



Music Undefended: The Resonance of an Africanising Value

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Abstract

The music of a culture defends the culture. It defends the people, their identity, their language, their rhythm, their melody and all the idioms and mannerisms peculiar to them. But most of the times we come across academics and armchair theorists who try to put up arguments in defence of their traditional or cultural music. The truth is that while such dissipation is going on in the 'world class' journals among the elite class, the reality is that something else is happening in the different classrooms. This is in reference to African music with all the multi cultural currents it entails. Until now, the real people who have ensured the authentic survival of traditional music have been the uneducated who live in the rural areas. This paper is a general commentary on the ineptitude that has attended the sorry state of development in the classroom teaching of indigenous music systems. Our curriculum still bears all the marks and yoke of colonialism. The histories we teach remain the musical happenstances of Europe and America. Only very few scholars are working towards a documentation of the events that happen around us. This apparent hangover from our oral past needs urgent attention. The reversal of the existing curriculum to reflect the genuine survival needs of African peoples must take the driver's seat. We are no people unless the language and the sounds of our forgotten past find their ways into our classroom. We are not a people unless this echo from the past is heard in our radios, our televisions and from nursery kids with delight and enthusiasm. Then and only then will our music defend us by defending itself and truly stand for all times as one of the pillar values of Africa. In the end what matters most is that this value makes us completely Africanised.



Introduction

We live in a globalized and globalizing world where identity is easily given up by weaker cultures under the deceptive pretext of a civilizing commonwealth. This makes the weak fade into socio-cultural and economic insignificance. Yet, beyond this confusing impression of advancement lies a deep yearning of the human spirit for Africa to put its house in order. No area of attention is more important than the issue of values. Music must rank high in the scale of values of Africa for so many reasons. And it is not important to join a list of apologists who have lined up in defence of African values. I am rather worried by these apologists. Very often we rise in defence of African language, dressing, music, sense of the sacred, life, respect for others and elders, holiness of life and the imagination, family, marriage, belief system, environment and even food. These apologies are unnecessary. None can be sufficient. The tenor of the argument here is, therefore, that African music cannot be defended by any scholar. It is the music that defends the scholar. African music is not about ideas or the evolution of them but about the experience of a unique art, an art that speaks volumes about us. Music expresses in a special way what mere speech does not accomplish. African music in no small measure does this too. The essence of human civilization is to become the best of who you are. A people's music is an essential part of who they really are. It expresses the innermost voices of their philosophic spirit, their hopes and aspirations, their frustrations and worldviews, their recreation and regrets, their past and present, their future and angst. These voices come from our distant past as a deposit of monumental value and as beacons of light showing even in the darkest pages of African history, the authentic route to our safe landing. Unless these voices sound afresh in us, we are nothing but whatever others think we are. In the words of Ciardi, "no man is half-civilized until those voices have sounded within him. A savage, after all, is simply a human organism that has not received enough news from the human race" (475: 1972).

The Framework

This write up follows the literary criticism of John Ciardi, a poet and poetry editor who taught that "literature ... is never about ideas, but always and only about the experience of ideas. Scientists and philosophers discuss ideas" (475: 1972). He held that one reading a good poem does not discuss ideas with the poet. He only becomes the poet by reliving the experience of the poet's imagination. The reader is detached from the poet's experience and at the same time knows that his own life is involved since the experience becomes a commonwealth shaped into form. And since form cannot be destroyed, the experience is



always at the beck and call of the reader. This purity of form makes the experience evergreen transforming it into a centre of value 'uncluttered by peripheral confusions'.

We need not go far to see a whole lot of opinions leading away from the facts. It is even more among the educated class. Ali Mazrui (1978) discussed complacency of the educated class in the quest for international links. He gave this problem extensive treatment in his analysis of cultural forces in world politics (1990). Saul Kripke built a link between identity and necessity (1979). At every level of human development or the so called civilization, identity is a sine qua non. Basil Davidson (2005) in looking at 'the Black man's burden' identified the grandiose plan for the African to abandon his roots in a derogatory description call 'tribalism' and 'atavism' in favour of democracy. This aporia is referred to as the *shadows of neglected ancestors*. A number of scholars have positively advocated for a return to the basic knowledge systems of the African peoples. These include but not limited to Nzewi, Agu, O' Ndubuisi, Sam Chukwu, Echezona, Rich Okafor and in the pop culture, Nelly Uchendu, Mike Ejeagha, Ebenezer Obey, Dan Maraya Jos, Bright Chimezie and Afam Ogbuotobo.

Issues and Considerations

Our scholarship of music has tended to focus more on Euro-American music. In the study of music, musicology without doubt has been appropriated by the West as the consideration of the musical theories of Europe. Ethnomusicology has been designated as the term for studying non-European music. This sort of segregation has been around. In the study of history and theories, musicianship, the story is the same. Why does African music or the music of African get discouraged from attending the lecture halls? Or why is it impossible for a full scale degree programme in African music to be at par with music as understood and studied now? Where is our own history of music? The truth is that as long as our music does not occupy a central position in our scholarship, the real essence of the humanities will be steadily defeated. It is difficult to challenge scholars who have taken several scholarly baths in the different rivers of the Western world to undo what they have been doing. Yet, it is a challenge to which we all called. The basic function of music education is in urgent need of review. The need to find a coefficient between what happens in the music classrooms and in the musical lives of our people is of paramount importance.



Conclusion

The echoes of African music must assemble with the rest of the arts in a solidarity march towards functionality. Since there is no case against the harmony of the arts, the need to be truly African is at the heart of authentic civilization and development of education and social structure. This means that it is only in a commitment to the resurgence of our arts that true values can emerge and endure. Only in such a way can we be defended by our values and not by what we say or write. It is by what we are. We need to hear again that the voices of our arts are the only army capable of defending themselves. And unless they so do, our own positions are utterly indefensible.

References

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