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# AFRICAN MUSICOLOGY: A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL GUIDE TO NIGERIAN ART MUSIC (1927–2009)

BY GODWIN SADOH



The musical landscape in Nigeria consists of a plethora of diverse and dynamic styles. Conversely, the various social strata are affixed to specific music genres. The discretion of musical taste in each group is influenced by socioeconomic and political factors. Thus, we have music popular in the circles of the rich, poor, elite, Christians, Muslims, as well as diverse ethnic groups. In the light of these factions, all the musical genres in Nigeria today can be broadly categorized into four major types—traditional music, popular dance music, church music, and art music. For the purpose of clarity, this article is divided into three sections: (1) a brief introduction to the history of art music in Nigeria; (2) a concise discussion of three generations of music composition in Nigeria; and (3) an extensive bibliography of Nigerian art music comprised of articles, books, and discographic materials. The article is primarily set to present a list of sources on Nigerian art music, showcasing the depth and breadth of scholarly activities on this music. As such, this article is not focused on an overarching historical account of art music in Nigeria; this is outside the scope of this study. Such comprehensive studies have been done and can be found in the articles and books listed in the bibliography.

The list below succinctly encapsulates the thrusts of the extensive bibliographies which represent the scholarly contributions on modern Nigerian art music by various musicologists from Africa, Europe, and the United States. Most of the Nigerian authors are composers, ethnomusicologists, performers, and music educators. The research is largely based on fieldwork, and their personal experiences in composing and performing this music. The bibliography documents articles, both published and unpublished, books, theses, and discographies, as well as papers presented at international conferences and symposia from 1927 to 2009. The topics cover every area pertinent to the study of art music

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in Nigeria—piano, organ, chamber, orchestra, vocal solo, choral, percussion, music and culture, music and dance, music and politics, music and text, music education, analytical and compositional techniques, theory, history, criticism, sacred and secular music, interculturalism, and composer biographies. The sound recordings of selected works were done by African, European, and American solo artists and orchestras.

### BRIEF HISTORY

Modern art music in Nigeria is rooted in the emergence of the Christian faith and the established colonial schools dating back to the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> It was in these two powerful institutions that potential Nigerian musicians had their formative tutorship and foundation in Western classical music. Historically, talented Nigerian musicians were first introduced to European musical instruments such as piano, organ, violin, flute, guitar, and other orchestra instruments in these two places. They received formal lessons in theory of music and musical instruments at the colonial schools, and from organists and choirmasters in their local churches where they sang as choristers.<sup>2</sup> Some of the talented Nigerians who came from upper-middle-class or affluent families received private lessons in their homes either from their school teachers, church organists, or British colonial administrators who had some training in Western classical music.

European classical music was also filtered into the Nigerian culture through the music curricula of institutions of higher learning such as departments of music in universities, colleges of education, and polytechnics (community colleges). In these institutions, Nigerian students were exposed to various aspects of Western classical music—history, theory, and performance on foreign instruments.<sup>3</sup> Concert activities in the “restricted” arenas were comprised mostly of repertoire by Western classical composers, such as Bach, Handel, Buxtehude, Vivaldi, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Britten.<sup>4</sup> From the 1970s, concert programs began to incorporate works by modern Nigerian composers to the delight of the local audiences.

Other agents that facilitated the dissemination of Western classical music in Nigeria were the elite groups, military bands, as well as economic

1. Fela Sowande, “Nigerian Music and Musicians: Then and Now,” *Composer* 19 (Spring 1966): 25.

2. Godwin Sadoh, *Samuel Akpabot: The Odyssey of a Nigerian Composer-Ethnomusicologist* (New York: iUniverse, 2008), 1–2.

3. Godwin Sadoh, *The Organ Works of Fela Sowande: Cultural Perspectives* (New York: iUniverse, 2007), 7–8.

4. Margaret Peil, *Lagos: The City is the People* (New York: G. K. Hall; London: Belhaven Press, 1991), 126–27.

and political factors. The modern Nigerian elite and the military bands organized various types of classical concerts featuring both vocal and instrumental works at designated venues such as public auditoriums, churches, university and college campuses, garden parties, and at the homes of patrons.<sup>5</sup> The economic and political factors document the influx of foreign musical instruments into Nigeria through trade with the British Empire. Indeed, the economic policies of the colonial administration encouraged the sales of British goods, including musical instruments, to Nigerians.<sup>6</sup> Since this style of music emanated from the Christian church, the performers and composers were predominantly Christians.

The activities of elitist organizations such as the Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON), the Steve Rhodes Voices, Lazarus Ekwueme Chorale, Music Circle, Terra Chorale, and the Ile-Ife Choral Society, have contributed immensely to the development and nurturing of art music in Nigeria. Since their inception, these groups have organized regular concerts of both Western and African art music in various parts of the country, particularly in Lagos, Ibadan, and Abuja. Consequently, the patrons and audiences of art music in Nigeria have been comprised of selected segments of the Nigerian populace—affluent, upper-middle-class, well-educated, students, expatriates, business tycoons, members of the diplomatic corps, intellectuals, as well as university and college professors.<sup>7</sup>

Another positive force toward the dissemination of art music in Nigeria is the recordings that are played on state and national radio stations. The program has been a weekly production for short periods over the years, and the broadcasts are usually aired at off-peak hours between 9:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. Short biographies of the composers and brief analysis of their music precedes the playing of the music in order to serve as background information for the listeners.<sup>8</sup> Notable Nigerian music broadcast commentators are Fela Sowande, Christopher Oyesiku, Samuel Akpabot, Ayo Bankole, Akin Euba, Kehinde Okusanya, Kayode Oni, Banke Ademola, Regina Anajemba, and Joy Nwosu Lo-Bamijoko. In addition to the efforts of Nigerian composers through broadcasting, modern African composers and scholars began to record and document indigenous art music on long playing records, compact discs, and videotapes beginning in the late twentieth century. Few recordings have been

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5. J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 14–16.

6. Akin Euba, "Neo-African Art Music and Jazz: Related Paths," *International Jazz Archives Journal* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1993): 4.

7. Afolabi Alaja-Browne, "A History of Intercultural Art Music in Nigeria," in *Intercultural Music I*, edited by Akin Euba and Cynthia Tse Kimberlin, Bayreuth African Studies Series, 29 (Bayreuth, Ger.: Breitinger, 1995), 80.

8. Godwin Sadoh, *Intercultural Dimensions in Ayo Bankole's Music* (New York: iUniverse, 2007), 15.

made in Nigeria; most of the recordings are presently done in Europe and the United States. Three prominent organizations responsible for these efforts are Iwalewa-Haus, Afrikazentrum der Universität Bayreuth, Germany;<sup>9</sup> the Centre for Intercultural Music Arts (CIMA), University of London, England;<sup>10</sup> and the Center for Black Music Research (CBMR), Columbia College Chicago.<sup>11</sup>

### THREE GENERATIONS OF COMPOSERS

In the course of in-depth research on Nigerian art music spanning over twenty years, the author has been able to identify and codify music composition in Nigeria into three basic generations: (1) the golden age of church music; (2) the age of concert music; and (3) the age of atonality. The periodization is based on the style of music that these musicians wrote in the epochs, rather than using chronological dates of birth to delineate the eras. By using style for the categorization of the music periods, progressive development of the works from the simplest entities to the most complex forms is vividly illuminated.

#### Golden Age of Church Music

The fledgling “Nigerian composition school” came into being around 1902.<sup>12</sup> As would be expected, the first generation of Nigerian composers (1900–50) was comprised mainly of church organists and choirmasters. They concentrated on writing exclusively sacred music for worship in the newly-founded churches. Their compositions include church hymns, canticles (responsorial prayer songs for soloist and congregation), chants for singing Psalms, choral anthems, and cantatas. Therefore, their works represent the first attempts by indigenous Nigerian composers in writing Western classical music. Most of the music is simple, short, and tonal. There is a strong imprint of Western classical music in the works of the first generation of Nigerian composers. The music was written for Western musical instruments such as piano, harmonium or organ, while the form, harmony, and style are clearly European. Examples of works in this category are Thomas Ekundayo Phillips’s *Emi Orun Gbadura Wa* (*Heavenly Spirit Hear Our Prayer*), *Versicles and Responses*, *Venite, Nunc Dimitis*, *Te Deum*, *Magnificat in C*, *Emi O Gbe Oju Mi s’Oke* (*I Will Lift My Eyes to the Hills*), for SATB and organ; *Three Offertory Sentences*, for unison

9. Akin Euba, *Modern African Music: A Catalogue of Selected Archival Materials at Iwalewa-Haus, University of Bayreuth* (Bayreuth: Iwalewa-Haus, 1993), 1–3.

10. Robert Mawuena Kwami, “CIMA Archival List,” *Intercultural Musicology* 4, no. 2 (March 2003): 1–7.

11. <http://www.colum.edu/cbmr> (accessed 18 November 2009).

12. Afolabi Alaja-Browne, “Ayo Bankole: His Life and Work” (M.A. thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1981), 4.

voices and organ; *Ninu Agbala Olorun Wa (In the Courts of Our God)*, for unison voices and organ; *Choral Suite*, for SATB and piano or organ, *Ise Oluwa (The Work of the Lord)*, for SATB and piano or organ, *From Glory to Glory*, for SATB and organ; and *Samuel: Judge, Priest, and Prophet*, a cantata for soloists, chorus, and organ.

Nigerian traditional musical instruments were not incorporated into these compositions during this era because they were prohibited in worship by the pioneer foreign missionaries.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the only instruments that early Nigerian composers could write for were European. Ironically, in spite of the embargo on traditional instruments, it was in this period that we began to witness musical synthesis of European and African idioms. The experimental process of conjoining Western elements with traditional Nigerian music actually began in the early church. This took the form of employing indigenous languages as texts of songs, and the use of indigenous songs as melodic themes in the compositions.<sup>14</sup> Notable composers from the first generation include Rev. Canon J. J. Ransome-Kuti, Rev. T. A. Olude, Ayo Bankole's father T. A. Bankole (1900–1978), Dayo Dedeke, Akin George, Ikoli Harcourt-Whyte (1905–1977), Fela Sowande's father Emmanuel Sowande, Robert Coker,<sup>15</sup> and Thomas King Ekundayo Phillips (1884–1969).<sup>16</sup>

#### Age of Concert Music

The second era of music composition in Nigeria took place between 1950 and 1960. The period was represented by Nigeria's most celebrated musician, Fela Sowande (1905–1987), who wrote most of his mature works during this era. Sowande continued to compose sacred music for divine services in the church, but he also introduced secular works for performances in public concerts, institutions of higher learning, and radio stations. To the Nigerian art music repertoire, he introduced solo art songs with piano or organ accompaniment, concert organ pieces, chamber music, and orchestra works. Although Thomas Ekundayo

13. Lazarus Ekwueme, "African Music in Christian Liturgy: The Igbo Experiment," *African Music: Journal of the African Music Society* 5, no. 3 (1973–74): 13.

14. Akin Euba, "Yoruba Music in the Church: The Development of a Neo-African Art among the Yoruba of Nigeria," in *African Musicology: Current Trends: A Festschrift Presented to J. H. Kwabena Nketia*, ed. by Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje and William Grandvil Carter, 2 vols. (Los Angeles: University of California African Studies Center; Atlanta, GA: Crossroads Press, 1989–92), 2:46–48.

15. Robert Coker was the first Nigerian to receive professional training in music in Great Britain in 1871. He was the first organist and choirmaster at the renowned Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos, Nigeria, in the late nineteenth century. Coker organized the first choir in this church in 1895. For further information on Robert Coker, see Godwin Sadoh, "A Centennial Epitome of the Organs at the Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos, Nigeria," *The Organ* 80, no. 320 (May 2002): 27–30.

16. Thomas Ekundayo Phillips was the second Nigerian to receive professional training in music in Great Britain. He was the organist and master of the music at the Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos, 1914–62.

Phillips claims to have written three short pieces for organ solo, his organ pieces were improvisations on indigenous themes, and thus there are no scores or music notation for them. It was Sowande who composed several large works for organ employing traditional folk songs and indigenous church hymn tunes. No other Nigerian composer has written such a large body of solo pieces for organ as Sowande. Examples of Sowande's famous organ pieces are *K'a Mura*, *Obangiji*, *Kyrie*, *Jesu Olugbala*, *Go Down Moses*, *Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho*, *Prayer*, and *Sacred Idioms of the Negro*.

Prior to this era, musical activities were often confined to the church during festive occasions such as Christmas and Easter seasons. With the introduction of secular works, the venue of musical activities shifted from the church to public auditoriums where secular compositions could be performed without restrictions. In terms of tonality, Sowande introduced chromaticism into the musical lexicon of Nigerian compositions. He refused to align himself with the "atonal school" of composers that was in vogue in Europe and America at the time. He rather chose to move his Nigerian audience gradually from the tonal convention of the baroque and classical eras towards romantic chromaticism. Chromatic passages are more prevalent in his organ works, such as *Via Dolorosa* and *Bury Me Eas' or Wes* (from *Sacred Idioms of the Negro*). Sowande left the idea of atonality to the next generation of Nigerian composers.

The second generation of Nigerian musical expression also ushered in a new patois of musical integration known as pan-Africanism. Sowande, unlike his predecessors, went beyond employing Nigerian songs in his works; rather, he assimilated popular tunes from other African countries into his compositions. In this process of acculturation, one would hear indigenous songs from Nigeria and other African societies in his music. For instance, he employs Ghanaian tunes in his *African Suite*, for string orchestra. In addition, the Sowande era introduced the concept of global interculturalism into Nigerian musical language. We must give credit to Fela Sowande for being the first Nigerian composer to go so far as to borrow spiritual tunes from the African American culture. He uses spirituals in his solo art songs, choral works, as well as organ pieces. Spiritual themes are incorporated into his *Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho* for organ, *Go Down Moses* for organ, *Wheel, Oh Wheel*, for unaccompanied chorus, and *Roll De Ol' Chariot* for SATBB and piano.

#### Age of Atonality

The third generation of modern Nigerian composers began in the 1960s. This group consists of highly talented musicians who studied at the royal schools of music in London and at American universities. They

were musicologists as well as composers. They received intensive training in European traditions in England, as well as training in ethnomusicology in America. Thus, it would be right to characterize these musicians as composer-ethnomusicologists. From the 1960s, Nigerian-trained composers embarked on intensive research into the traditional music of their society to construe its component materials, structure, stylistic principles, tonality, function and meaning in the society, the instrumental resources, organization of ensembles, rhythmic basis of instrumental music, organization and techniques of vocal music, melody, and polyphony in vocal as well as instrumental ensemble, speech and melody, theoretical principles, and interrelatedness of music and dance. The focal point has been cultural renaissance and the search for nationalistic identity, that is, how to make the music sound more Nigerian. In addition to their contributions to Nigerian art music literature, they are the authors of most of the articles and books listed in the bibliographies below.

It is also from this period that we witness for the first time compositions involving traditional African and Western musical instruments. Prior to this era, the music utilized only Western instruments. African instruments were not included in the scores of the pioneer composers, but rather were used for supportive purposes and to create spontaneous improvised rhythmic background for vocal songs in live performances. Therefore, rhythms of traditional musical instruments were not notated, but were confined to oral conventions. Such instrumental rhythmic patterns were not notated until the era of the composer-ethnomusicologists.<sup>17</sup> Invariably, the third generation composers intend to make the music more appealing to their local audiences. In other words, the indigenous elements in the music are meant to captivate and endear the larger society to the works. Compositions utilizing Nigerian traditional and Western musical instruments include Samuel Akpabot's *Ofala Festival*, a tone poem for wind orchestra and five African instruments; and *Nigeria in Conflict*, a tone poem for wind orchestra and eight African instruments; Akin Euba's *Chaka*, for soloists, chorus, Yoruba chanter, and a mixed ensemble of African and Western instruments; *Bethlehem*, an African opera for soloists, chorus, dancers, rock ensemble, and African instruments; *Igi Nla So*, for piano and four Yoruba drums; Joshua Uzoigwe's *Masquerade I and II*, for *iyaalu* and piano; and his *Ritual Procession*, for African and European orchestra.

In terms of tonal organization, this group of Nigerian composers was tutored in the Western theoretical principles of the early twentieth century such as the twelve-tone-row method, atonality, dodecaphony, dissonance,

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17. Sadoh, *Intercultural Dimensions*, 14.



pandiatonicism, serialism, octatonic scales, and so forth. Suffice it to say that pioneers of atonal compositions in Nigeria employ the various tonal schemes in two ways. First, some of the compositions are strictly written in Western idiom following the styles of Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, Anton Webern, Olivier Messiaen, and Igor Stravinsky. Works in this category are practically European in conception without any interjection of African traits. The form, texture, instrumentation, rhythmic organization, and tonality are exclusively Western oriented. Compositions in this category include Ayo Bankole's Piano Sonata No. 2 in C ("The Passion"), and *Three Toccatas* for organ. The second category of twentieth-century atonal compositions in Nigeria incorporated some indigenous elements. These compositions are partly Western and partly African. As such, they are best described as syncretic or intercultural compositions—the amalgamation of Nigerian music resources with other world cultures.<sup>18</sup> Examples of works in this category using diverse tonal schemes include Ayo Bankole's *Three Yoruba Songs* for baritone and piano; Joshua Uzoigwe's *Oja* for wind quartet; Akin Euba's *Scenes from Traditional Life* for piano, *Impressions from an Akwete Cloth* for piano, and *Saturday Night at Caban Bamboo* for piano; Samuel Akpabot's *Verba Christi*, cantata for chorus, orchestra, and soloists; and Godwin Sadoh's *Five African Dances* for organ, *Three Dances* for piano, *Three Sketches on Atonality* for piano, *Three Pieces* for flute, *Illusion* for violin and piano, and his *Potpouri* for trombone, flute, oboe, clarinet, and string quartet. Prominent composers of atonal music in Nigeria are Samuel Akpabot (1932–2000), Ayo Bankole (1935–1976), Akin Euba (b. 1935), Joshua Uzoigwe (1946–2005), and Godwin Sadoh (b. 1965).<sup>19</sup>

### CONCLUSION

According to Kofi Agawu, the emergence of art music in Nigeria is the African response to the Western classical music imposed during the missionary era and colonization that lasted almost a century.<sup>20</sup> As it turns out to be, this experience initiated the genesis of modern intercultural musical practice between the continent of Africa and other foreign cultures. In this way, art music in Nigeria provides a platform and forum for native

18. Akin Euba, *Essays on Music in Africa 2: Intercultural Perspectives*, Bayreuth African Studies Series, 16 (Lagos, Nigeria: Elékóto Music Centre; Bayreuth: Iwalewa-Haus, 1989), 115–48.

19. Some other contemporary Nigerian composers whose names and works have not been mentioned include Adam Fiberesima (b. 1926), Lazarus Ekwueme (b. 1936), Meki Nzewi (b. 1938), Okechuckwu Ndubuisi (b. 1939), Samuel Ojukwu, Felix Nwuba, Nelson E. Okoli, W. W. C. Echezona, David Okongwu, and Nwokolobia Agu.

20. Victor Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 16.

composers to experiment with the combination of indigenous musical resources with foreign idioms. Second, the introduction of Western classical music to Nigeria created a newfound social arena in the form of the concert hall for musical performance that encourages a contemplative, unflappable, and “passive” experience from its audience. Rather than the traditional participatory experience of singing, dancing, hand clapping, or even playing some of the simple musical instruments during performance, the audience could only smile and applaud at the end of musical selections. Certainly, this style of music making expands the cultural landscape as well as the process of performance-creativity in twenty-first-century Nigerian society.

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#### ABSTRACT

This article provides a brief introduction to the history of art music in Nigeria, a concise discussion of three generations of music composition in Nigeria as well as an extensive bibliography of Nigerian art music comprised of articles, books, and discographic materials. The article is primarily set to present a list of sources on Nigerian art music, showcasing the depth and breadth of scholarly activities on this music. As such, this article is not focused on an overarching historical account of art music in Nigeria; this is outside the scope of this study. The bibliography encapsulates the focus of the extensive bibliographies which represent the scholarly contributions on modern Nigerian art music by various musicologists from Africa, Europe, and the United States. Most of the Nigerian authors are composers, ethnomusicologists, performers, and music educators, whose research is largely based on fieldwork, and their personal experiences in composing and performing this music. The bibliography includes articles, both published and unpublished, books, theses, and discographies, as well as papers presented at international conferences and symposia from 1927 to 2009. The topics cover every area pertinent to the study of art music in Nigeria—piano, organ, chamber, orchestra, vocal solo, choral, percussion, music and culture, music and dance, music and politics, music and text, music education, analytical and compositional techniques, theory, history, criticism, sacred and secular music, interculturalism, and composer biographies. The sound recordings of selected works were done by African, European, and American solo artists and orchestras.