

Dance Without Music: An Academic Fable and Practical Fallacy in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT Knowledge is often likened to weather conditions that pay no heed to national boundaries. This opinion has led many African scholars into using the same instruments to gauge issues in African and non-African studies expecting to get similar results. In this study, the researchers reveal that dance without music is unthinkable in Nigeria. Using specific examples and field observations, they reveal that such ideals are of non-African origin, which should not be encouraged to overlap in a culture with already defined musical functions, roles and characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

Dance is believed to be as old as man. Although its origin is lost in antiquity, it is however believed to be of divine origin. This is evident in the myths of the various nations of the world. Just as this view is held of dance, so is the musical types which go with them (Wachsmann 1965, Sorell 1979, and McClellan 1988). Until very recently, dance and music in African context were closely knit in which case dance and music shared an interchangeable posture in this line and that an effort to dichotomize them will end in futility (Tracy 1963, Nketia 1974, Akpabot 1986, Ugolo 1998, and Aluede 1999). These scholars are of the firm resolve that music and dance are inseparable.

In the context of increasingly violent search for true knowledge devoid of ambiguities, one may begin to question the appropriateness of the account above especially when there is today overwhelming evidence of music without dance in Nigeria. Vidal (1971), Ames (1973), Lateef (1987) and Aluede (2004) provide succinct examples of musical genres without the accompaniment of dance. In a similar vein, dance scholars in our contemporary societies hold the view that dance is a separate art form devoid of all other ancillaries. While music can be performed without dance, can dance also be performed without music? It is with this not only burning but topical issue we are here concerned.

What is Dance?

Exactly what dance is, is an issue of no general agreement among dance choreographers? However, what is constant in dance is movement in time and space. According to Jacqueline Smith

(1989: 30), dance is "an exposition of movements". Supporting this claim, Oko-Offoboche (1996: 4) says "dance is poetry spoken with the human body in time and space". These definitions talk of dance as movement borne but remain silent about what gives impetus to the said movement. To Bakare in Ufford (2000), Dance is a musical art. In a similar direction, Bakare (2000) defines dance as a rhythmic movement of the human body in time and space to make statements. To Bakare therefore, dance communicates and dance needs rhythm to function. Because the present thrust of this study is the examination of dance from a definitive angle, a temporary end to this discussion is suggested at this point to pave way for a retroactive examination.

What then is Music?

A symbol that expresses feeling, life, motion and emotion (Langer 1953). A unique phenomenon among the fine arts in that it calls for a response not only from the head and the heart but also, frequently, from one or more of the feet (Muir 1976). The definition above share the opinion of that motion or movement is associated with sound. Talking specifically about the position in Africa, Tracey (1963), Bebey (1975) and Graeme (1991) observe that African music is an Art form, which embraces all other arts of the society, and that dance is not a separate art neither is music rather a complex of whole living. Just like the term colour that does not have equivalent in African languages (Koffie 1994), the concept of music in Africa cannot be imagined nor put into a straight jacket in terms of definition in the western sense. Therefore music in Africa is all encompassing.

Similarities Between Dance and Music

Judging from the tone of this paper, it maybe considered superfluous to still feel the need to show the similarities dance has with music. While not suggesting an in depth account, a cursory look is advised, as the move will help in the basic understanding of the writer's construct.

Music and dance go together. Dance is never done without some form of rhythm or music. Music inspires dance and guides movement to achieve harmony and synchronization. This can even be deduced from different kinds of definitions of dance which show that inherent activity of music in dance enactments (Ufford, 1. 2000: 34)

She argues further by saying that it is the rhythm of music, which determines the movement of dance, and that such relationship enhances perfect harmony aesthetically. Drawing some instances from the Bible, Aluede (1999), Ufford (2000) and Aluede (2003) observe that Dance had always had musical accompaniment. Cases in point are (a) Moses' sister Miriam leading Israeli women "with tambourines and dances" (Exodus, 15: 20), (b) At the instance of the philistine's defeat by David's army, "the women come out of the cities of Isreal singing and dancing" (1 Samuel, 18: 6) and (c) The home coming of the prodigal son who was received with music and dancers by the father (Luke, 15: 25) Unless in very rare cases, music is almost always accompanied with dance.

Ufford, I.G. (1995: 2) says, "dance is a medium of expression of emotions" and Ufford, I. A. (2000: 36) concludes, "Dance is performed according to musical beats. This means Music comes to mind first before the rhythmic movements of the body. It provides the rhythm to guide and direct the design of body movements". Ufford and Ufford are not alone in this position, Music naturally spurs listeners to dance. Hence Maria Anne (1987: 3) Says "Good dancers exhibit three basic qualities; a sense of rhythm, a love of Music and a willingness to learn". From the opinions above it could be said that dance is music propelled.

Over half of Music and dance repertoires in Africa remain the intellectual property of the community. By this we mean Music and Dance are collectively owned in Africa (Nketia 1975, Bebey 1975, Enekwe 1991, and Aluede 1999). Although today in Nigeria there are dance troupes

all over the country either owned by the government, organized individuals or universities, their focus is audience based and so meeting the needs of the culture they serve is paramount in dance conception and production. In executing this desire meeting the spectators needs over-rules the possibilities for experimentation and so music and dance share common boundaries that anything else.

The performance of African music and dance is a complicated process that involves psychomotor skills. While the drummers and the singers are playing intricate rhythms on the drums as well as complex pitches on the voice, the dancers dramatise every bit of the rhythm using his body as a vessel. This supports the view that each role is psychomotor bound (Aluede, 1999: 206)

In African performances every member of the ensemble is involved in the over all music production. Dancers are singers and drummers. This is evidently so because in some ensembles dancers have their song choices, they also wear sound amplifiers and buzzers in the forms of Leglets and anklets. Each step taken by such dancers enhances the over all tone quality of the ensembles music (Kamien, 1988)

A sub field receiving serious attention in the contemporary Africa as never before is music and dance therapy. McClellan (1988), Hart, (1990), Moreno (1995), Friedson (1996), Ruzvidzo (1997) and Zechetmayr (2003) share the view that music and dance are healing forces. They say music and dance enables the sick to dance off their disease because as a disordered person is subjected to some kind of music, psycho-logically, the problems on the patients mind which gave rise to the physical manifestation of sickness melts away and healing is carried out on a more physiological parlance, Music and dance, when carefully performed for the sick and managed appropriately enables the human hormonal glands to secrete endorphins which involves healing-the human system. Through this exercise, the blockages in the human bodies are rectified. Music and dance have been tested and known to lower blood pressure, improve heart rate, and heal general debilities.

Dance without Music in Nigeria: Some Remarks

Can dance be solely performed in Nigeria? Put differently, is there any traits of dance without music in Nigeria? Or is there any incidence of dance without music in your community? Ever

since 1999 when one of the researcher authored- African Music and Dance Any difference? he became close to the understanding that there exist some Nigerians who feel that dance is an independent art form and in the last five years, field works, trips, workshops, and debates have been organized to explore the possibility of this novel idea and below are some critical observations on this issue which are discussed under the headings below.

(a) Spontaneous Dance: In Nigeria, it has been argued that dance could be a distinct art form devoid of music and instances have been given in this realm. Some of such instances are (1) the sudden announcement of the birth of a new baby boy by a couple who has been childless for ten years, (11) the purchase of a new maiden car by a son. (111) the death of a respected personality in any Nigerian community. These news are touching emotionally. When steps are moved in joy music simultaneously follows. This music is usually in forms of vocables in times of joy vocables like Igbo Kwenu, Kwenu, Kwuezeno of the Ibo speaking Nigeria, Hey, hey, hey, heo of the Esan people and Siwosiwo, Siwo, of the Benin people all of Edo State are good examples. In times of sadness and anger, the Okrimale body Sign of Ekpon people, Okogo—o of Esan people of Edo state and the Girinya dance of the Hausa speaking Nigeria remain good examples. In the examples given above, all the events cited are interwoven with music and dance. Hawkins (1988: 4) says “grows out of life, reflects life and is life”. Movements in dance is culture bound thus it is able to convey joy, grief, sadness, surprise, anxiety etc. in Nigerian communities. This is of course why Oko-Offoboche (1999: 8) says, “the dance of the day is a good reflection of the values of the time”

(b) This Universe is Kept Alive by a Master Musician – God: The Bible gives an account of God in the book of Zephaniah 3.17 as taking great delight in his creatures, quiet his creatures with his love and rejoicing over them with singing. In a similar way, God has ordered the night and the day on twelve hourly basis. The birds of different hues herald the closing in of dusk and the dawn of day. He has also made man a rhythmic being. Ufford (1995: 2) notes that

Man is a rhythmic being; breathing and blood circulation make him so... Breathing is the body rhythm essential to life. That in itself is the beginning of body movement according to the rhythm of life.

It should be understood that in the beginning music had been in place. Music should not be conceived in the form of melodies harmonies alone in form of ensemble organization. One's heart beat, one's intrapersonal feeling are internally motivated and are part of the rhythm of life. Proposing dance without music in Nigeria is for now still an exercise in futility. In giving an example of dance without music among the Igbe religious group of Urhobo, Nobofa, (1990: 18) records that

They dance mute, without songs or musical instruments. However, the percussion produced by the beat of their bare feet is quite rhythmic and a good conductor on how to go about the dance and, in fact it more or less acts as a leader drum.

Professor M.Y. Nabofa is a renowned scholar of symbolism in religion but has quickly said that although the dance has no songs and musical instruments, the feet rhythm gives a good idea of how the dance should be performed. In African contemporary societies hand clapping, foot stamping, tight slapping, voice yodeling and chest drumming are all forms of instrumental accompaniments and are as such often discussed as characteristics of African music. Just a note to end this segment, music has always been the precursor of dance in Nigeria and where dance emerges first music instantly follows. If the foot steps of a dancer were ever heard then it means he was musically accompanied. And in all, ever since the worlds creation rhythm has always been in force, hence our heart beat, speeches and foot steps are ruled by rhythm.

(c) How are Dances Named in Nigeria: Arising from the observations of Tracey (1963), Bebey (1975) and Graeme (1991) as mentioned previously, music, dance, mime and drama and not conceived separately or independently hence in talking of a musical genre in Nigeria, its dance, songs and music are thought of collectively. This is exactly why music and dance in Nigeria are conceived and condensed into one word name. In Nigeria- examples of such are Ijala- hunters' music and dance and Gelede of Yoruba, Nigeria.

Ujie and/or Isoton- processional burial music and dance of Edo people, Nigeria

Omoko- Music and dance of Itsekiri people of Delta state to mention but a few

(d) Using Non- African Models to Address African Arts: The problem with the thorough appreciation of African music and dance is that

majority of African scholars are products of the missionary and other foreign influences. Having studied under euro centric scholars are still today unable to re-image certain falsehoods even in the light of emerging field dates. Surprisingly, some Africans still see African dances in Sorell's eyes that

African dance are primitive, limited in scope, unconscious-in approach and repetitious in movement (Sorell, (1967: 14)

Beyond the statement above, it is also being held that music is appreciated through the ear, so it is an auditory art and dance is a visual art. Sadly no one considers or ever cares to examine whether such distinctions exist in the whole of Africa, or tries to examine African music and dance aesthetics.

In America, dance is simply a physical activity. The international council for Health, physical Education, Recreation, sport and Dance is a good example of their belief. In recognition of the collective attribute of African performing Arts, The international center for African music and dance (ICAMD) was established at the university of Ghana in January 1993 with the assistance of the Rockefeller foundation, Ford Foundation and Swedish international Development Authority (SIDA). ICAMD continues to carry out its primary mission of promoting international scholarship and creativity. In African music and Dance. This body also has a secretariat at the institute of African studies University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria. As it is in Africa, Nigeria is not left out, music goes with dance

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, we have tried to examine by way of definition, Music, dance and their similarities. In the course of investigation, the researchers observe that while there are some few instances of music without dance, dance can hardly exist without music in Nigerian communities- this subject has exhaustively been discussed using specific examples from different culture areas in Nigeria. Although the intention of this study is not to abbreviate any further move for experimentation or any form of rediscovery, it should be said here and now that unless otherwise dance goes with music-some forms of music. Should dance be performed alone be it individually or collectively, psychosocial physiological disorders are usually suspected in Nigeria.

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