

# ENHANCING IDEALS OF NATIONALISM IN NIGERIAN ART AND POPULAR MUSIC THROUGH COLLABORATIVE COMPOSITIONS.

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## Abstract

Vocal or instrumental music is usually an expression of people's cultures, beliefs, and languages. Opinions by various scholars are that musical scales realized from languages of various cultures of the world are mainly the true depiction of the genealogy of any music type. A composer is usually restricted if he is solely given to composing within the confines of his culture and tradition without deliberately making inroads into other people's cultures and musical practices. Such a composer is hamstrung and may not turn out enough compositions that he may wish to, and would also lack national and international appeal and taste in his compositions. Through literatures and historical purviews, this paper focuses on the benefits and importance of collaborative works among composers in order to diversify in their quest to create music that would meet the needs of various societies. Lack of collaboration among composers poses a lot of problem to wide acceptability of most composers' works in alien traditions. The paper concludes by advising among others, that music studies should collaborate with other disciplines in order to increase the knowledge scope and horizon of its practitioners, in order to create music with general appeal.

**Keywords:** Collaboration, Music Composition, Alien Tradition, Nationalism

## Introduction

Apart from music composition being an abstract endeavour, composers most times need to draw their materials from inspirational sources just like every other work of art. Inspiration is defined as the act of an elevating or stimulating influence upon the intellect, emotions or creativity. It can also be seen as a person, object or situation which quickens or stimulates an influence upon the intellect, emotions or creativity (Oxford Dictionary of Contemporary English, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition). Most compositions borne out of strong inspiration usually turn out better than those borne out of mathematical calculations or financial inducements. They are more intuitively generated than when commissioned to do so. "Music is being expressed as having close relationship with science... Both use mathematical principle and logic blended with creative thinking and inspiration to arrive at conclusions that are both enlightening and inspirational. It could be said that science is the music of the brain and music is the science of

the heart. This is evidenced in music composition which is basically a mathematical exercise (Ofili, 2019:40)". However, no matter the reason or the purpose of undertaking any composition, the primary aim of the composer is to create interesting piece of music anybody can listen to and appreciate. The author had previously observed that there are three incentives that spur a composer to write music which are: inspiration, commission, and through mathematical processes. He opined that either one is inspired by certain objects, materials, persons or spiritual things around him, or commissioned to compose thereby being induced by financial gains, or moved by experimenting with mathematical permutations and configurations of sounds to produce music (Olisaake, 2015). The author's opinion in this paper is that collaboration also produces a strong catalytic effects and promptings to producing good music compositions.

Collaboration is the noun form of the word "collaborate" which according to the Oxford Dictionary is: to work together with others to achieve a common goal. Collaboration can be a useful part of the creative process. Reason for collaboration is the same as adduced to the saying that no one is a master of all knowledge. It is also the reason that necessitated referencing in the academic or scholarly circle, as no one knows it all. Humans need each other to forge a formidable force in all spheres of life. Collaboration according to Merriam-Webster (2006) is defined as "to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavour (351)". It is possible to do some works alone and achieve results but it is better to work in collaboration with other people in certain tasks in order to achieve better results. In team works, novel ideas are garnered and synthesized to produce more authentic results that would stand the test of time.

As inspiration provides necessary prompting to music creativity so does collaboration. A composer may face a serious challenge to write music in a tradition he is not familiar with either by recommendation or by contest, such a composer should not be deterred by his ignorance of the cultural practices or language barrier of his clients. He can maximally exploit the opportunity offered by his ability to collaborate with persons from the research background. Sometimes a composer may be faced with challenges of interpreting technical endowments in a subject matter that is alien to him. In such a situation, inter-disciplinary collaboration becomes necessary. For instance, a composer contacted to write music to aid the teaching and understanding of the first twenty elements and their mass numbers/electronic configurations in chemistry may need to collaborate with someone from chemistry discipline in order to deliver well. Collaboration may also thrive better if the composer considers making inroads into traditions that are alien to

him.

By alien tradition is meant any practice that is foreign to a particular culture. It may be in the way of speaking, food, language, clothing, behaviour, objects, religion, music, artefacts, etc. Africa is replete with these practices in diverse ways and these are what make each unit culture unique in its own way because they constitute the values and norms of the society. When a person is in contact with practices that do not belong to him, or that he is not familiar with, the person is alien to that culture, and that person needs help from someone from that cultural background in order to flow. This is collaboration, especially if the person needs information to help execute a project. Composers need to collaborate in this manner to generate cross-cultural compositions without mutilating information they want to pass across to their listeners.

Collaboration is a veritable tool in academic research, and has been very helpful in producing works of international repute. The Westerners, especially the colonial masters and early missionaries used it effectively to achieve their purposes of colonization. However for the purpose of this paper, the study is limited to the importance of collaboration affecting music composition in alien tradition.

### **Insight into Music Composition**

Music composition entails creativity; it involves the manipulation of musical notes to produce sounds that please the ear. Unlike in sciences and applied arts, there is no physical object one can touch and call music. It is an abstract thing conceived by man's creative ingenuity. However, man created physical objects to serve as media to aid man, who himself is a medium, to explore and express other sound sonorities through which music can be expressed, and these are musical instruments. It is through the art of music composition that what is called music is birthed.

According to Onwuekwe (2007), "Music composition is the art of writing down original music that has not been heard, sung or performed by musical instruments. Music is created by individuals, using a traditional vocabulary of musical elements. In composition, the principal creative act is music. Here, something considered new is produced by combining the musical elements that a given society recognizes as a system (pp. 29 – 30)". Sound knowledge of rudiments and elements of music progressively acquired is what is needed to arm oneself with the knowledge or skills of composition. Chiefly among the requirements include understanding the clef signs, note positions and values, time and key signatures, chords and their progressions, and so on. Assembling and putting together musical notes following certain rules gives

birth to a new musical composition.

Musical composition can refer to an original piece or work of music, either vocal or instrumental, the structure of a musical piece or the process of creating or writing a new piece of music (Wikipedia). People who create new compositions are called composers. A good composition starts with the creation of melody which is a related succession of sounds. This is realized by placing in succession notes of different values and altitudes obeying a particular time frame within a measure. A melody which is usually horizontally structured must seem to be going somewhere with its arrangements appealing to the senses. Every melody depends heavily on scales to make meaning just as every literary work is based on the letters of the alphabet.

A composer is the person given the knowledge to gather and structure sounds to produce interesting music materials. "The composer is a very resourceful music educator. He is a person with "the ability to be musically creative, that is, to conjure up a simple musical structure which could be a melody, with or without words, a rhythm phrase (Herbst, Zaidel-Rudoph and Onyeji (2003:142)".

### **The Place of Nationalism in Music Composition**

Nationalism is a concept used mostly in the arts and social sciences milieu which is a paradigm shift from global concept of altruism. It has to do with putting national interest above other considerations. In music, it is a school of thought which advocates that, music composition should draw ingredients from a particular national source in order to give the composition a taste and flavour that informs the listener the origin of the music. Materials for music composition are usually drawn from certain sources which may be directly or remotely familiar to the composer. "Nationalism can be defined as an ideology that emphasizes loyalty, devotion, or allegiance to a nation or nation-state and holds that such obligation outweighs other individual or group interests (<http://www.britanica.com>)".

Nationalism is also seen as 'an ideology that promotes the shared identity of the citizens of any country. For a nation's progress and prosperity, it is imperative that its' citizens rise above their regional identities and strengthen the sense of pride in their nation (<http://infinitylearn.com>). According to Machlis (1957), "Romantic interests in the Middle Ages opened up to the musician a fanciful world of national legend and saga. In addition, the nationally conscious composer made a contribution to his country's art by uniting his music with the lyrics of a national poet (p. 111)". Furthermore, Machlis continued to observe that:

Nationalism encouraged the nations that had no established tradition of art music to develop their own manner of musical speech. It brought these newcomers to their rightful place in the concert of nations, alongside the older musical cultures such as Italy, Germany, and France. The nationalist impulse was naturally most prominent among the musically “young” nations, but the older ones felt it too. For national consciousness pervaded every manifestation of the European spirit in the nineteenth century. The Romantic movement unthinkable is without it (ibid: 112).

Works of art usually provide the medium for expression of nationalism. It can be seen in the sculptures, arts and designs, literary works, architectural designs, poetry, music, political thoughts and ideas to mention few. Among these avenues, music seems to provide as much force as language in the expression of nationalism. Ekwueme (2004) had opined that “Music is said to be “a universal language”, in that music can be understood across linguistic barriers. Purely instrumental music, for example can convey messages to all and sundry, irrespective of colour, race or creed – even if it is not necessarily the same thing that gets conveyed to all at the same time by the same piece of music (2004:284)”. This is because music borrows the ups and downs or tonal contours embedded in language in order to drive its messages home. This is usually achieved by employing the right scale system akin to the language in focus.

Every language is structured with patterns having words of different tonal levels which dictate the various meanings. This tonality is what makes language assume some level of musical qualities. This writer had previously observed that “What determines the scale structure of a particular ethnic society which guides her music is her language. In other words, language pattern of a given ethnic group determines the tonal organization of her music. Verbal texts to which songs are set influences to a large extent the form and structure of African music (Olisaeke, 2011: 312)”. Continuing, the author observed that “Major effects of languages on African music are prevalent in the area of tonal inflection. Every language has different tonal levels. It is this tonal level that makes the difference between words that has different meanings (Ibid::313)”.

In the early periods of music, there was no much emphasis on any music type employing national flavour or depiction of any national interest. Music was just pure, and seen as music, with emphasis rather on obeying rules of melody writing, harmony and counterpoint. Music was conventional with composers

focusing on how to create good melodies with attendant harmonies that would please the listener. Periodic or epochal mutations as introduced by changes in the general aesthetics of art, literature and architecture were what formed the different tastes in music as composers deliberately incorporated those changes in their compositions. This is the reason one can identify music written during romantic era from those of classical or baroque periods. Movements and varieties were created in the baroque era by use of such names as andante, allegro, adagio, theme and variations among others to depict the mood, tempo, style and type of music. The period also embodied other names derived from western dances such as minuet, bourrée, march, and sarabande to mention few. The use of these dances gradually expanded into the romantic period with their composers heightening its usage and shifting attention to accommodate many other dances.

Classical music revolved around few countries in Europe, notably Hungary, Germany, Italy, France, United Kingdom and few others. Composers from outside these spheres especially France and Russia played a lot of role in creating music with national taste by injecting practices outside the status-quo. Debussy and the Russian Five role easily call to mind. Composers of Romantic and Post-romantic period composers actually saw the need to draw their materials from remote sources such as local dances, folk tales, minstrelsy, fairy tales and other traditional practices in creating new music. "The trend of Nationalism which had begun during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century continued into the 20<sup>th</sup>. In America, Charles Ives made use of his country's folksongs, dance music, marching songs, popular songs and even hymns in his compositions; and Aaron Copland has included cowboy songs in his ballets *Rodeo* and *Billy the Kid* (Bennett, 1987:64)".

This quest for composers to localize their sources of materials for music compositions gave birth to the term known as Nationalism. Uzoigwe (1992) had pointed out that "many countries in the world have produced composers at one time or the other, who have in various ways sought inspiration from the traditional music of their country for the creation of a written art music that would represent its local sources and as well be international in its communication (p. 9)". Romantic period composers so much expounded the practice and expanded this horizon of musical expression to such an extent that Modern composers found it an easy avenue for in-depth musical expression.

With the birth of nationalism, music has somehow moved away from abstract configuration of sounds to real representation of familiar concepts of

absolute sound materials. This is because contents are localized such that the locals can understand and appreciate such music. The question that needs to be answered is what and what are needed to be drawn from another culture to achieve the desired result of intercultural practice? This same question bothered Onyeji (2016) when he posited: "That African Art music composers have made attempts to draw from African traditional music is not in doubt.

What seems to have remained in doubt is unanimous agreement on what is to be drawn from African traditional music to make an African art music representative of the culture and social context it is taken from (p. 47)". Ogisi partly suggested a way out of this quagmire when he observed that: "In attempting to create a national identity in terms of the sonic, it is necessary to state that Nigeria has several sonic matrixes derived from the traditional musics of the various ethnic groups. However there are common features that composers could harness and from which a national sonic matrix could evolve (2007:138)".

Language provides the necessary materials to localize musical contents not only in vocal music but also instrumental. This is because music is drawn from the language of various communities. Suffice to say that in order for a composer to draw material from any community, he has to study the scales that form the local music of the community. We are aware that the conventional diatonic and chromatic scales are not usually applicable in the music of local communities. Every community has its own way of speaking peculiar to them commonly called 'mother tongue'. These mother tongues are musically guided by scales inherent in the tongues and embedded in their languages.

Most tongues or languages have tonal levels ranging from four to seven notes. Some, especially those with microtones in their tongues and languages even have more. Those with less tonal levels than contained in the conventional diatonic scale usually omit some semitones within the span of an octave. This is why some languages operate within the axis of pentatonic and sextatonic scales. Whatever the number of tones contained in the scale of the language of any community, the major thing is that the language, the tongue and the music belong to them, serve their purposes and are unique to them. These peculiarities are what make them who they are, and they are identified by them.

Having seen the importance of language and the effect of languages on music scales giving identity to music of various communities, it is therefore pertinent that composers draw their materials from the local sources to give the required

flavour and identity to their music. The question then is whether a composer should limit himself only to his backgrounds or explore diverse frontiers in his works? This is personal and remains the composers' choice and disposition to creating variety and having quest for international attraction in his art. However, where a composer needs this diversification, collaboration becomes inevitable.

### **Needs and challenges that call for collaboration**

The need for collaboration cannot be overemphasized as many composers over the ages and in various countries of the world have been adopting it. When a composer restricts himself to using materials only within the confines of his cultural and linguistic background, what happens is that he has short-changed himself as he could not fully express his musical prowess which his exploration of other cultures would have provided. For a composer to fully express himself beyond his cultural domains, he needs to collaborate with people from other cultural and language environments. By collaboration here is meant that he can rely on other persons to interpret not only the language but also other cultural nuances that would enable deeper understanding of the philosophy behind what is interpreted for deeper appreciation and expression. Language alone does not express full understanding. Nzewi and Nzewi (2007:145) had expressed that "A person researching in her/his culture area already speaks the language, and can communicate directly and intelligibly with the knowledge owners and practitioners. A researcher who does not speak or reason in the language of the community in which she/he is researching has the handicap of relying on the interpreter or learning the language".

Collaboration entails involving another person with some knowledge of the research interest or area that a researcher is not fully acquainted with in order to supply the information that would make the research comprehensive. Such knowledge can be in the form of involvement in field investigation such as: taking the researcher around to see places, meet the necessary people, supply information, and provide interpretation among others.

Another challenge that necessitates collaboration is that of recognition and saleability. An artiste that works within a particular geographic area may not be recognized outside that environment and for him and his music to be recognized in other geographic areas, he needs to collaborate with musician from those other areas.

### **Collaboration in Nigeria music industry**

In popular music, collaboration has been thriving between various artistes



both within and outside the country whereby an artiste features another artiste in propagating one's music. Usually this happens as a cross-fertilization of ideas and synergizing with one another to give special feeling and effect in the music of a particular artiste especially in stage performances. Artistes featuring each other when they replay or re-record their music or in remixes and the success rate of collaboration has allowed Nigerian music to access the largest entertainment markets in the world.

According to OpenMicUk.co.uk, "music collaboration consists of two or more artists, producers, or musicians coming together to work on a single or various music projects. In regards, the purpose is to focus on everyone having a chance to express their musical uniqueness". Both parties contribute on a levelled scale, instead of a hierarchical structure of conducting a project. Music collaborations work best between artists that complement each other and present clear goals and roles. With heavy team-building skills, artists not only can create powerful music but double promotion efforts to expose the solo artists to a larger market (Isaac Herron: 2021) <http://www.youthtimemeg.com>.

Many Nigerian musicians such as Omah Ley featuring Justin Bieber, Rema featuring Chris Brown, Adekunle Gold featuring T Y Dolla Sign, Davido featuring Kanye West's Sunday Service Choir, Davido with Nicki Minaj, Meek Mill and Chris Brown, Future featuring Drake Tens, Lojay and Chris Brown, Drake featuring Wizkid & Kyla, Beyonce featuring Wizkid, Blue Ivy & Saint Jhn among many others have engaged in fruitful collaborative efforts

On the international scene, there are numerous partnering that have taken place even from the time of 'Old School' period. In 1986 Paul Simon in his album 'Graceland' collaborated with South African musical group Ladysmith Black Mambazo led by Joseph Shabalala to produce intercultural music with international appeal. Other examples are the song "Endless Love" by Diana Ross and Lionel Richie released in 1981 which was also replicated by Luther Vandross and Mariah Carey in 1994. Dolly Parton collaborated with musicians like Kenny Rogers, Linda Ronstadt and Brad Paisley among other artists in various albums. Tony Bennett's numerous collaborations with musicians like Paul McCartney, Barbara Streisand, Elton John, Celine Dion, and George Michael. In the same vein, Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie's collaboration in 1985 "We are the world" (USA for Africa) was produced with assemblage of about 46 vocalists of international repute.

In the milieu of art or classical music, collaboration is rather rare among composers. Few examples can be cited here across centuries: in 1721, Michael Richard Delalande and Andre Cardinal Destouches jointly composed

the opera-ballet *Les elemens*. Also the same year Filippo Amadei, Giovanni Bononcini and George Frideric Handel each wrote one act of the opera *Muzio Scevola*. In 1861, the operetta *Les musicien de l'orchestre* was written by Leo Delibes, Erlanger, Aristide Hignard and Jacques Offenbach. In 1913, Maurice Ravel and Igor Stravinsky together wrote a completion of Mussorgsky's opera *Khovanshchina* for a production by Sergie Diaghilev. In 2000, the opera *The Age of Dreams* was written by three Finnish composers Kalevi Aho, Olli Kortenkangas and Herman Rechberger which was premiered at the Savonlinna Opera Festival that year. There are several other collaborations that have taken place over the years but still, much still needs to be done especially in our clime where the practice is almost non-existent.

The benefits of collaboration cannot really be overemphasized and when carried out across national and language barriers, it promotes intercultural transfer of knowledge and heritages as well as building strong musical cultures.

One of the best ways to uphold nationalism in African music is for composers to collaborate with each other to create music that has diverse appreciation. This is because Africa has diverse languages and culture, and as diverse as these factors are so also are their music traditions. Collaboration can be likened to intercultural musical practice whereby practitioners borrow from music practices of other ethnic nationalities. In Abiodun's discourse on intercultural musical practice in Ekiti, he observed that "Intercultural music education encompasses learning the different musical practices – drumming, melody, rhythmic patterns, song text, and other musical behaviour like dance and compositional technique (Abiodun, 2017:44)".

## Conclusion

Overtly, popular music practitioners collaborate in propagating their music, art music practitioners especially composers can also collaborate in order to create interesting music with diverse appeal instead of restricting their materials only to what are derivable from their immediate environments. It is pertinent to state here that apart from language and cultural dependence composers can gain more knowledge from each other by way of collaboration. By this is meant that two composers can synergize musical ideas in producing a new composition, especially lengthy ones like operas and symphonies among other creative works. This is because composers may most times be bereft of ideas in the middle of a work when it is done alone. This accounts for many unfinished compositions by some composers.

Composers may be hamstrung when limited to sourcing materials only from

within a cultural and language background. He may not properly express himself musically in another cultural background. Such restriction localizes the composer and invariably affects music production. We can also infer from this piece that a composer can achieve nationalism in a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual society as we have in Africa by cross-fertilization of ideas between them in their different ethnic backgrounds. Use of middlemen as interpreters and research assistants can also be helpful.

Composers should be able to compose various types of music using different with aim to achieve recognition nationally and internationally. Composers should therefore not remain within the circle of his locality. Experiments with other cultures of the world can be achieved through collaboration.

### **Recommendation**

Think home philosophy is a political parlance in Nigeria whereby nationals are encouraged to be patriotic in outlook especially in material and creative investments. This patriotic tendency is simply a call for nationalism in whatever endeavours a true citizen is engaged. To maximally achieve this in art and pop music in Nigeria, the following recommendations and suggestions are therefore proffered:

It is advised that music studies should collaborate other disciplines in order to increase the knowledge scope and horizon of its practitioners especially composers, in order to create music with general appeal.

Music collaboration should be a topic in music studies in schools in order to teach students who are future art and pop music practitioners and composers the benefits and importance of engaging in this practice to achieve goals, international recognition, as well as churning out enough materials for performers and entertainers.

Equal emphasis in the teaching of art and pop music in schools should be encouraged to make both music types relevant and important and thereby creating the tendency for both to synergize. We can call to mind the synergy of both art and pop music types in the works of the German orchestra leader Bert Kaempfert and the Greek musician Yanni.

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