

Performance Practice of Bata Ensemble of the Awori People in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Performance as a major means of expression of African music cannot be overemphasized because of its usage as a means of communication, education, entertainment, among others. The heterogeneous nature of African society creates divergent practices in its music. In Yoruba land, some musical practices are strictly practiced in certain locality while others are generally practiced across the land. Those that are generally practiced are not strictly the same as a result of human interaction, as such; every community has its own unique value added to its performance of music. The Bata ensemble music is one of the strictly practiced music in Yoruba land by the egungun and sango devotees that is gradually turning general. This paper examines the performance practice of Bata ensemble in Awori community. Its organization and musical style were also investigated. Library and field work was used in this paper to explore its empirical nature. It was discovered that composition of instruments, their names and its performance style is unique and slightly different from other localities.

Keywords: Performance, Ensemble, Drum, Instrument and Bata.

1. Introduction

The role of music in the life span of man cannot be overemphasized and its importance especially in African culture is encompassing. Vidal (2000:1) opines that 'one of the most common form by which man expresses his emotions, feelings and sentiments' is through music. In Africa, music is seen as a part of life and a model for cultural practice. Music is used from birth to death; it is used to express joy when a child is born, to express sorrow when someone dies. It is also used for coronation, puberty rites and other ceremonies as it arises in different community. For different events that take place in the community, different music is employed depending on their cultural and environmental background. Music used for ritual ceremonies are different from the music used for recreational activities. There are diverse types of music for diverse functions. Tracy (1969:10) expressed that music in Africa is seen as 'vocal participation and physical manipulation of instruments and the rhythmic or dance movement associated with music'. As such, music could be in vocal or instrumental forms. The vocal form could employ a chorus of a group of boys, group of girls, group of men, group women or combination of both. The instrumental form could also employ drums, flute, trumpet, xylophone, goje among others or combination of instruments and vocal form.

In traditional Nigerian society, each of the communities has different musical groups. The numbers and types of social events that take place in a community also determine the numbers of musical groups that exist in such community. In Yoruba land and other communities in Africa, drum is the most widely used instrument and it is used in different capacity to carry out different functions. Some of the drum ensembles that are popularly known in Yoruba culture include Dundun, Bata, Gbedu, Bembe, Afere, among others.

Akpabot (1986:13) writes that '

some instruments assume greater importance in some parts of the country than others making it possible for the names of an instrument as used in one region to be widely known throughout the country'.

In the same manner, the existence and the use of some of these popular instruments in some locality is also a mystery to lots of people. As such, the use of Bata drum ensemble in Awori community is not a well known fact to majority of people, although, its usage in this community is expected because Awori is a Yoruba community. This paper shall examine the performance practice of Bata Drum ensemble in Awori community alongside its organization and musical style to establish its existence and to create an avenue for comparison of its practice in other localities.

2. The Awori People of Lagos State

The Awori people are one of the major Yoruba sub-groups in Nigeria. Their origin could be traced to Ile-Ife between the fourteenth and fifteen centuries from where they migrated and settled at Isheri Olofin in the modern day Lagos State and later spread to Ogun state.

The name 'Awori' (mud sink plate) is symbolic to the migration and settlement of the Awori people. Ogunnifunnire who was the Awori progenitor was one of the princes of Ife town and he was also a brave hunter at that time. While he was away, his father died and his father's property was shared among his siblings with nothing left except a ritual pot. When he came back he was very furious and he consulted the Ifa oracle for counseling. The Ifa counseled him to migrate to undisclosed place and that he should float the ritual pot left by his siblings on the Ogun river. Ifa further instructed him to settle down wherever the pot sinks. After he carried out the instruction of Ifa, the pot he floated sank at a place he called Isheri Olofin where he settled and later expanded to many other areas (Ajayi 1998).

According to Faluyi (1987), there are four major concentrations of Awori viz: Coastal or Southern, Western, Eastern and Central. The coastal or southern and western constituencies of Aworiland falls into the modern Lagos state while the Eastern and central lies within the modern Ogun state. The central and the eastern settlement of the Awori people that fall within Ogun state are found in places like Ota, Iboro, Igbesa, Ado-Odo, Iro and other smaller Villages.

The coastal or southern and western Awori of modern Lagos state could be found in places like Isheri Olofin, Lagos Mainland, Agege, Ibese, Etete, Irede, Imore, Itire, Ojuwoye, Egbeda, Idimu, Isolo, Ojo, Ejigbo, Ijanikin, Iba, Egbe and villages westward to Badagry.

The Awori speaking people of Lagos State constitute the largest single ethnic sub-group in Lagos State, constituting as it were about 75% of the Indigenous population of the state. The Awori people are found in about seventeen (17) Local government areas out of twenty (20) in the state (Lawal 1999).

The socio-political life of the Awori people is not different from the Yoruba socio-political setting but, with a different peculiarity. The political power and the administration of the community in all categories lie in the hands of the following: Oba/Olofin, Igbimo, Osugbo cult, Egbe and Ibudo Opa Council,

The Awori people are primarily noted for farming as major occupation which forms their basic economic activities. However, there are other attached ones like hunting, palm wine tapping, mat weaving, blacksmithing, carpentry, tailoring among others.

There are general and peculiar festivals observed in Aworiland. The general festivals are the festivals that are practiced all over Yoruba land while the peculiar ones are the festivals that are only practiced in Awori land. The festivals includes: Egungun, Oro, Gelede, Efe, Kori, Ogun, Obatala, Eyo, Sango, Alaworo, Elegbeta and Iroko.

3. The Bata Drum Ensemble

Vidal (1995) observed that the south-west of Nigeria is dominated by two principal medium of musical expression; drum and voice, although, there are other instruments like flute, gong and rattles but drumming and singing constitute the major form of musical expression. The use of drum in particular cannot be overemphasized because it is used as the foundation of ensembles. The role of the drum is reminiscent to the string section of the western symphony orchestra. Apart from certain drums that are used for certain rituals, most drums are used as group instruments (ensemble) that is, combination of different or same drums in different sizes.

Bata ensemble is one of the most popular ensembles among the Yoruba people. Before now, the ensemble is strictly attached to *egungun* and *sango* devotees, but in the contemporary time, it is becoming a freely use.

3.1 Origin of Bata

The difficulties which beset the historian of Yoruba music is similar to those confronting the historian of general Yoruba culture. In the absence of a literacy tradition among the Yoruba,... has to rely on oral tradition and on artifacts for information pertaining to the earliest history of Yoruba. (Euba 1990: 37).

There are different versions of the origin of Bata drum in Yoruba land, but one of them will be highlighted. According to Falolu, a bata drummer from Igbo- Ora, said that, there was a man called 'Bata' in Igbo-Ora area of Oyo State in Yoruba land many years ago. He was known to be a very powerful man in the town. He became aggrieved because of the way he was treated by the people around him. One day he got angry and transformed himself to drums of different sizes. The drums he transformed to were later named after him and were adopted by the *Egungun* and *Sango*

devotees.

There were other accounts of the origin of bata described by Darius Thieme (1960). He recorded that it was shortly after the reign of *sango* that *bata* was made to ark his reign. He also acknowledged the view of some that said that when *sango* was to perform his *juju*, he used the *bata* to attract lighting. In that view, the use of *bata* drum started in Oyo Alafin and later spread to other Yoruba towns. The composition of *bata* drum ensemble of Oyo people are:

1. *Iya ilu*
2. *Omele abo*
3. *Omele ako*
4. *Kudi*

3.2 Bata Drum Ensemble of Awori People

The composition of bata drum ensemble in Awori land is a little different from the Oyo's bata drum composition. There are four different types of drums that are used but of different names, sizes and tones. The instruments are:



Photo 1: Iya ilu



Photo 2: Omele abo



Photo 3: Awere



Photo 4: Oji ilu

4. Performance Techniques

The *bata* drum ensemble, unlike the *dundun* and other ensembles is strict in its activity due to its myths and its affiliation with *egungun* cult (masquerade). Although, *bata* ensemble performs for both ritual and social ceremonies, its performance is restricted to members of the cult. The *bata* ensemble is not commonly found in the street played for entertainment like the *dundun* ensemble, except for masquerade parade.

Bata drum ensemble performances are based on festivals, rites and social events like naming ceremony, coronation, burial ceremonies and special occasions (visit of important personalities). The ensemble is usually stationary during its performances. It does not move about from place to place because all its instruments are heavy instruments. *Bata* ensemble performers maintain either standing or sitting positions in the performance arena.

Nonetheless, some drummers like the *Iya ilu* drummer are often seen on the stage dancing and displaying instrument versatility of and once that is done, he retires to his position. At the time of performance, the drummers could stand or sit placing their instruments on their neck or thighs horizontally or vertically. When the drum is placed horizontally, the drummer plays both sides of the drum (employing both right and left hand simultaneously). Also when the drum is placed vertically, one side of the drum is up while the second is down, then the side that is up is played with two hands. If the drum is placed vertically, the drummer sits because the drum is placed in between his thighs.

4.1 The Techniques used in Bata drumming are as follows:

4.1.1 Stick and Hand Style

This is a technique where stick and hand are freely used in drumming. Apart from *Oji ilu*, all other drums in the ensemble are played with stick and hand. The *Iya ilu* and *Omele abo* drums use the same technique for drumming; the big side of the drum is played with hand while the small side is played with stick. The hand and the stick play different rhythms and occasionally play the same rhythm simultaneously.

4.1.2 Stick and Stick

This technique is only practiced by *Awere* drum in the ensemble. *Awere* drum is the smallest drum in the ensemble; the drummer uses one side of the drum with two sticks. The stick is called '*Ape ilu*'. The drummer could hang the drum on his neck with a sling or sit and hold the drum with his thighs.

4.1.3 Hand and Hand

Hand and hand technique involves the use of both hands to beat either the same face of the drum or different faces of the drum. The drums used for this style are *Iya ilu*, *Omele abo* and *Oji ilu*. However, *Iya ilu* and *Omele abo* usually use two techniques; first is the stick and hand when the drum is placed horizontally, second is hand and hand when placed vertically.

4.1.4 Muting Technique

All the drums of the ensemble with the exception of *Awere* possess 'iro' a thick black substance on the side of the drums used for muting purpose. The substance performs two functions on the drum:

1. It changes the tone quality of the drum
2. It amplifies the sound of the drum

4.1.5 Bell Technique

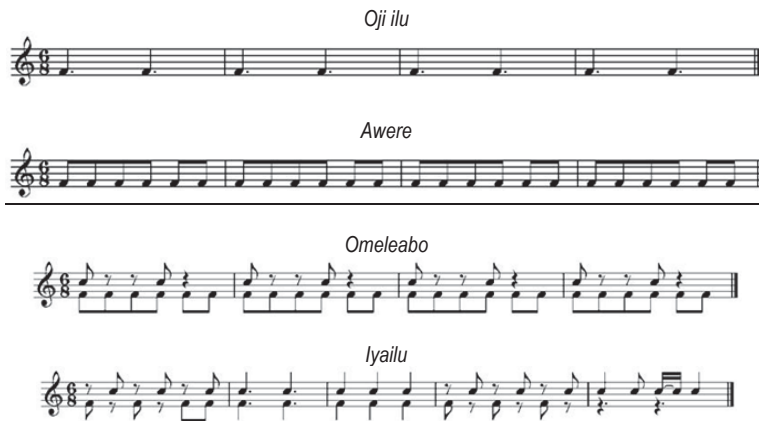
Bell technique is composed of little bells tied to the edge of a drum to resonate and add colour to the music of the ensemble. The technique is only used by *Iya ilu* because of its position as the principal instrument and leader of the ensemble. The *Iya ilu* drum is decorated with small bells tied to the big side of the drum and when the drum is played the bells resonates.

4.2 Musical Organization

4.2.1 Rhythmic Organisation

The rhythmic organization of the *bata* drum ensemble is divided into two, namely: secondary and principal instrumental organisations. The secondary instruments play strict and repetitive rhythms. The rhythms played by secondary instruments provide the instrumental background for principal instrument to act. Also provided is a danceable atmosphere for the singers and dancers. Instruments that fall into the secondary instruments category are *Oji ilu*, *Awere* and *Omele abo* (occasionally *Iya ilu* support the secondary instruments). *Awere* and *Oji ilu* drums play divisive rhythms and *Omele abo* plays additive rhythm.

The principal instrument is the *Iya ilu* (however, *Omele abo* supports *Iya ilu* in plying certain passages). The principal instrument plays free rhythms and improvisation.



4.2.2 Tonal Organisation

The drums of the *bata* ensemble are restricted or limited in tone when compared with other drum ensembles like *Dundun* among others. This notwithstanding, the *bata* drums produces tones that form melody in the tritone scale. The tritone scale is a scale of three tones. More so, in Africa, instruments are constructed to speak the language of the environment in as much as they are to be used as an extension to the human voice (Oriloye 1985).

The smallest drum of the *bata* ensemble is the highest pitched drum; the small drum is a mid-high pitch drum. The medium drum is a mid-low drum while the largest drum is the lowest pitched drum (vidal 1995). *Bata* drums are restricted to the number of tones that must be used. For instance, *Awere* and *Oji ilu* are restricted to one tone each despite the fact that they can produce at least two or three tones. (That is, one face of the drum is allowed to be used). But, *Iya ilu* and *Omele abo* are given the privilege of using all the tones they can get through normal and muting technique of drumming. The *Iya ilu*, which is the principal instrument of the *bata* ensemble, has two heads which produces two tones and other muted tones.

Table 1: Bata drums of Awori People.

Name	Size	Pitch	Numbers of Tones Used
Iya ilu	Large	Low- high	2
Omele abo	Medium	mid- high	2
Oji ilu	Medium	Middle	1
Awere	Small	High	1

Awere drum plays repetitive ostinato on a single pitch consistently in their performance. *Oji ilu* drum plays the simplest repetitive beat pulse of the music. *Omele abo* plays a dual role in the ensemble. Its support *Awere* and *Oji ilu* drums in the accompaniment and compliment the *Iya ilu* to make a complete statement. Both sides of the drum are used to play

the same rhythm. The *lya ilu* as the principal instrument, use two side of the drum. Each of the side plays independently and collectively. The *lya ilu* of *bata* ensemble does not play melody like *dundun lya ilu* because of its limited tones but, rather its uniqueness lies in the manipulation of rhythms.

Generally, *bata* ensemble consists of three sub-groups such as drummers, singers and dancers.

4.2.3 Drummers

The organization of a drum ensemble is based on the musical ability and experience of the drummers. The leader handles the most complicated or skillful drum of the ensemble, which is *lya ilu*. The *lya ilu* is the mother drum that controls other drums of the ensemble. Next to the *lya ilu* is *Omele abo* which performs similar role with the *lya ilu* drum. This is followed by *Awere* drum. *Awere* is handled by any drummer who is third in command in the drum ensemble. *Awere* is a special drum in the ensemble because it provides the basic background rhythm that other drums build on. *Oji ilu* drummer is the lowest ranked drummer in the ensemble. The drum plays the pulse of the beat and the bass part of the music in ensemble.

4.2.4 Singers

The adage '*A lu bata kan kii darin*' (Bata drummer does not raise song), underscore the need for separate singers in *bata* performance. The energy put into *bata* drumming is enormous such that drummers find it difficult to combine the two activities. Therefore, separate singers are incorporated in the group and led by a leader who directs or manage singing activities in the group, though, the *lya ilu* drummer remains the overall leader of the ensemble.

4.2.5 Dancers

Although, the word 'dancer' exists in the *bata* ensemble, its activity is carried out by singers and occasionally supported by drummers. If the performance involves the masquerade, automatically the masquerade becomes the main dancer and supported by singers. But in the absence of a masquerade the singers take full responsibility for dancing. *Bata* dance is unique compared to other types of dance in Yoruba land. There is always a communication link between the drummers and dancers. Drummers often direct the dance style of the dancers. A remarkable thing about *bata* dance is that it is liken to acrobatic display.



Photo 5: Singers and Dancers



Photo 6: The Whole Group

5. Occasion for Bata Ensemble Performance

5.1 Religious Occasions

Great honour is given to the worship of gods, ancestors and deities in Awori land. The worship of gods is classified in to two categories namely, major and minor worship. Minor ceremonies are the weekly celebrations (*ose*), which take place once every five days, as well as (*itadogun*), which also take place once every seventeen days. Major ceremonies are the annual festivals that are celebrated over a period of several days. The music used at these two festivals is for ritual purposes and as such, it is exclusively used by the devotees without interference from non devotees. However, the final day of the festival is usually done in an open arena involving the whole community.

5.2 Secular Ceremonies

Bata music is used for all social ceremonies like naming ceremony, marriage, house warming, coronation, and burial of member of the egungun cult. Although, Bata music is restricted to egungun devotees but, when performed at social ceremonies the entire people at the occasion participate in the music.

5.3 Special Occasion

Apart from the two ceremonies mentioned above, there are other occasions where bata music is performed this include cultural day presentation to welcome dignitaries and providing drum accompaniment for dance contest at Dance Institutes.

6. Conclusion

Bata ensemble is one of the most popular ensembles in Yoruba land, its practice among the Awori people of Lagos State is unique compare to all other locality. The composition of the drums which include Iya ilu, Omele abo, Awere and Oji ilu is slightly different. Although, the drums use the general technique of drumming but the Oji ilu has its peculiar and unique drumming technique. Members of the ensemble do not perform alone as some other sub groups; singers and dancers are also involved. Its performance is within the context of religious, secular and special ceremonies. The performance of bata music is restricted to the devotees of egungun and sango cults. Presently, the use of bata drums has transcended beyond its restriction, the drums are now being used by popular musicians, church and Asalatu musicians in order to explore its unique quality in their music. However, the full performance context of the ensemble can only be used by the cult.

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