteristics rhythm with variations. To this is added the "master drum" which improvise upon and combines other instruments.

Fafunwa 1975:20 maintains this equilibrium with rhythmic alacrity by saying that "the infinite variety of African dance movements offer the African one of the best media for physical exercise. The dance and the music also serve as cultural vehicles, encouraging team-work." This brings to mind Nigeria's internationally renowned ATILOGWU acrobatic dancers who have for a long time got the credentials for physical exercise and team work. In the same vein Randles 2001:700 describes rhythm as the pattern of movement in time while Akpabot 1986:88 in an agreement with "Dalcaroze's theory of Eurhythmics

says that music first entertains the ear to the mind and eventually effects bodily movement causing people to react in certain ways.”

Once you have heard African music, it is surprising how easy it is to recognize it in spite of all its variety. Perhaps this is due mainly to its unforgettable rhythm as it has a very steady beat that may not change in tempo for hours. Nettle in Grolier further expatiates on the African's rhythmic vitality, when he stress that:-

Many African musicians have developed an extra ordinary rhythmic ability that helps them to keep up the tempo without the slightest variation over enormous time span. They can perform rhythmic fists on their drums that are truly amazing.(P.42)

### **Musical Style- Dance**

Randel (2001:17) says, “That in most of the world's societies, there is a close tie between music and religion, but in Africa, the act of dance is usually also involved.” Stressing further, Randel says that the importance of dance and its concepts as part of a music performance points up the close relationship between body movement and music such that performers and listeners are rhythmically drawn together on the ground into a unified atmosphere of actions, in contrast to the dichotomy between musicians and audience in a Western Concert.

### **Instrument**

African music is characterized by the great quantity and variety of musical instruments. All for the major classes of instruments are well represented in practically all societies. Idiophones are the most common and Africa exceeds other countries in the number and variety of membraphones, Idiophones and Chordophones.

### **Drums**

As stated above, Africa exceeds other continents in the number and varieties of membranophone meaning that the drum occupies a distinctive place in African music. A society may have several types; each for a particular function. Legend has it that Obatala, the YORUBA god of creation had four wives who serenaded him every night singing and clapping their hands in rhythm. The god decided that it would be a good idea to teach them how to produce these rhythms on a drum. So, he had four drums made and named them

after his wives Iya Nla, Iya Agan, Afere and Keke. These remained to this day and in any music for the worship of Obatala only four drums are used.

The drum is the foundation of most African music ensembles, fulfilling much the same function as the string section of a classical symphony Orchestra. Drum here is used to include all varieties of the instrument. Akpabot 1986:11 writes that, "In Northern Nigeria, the calabash drum (Koria) is used in every orchestra making use of string instrument. Drum rhythms fit into one of the two main types of instrumental rhythms found in African music be it percussive rhythm or melodic rhythm."

There is a sociological twist to the organization of a standard drum orchestra and therefore the rhythmic pattern allocated to each drummer. To this Akpabot has expressed that "In Nigerian orchestral music, four drums constitute an average family representing the father, mother, brother and sister, and where a fifth drum is added it is usually to add colour to the inner voice parts. The most talkative of the group is the mother drum with a very good reason "women can out-talk any man especially when they are excited."

### **Summary and Conclusion**

African music (especially African popular music) is a blend of African, European, African American and some Middle Eastern musical traditions. Here are some of the styles in which African music had the strongest and greatest influence.

**Afro Beats:** Nigerian musical style which constitutes a rocou bedlam. It is strongly influenced by the African American Jazz music. Fela Anikulapo-kuti is the exponent.

**Blues:** African American vocal and instrumental music originated by black people in the USA about the misery of their lives.

**Calypso:** Improvised song composed by the people of Trinidad, on a subject of current interest.

**Gospel (Spiritual) Songs:** The first gospel songs were the spiritual of African slaves converted to Christianity. The joyful emotional style which developed from there strives in churches in Southern USA.

**Highlife:** Africanized version of Western ball room dance music. The style was developed in Ghana and extended to Nigeria.

**Isicathamia:** Male choral singing in South Africa which uses traditional wedding songs, African American Choral styles, and Wesleyan church hymns.

**Jazz:** An African American style featuring improvisation and synchopated

rhythms. Louis Armstrong contributed to the popularity of Jazz profile as a brilliant trumpeter.

**Juju:** Music style in Nigeria which uses traditional proverbs and praise, poetry and features the talking drum. King Sunny Ade and Ebenezer Obey are among the stars that popularized this profile.

**Mbaqanga:** A popular style of music for dancing in South Africa.

**Ragtime:** A composed instrumental genre primarily for Piano; particularly created by black Americans. This music combines Syncopated melodies with the form of a march. Scott Joplin contributed to the popularity of this profile.

**Reggae:** Any of several styles of urban Jamaican popular music. This is a musical style that is a synthesis of American rhythm and blues, traditional African and Jamaican folk music. Representative artistes include Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Black Uhuru.

**Rhythm:** This includes the time aspect of music, the effects of beats, accents grouping of notes, etc. Musically rhythm is said to be the pattern of movement in time. In African semantics rhythm is said to be the life wine of music. Practically, in the form of dexterous drumming Art Blakey an amazing Black American genius studied and used real African rhythm which made his music exciting and rigorous on the drums and percussion.

**Rumba:** Afro-Cuban recreational is a secular, recreational music, dance that accompanies events with various sub-types like gauneu, yambu, and Columbia. The rumba though secular contains elements from African derived form of sacred traditions.

**Samba:** Afro-Brazilian dance and dance music form; a very prominent Annual carnival celebrations in Brazil. The Samba is said to have particles of Nigerian music and dancer in its rendition.

**Soul:** A mixture of gospel or spiritual music, rhythm and blues and off shoots of borrowed African musical attitude. This species of black American popular music has been featured by black artiste such as Ray Charles, James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Steve Wonder, etc.

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