

INDIGENOUS INNOVATIONS MEET MODERNITY- ANALYSIS OF IGWE SONG BY THE MIDNIGHT CREW

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Abstract

Nigeria is blessed with some of the best Gospel musicians making distinct marks in Gospel music entertainment around the globe. The Midnight Crew, a Nigerian Gospel group has blazed the trail with the composition Igwe, a song that shot them to the limelight in 2008. The paper trails the evolution and development of the group over the years. Through detailed musicological analysis, it investigates the unique elements in the songs, examining the techniques adopted in creating the song that has revolutionized the Praise worship concept in Nigeria. The paper concludes that more analysis should be conducted on other popular music genres in Nigeria in order to further appreciate the noble contributions these musicians have made in the field of popular music through the way their songs are created, processed and consumed in Nigeria and around the world.

Key words: *Popular music. Genres. Fussion. Codemixing. Modernity*

Introduction

The study and analysis of popular music is fast becoming a popular phenomenon in the Nigerian academic system. In recent times, research analysis on popular music culture are consistent and robust. The music that was initially branded amateur is finding its way into journals, conference proceedings and scholarly books considering the enormous hidden gems embedded in them. It has become abundantly clear that to treat popular music as simply another activity (something else that is 'popular', that people indulge in) is not enough. We need to engage in a rigorous research through both descriptive and analytical terms (Moore, 2003). Popular music is a genre. But it has to be treated with more evaluation and exploration that other genres are accorded. There is therefore the need for some positive evaluations from the establishment (Rorem, 1968). It is on this premise that this paper examines in technical details the song 'Igwe', written by the

Midnight Crew, a famous popular Gospel Music group in Nigeria. The midnight crew is one unique Gospel music group in Nigeria whose debut with their single hit 'Igwe' sent shockwaves around the popular music industry around the world. Its impact was particularly keenly felt in Nigeria because of the media hype and church publicities. For close to three years after its release in 2008, 'Igwe' topped the Nigerian music chart, won several awards, received many media reviews and became an instant sold out in many record stores across the country and the internet. The Midnight crew were popular prior to the 'Igwe' debut. But it was the single hit that shot them much higher into the world Gospel music scene, thus consolidating their unique position as one of the most sought after Gospel artistes from Nigeria.

The church services in Nigeria and Africa exceptional for robust and exhilarating worship sessions. With the high rate of evolution and growth of Pentecostal churches in the country, there was a renewed interest from a few musicians in the church towards the '*Africanization*' of praise and worship (Adedeji, 2007). Prior to this, modern Gospel songs from Europe and America flourished and gained root in the churches. However, some musicians started experimenting with a fusion of some sort; a 'cross-breeding' of worship songs in terms of language, beats, and styles. This experiment paid off for a group like the Midnight Crew whose attempt to create a confluence of sounds paid off with the making of 'Igwe'. This song has found unique acceptance from both the young and old folks, opening door for wider performance at various international tours. Interestingly, this song has found its way into the public domain, worship and dance halls. This paper therefore attempts a descriptive analysis of the music within the context of its sociocultural background. This paper adopts the analytical/interpretative and historical approach, taking note of the milestones in their journey to stardom. Furthermore, it will attempt to analyse the lyrics in relation to the music and rhythms and also to examine the way the concept of codemixing has been applied in the music in the bid to create relevance in a complex ethnic society like Nigeria. Given the immense value of cross-disciplinary enquiry, it applied both musicological and descriptive methods of musical analysis in order to highlight the more immediately comprehensible insights that may be garnered through non-discipline-specific means of examining music, lyrics, and sociocultural contexts in tandem (Wiley, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

This study is built on the theory of "progressive traditionalism," (Emielu, 2018). This theory by Austin Emielu, states that cultural interactions with outside forces are deployed to enrich, not destroy, inside resources in a progressive manner. He broadened the scope of this study to include not only "outside forces" but also internal borrowings and cultural exchanges from within. The work of Progressive Traditionalism was inspired by John Collins's (1994) progressive indigenization,

Bruno Nettl's (2005) continuity of change theory, Kofi Agawu's (2003) idea of self-conscious renewal of tradition and Christopher Waterman's (2002) idea of progressive traditionalism, mentioned briefly in his work. The relevance of this theory to this study is the fact that the Midnight Crew has had enormous fusion of western ideas with the indigenous music in Nigeria. Her power lies in her ability to create unique music brands using western ideas and techniques. The study further interrogates the ways the traditional elements find its course with the blend without losing its cultural relevance. Through a microscopic lens, it explores the musicological traits in the music that has given it headroom for innovations.

The Midnight Crew

Midnight Crew was founded on the 8th of November, 2001 as a faith based music group with four members Patricia Uwaje King, Gbenga Oyebola, Odunayo Ojo and Mike Abdul¹. Their first melting point was at the Yaba College of Technology where they met as students.

We met at Yaba College of Technology. We were in the same choir in 1999 and were just keeping it real. We all had that musical background before we went there. Along the line, the four of us started getting close and flowing well together musically. As we were moving on, we had one concert, it was very great and from there, we decided to continue this after leaving school. We put a lot into it while we were in school because we didn't want it to end in school. We had to make up our minds to run with the vision and right now, we are the one chasing the vision.²

It should be stated here that the midnight crew did not start as four. They were initially eleven in number. However, some started opting out of the group due to family commitments, travels and studies

Initially, we were eleven –some got married and went to London with their husbands, some caught another vision, while some are into personal ministries and are doing well. One of them could not cope with engineering and music, so she opted out. It was not a break-up but a breakthrough³.

There has been several discourse on the choice of the name 'midnight crew' due to what it connotes. Statements like 'men of the night', 'Daughters of the night' or 'midnight Hotel' have been used to connote negative vices. However, the Midnight crew states that the name was a snag coined out of their being available to functions under short notice:

While we were in school, we usually say that there is no concert we can't make. Most times, they invite us during the examination period and we do normally accept such invitations and perform five or more minutes before our examination. We just considered our attitude and zeal to work at any

time, even at midnight when others will be sleeping. In fact, there's no other thing to call us than midnight crew, we are just always available.⁴.

The group has four albums to its credit; *Fusion*, *Tungba Unlimited*, *Igwe* and *King of Nations*. Their compositions are eclectic in nature, taking something from every genre of music available to its members. They have won numerous awards among which are the Music Group of the Year: City People Awards, 2009, Gospel Artiste of the Year: Nigerian Entertainment Awards (USA), 2009. Best Traditional Song: Nigerian Gospel Music Awards, 2009. Most Popular Song of the Year: Best Non-UK song of the year: Africa Gospel Music Awards UK, 2010 and Best Indigenous Gospel Song: Nigeria Gospel Music Awards, 2011.



The Midnight Crew from left: Gbenga Oyebola, Odunayo Ojo, Patricia Uwaje King and Mike Abdul. Courtesy Michael Abdu;.

Analysis of Igwe

The song 'Igwe' was first released in 2006, then relaunched in 2008 with a 'time compliant sound' as produced by Wole Oni.⁵ It was among the eleven song track released on the 'Igwe' album. Interestingly, it is one among many songs that brought the group global recognition. The question remains why the song became and remained a smashing hit from other songs they had written over time. An in-depth analysis of the song would give us a clue to that. However, it is worthy to

note that the answer might not be unconnected with their long-standing practice of creation and re-creation of communally owned cultural materials that characterizes much local, melodies juxtaposed with the African- American Gospel Music culture. The word Igwe and 'Eze' as used in the song is a legal title conferred on traditional rulers in Igbo land, South Eastern part of Nigeria (Ojuigo et al, 2014) Such words as *Igwe* and *Obi*, plus others, are used by Igbo people as titles of respect and homage to the Eze. Igwe is derived from the Igbo word *Igwekala* or *Eluigwekala*, "the sky or heaven above the sky is higher or bigger than land", implying that the Eze is a higher servant of the people (Eze, 2015). The word in this context is used as a tribute to God the Almighty. As seen in the second phase of the song excerpted below:

Eze ndieze	King of Kings
Idi egwo	You are great
Onye nabia ozo	The one that is to come
Idi egwo	You are great
Onyedikagi	Who is like unto thee
Onyedikachukwu	Who is like unto thee Oh God
Omalecha	The paragon of beauty
Agwuanechemba one	The almighty defender
Bulie ya....elu	Lift Him high

The central theme of the song is the Lordship of the Almighty God as excerpted in the first line of the song in Yorùbá language:

Ko s'oba bi re	There is no King like you.
Ko si baba bi re	There is no father like you
Ko ma s'Olorun bi re.	There is no God like you
IGWE	(Salutation to the king)

Corroborating this in oral interview with the researcher, Mike Abdul, a member of the group states:

The song "Igwe" was inspired by the need to see the church praise God undeterred by lingual differences or sentiments of tribes⁶

There were several factors that made the song an instant hit at the time of release, This, Mike Abdul observed:

... The codemixing and codeswitching worked. I think the attractive elements of bringing together languages and beats from different genres were the attractive elements that made it enjoy much airplays. The intro by Wole Oni is still talked about.⁷

On the main composer of the great song, Mike Abdul states that it was a collective effort:

... The chorus was written by a Yaba Tech school mate fondly called Brother Victor. We (Midnight Crew) wrote the verses, bridge, vamp and adlibs. Mike Abdul coordinated the project.⁸

The vocal performance of 'Igwe' creates a space in which listeners travel through the poetry and melody of the song with a clear understanding and appreciation of the cultural elements and sonic sounds they are familiar with. The changes in the mood of the song are equally reflective, codifying the beauty and dynamics of Gospel music an adaptive modernity.

Analysis is very good at pointing out differences, whether stylistic (i.e. between similar pieces) or within pieces (varied repetitions, for instance) (Moore, 2003) The next section attempt to evaluate the track described, by identifying some of the organizing structures, style and compositional features applied in the song, a musicological analysis of the song is also attempted.





Structure

The song is not based on the conventional verse/refrain structure. Instead, it falls into five phases which create a single emotional arc. The coherence of these phases is assured by the harmonic structure: the song is totally open-ended, with an ever-present, nominally I-IV-V-I.

Table 1, below provides a formal diagram for the tune; the music is organized by sections that are marked by CD timings. The numbers that follow in each case provide a bar count for a section followed by the number of bars

Based on a four beat pattern at the beginning with a compound groove at the end, the song inscribes a volatile interaction between tradition and modernity, and the reenactment of the old and new beats. It starts off with the jerky rhythms interlocked with rambunctious horns. The syncopated rhythms are interlocked with an explosion at the last cadence in a dissonance chord of an inverted 7th.

Table 1: A Formal Tune Chart

TIME DURATION	HYPERMETRIC UNITS	FORM	DOMINANT MUSIC FEATURES
0:00--0:14	1-6	Intro	Dominant horns and studio synthesizers. Roll drum added, full band, in time
0:15--0:48	7-22	Phase 1	Establishment of the theme by the voice in Yoruba and Igbo with a steady tempo and groove
0:48--1:04	23-31		The establishment of the chorus section
1:04--1:39	32-48		A restatement of the first section.
1:39--1:55	49-56		Repetition of the chorus section
1:55--2:28	57-72	Phase 2	Establishment of another material in Igbo language with a high groove and a dialogue between voice and instrument before capitulation to the main beat
2:28--2:45	73-80		chorus section
2:45--3:02	81-88	Phase 3	A typical western pop beat element in both vocal and instrumental. The vocal background embellishes with the moans. Highly irregular beat patterns
3:02--3:18	89-96		Repetition of the chorus section
3:18--3:32	97-103	Phase 4	A typical funky African American Gospel Jive.
3:32--3:41	104-107		Establishes a slow change in tempo and time: Compound time with Hausa Inflection (Modal). Purely Nigerian beat groove at the background reflective of the Niger Delta beat pattern.
3:41--5:09	108-146	Phase 5	Hausa Tonal inflection mixed with western influenced pop and Nigeria Delta Pidgin groove. snare drum rolls ends the song abruptly

1st Trumpet in Bb

2nd Trumpet in Bb

Trombone

Tuba

Music Example 1: Introduction of Igwe with the horns

The musical style adopted in this song is a fusion of Western pop, highlife and Nigerian traditional groove (which can be seen in the bass line of the song)

Music Example 2: Bass line section of Igwe

It employed both the western and traditional musical instruments for its enactment. The solo singer introduces the theme of the song with a call which is immediately replied by the chorus, giving rise to 'open-ended, repetitive gestures'.

The musical score is written for five parts: Solo, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Piano. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The Solo part begins with a melodic line in the first measure, followed by lyrics: 'Ko s'o ba bi re Ko si Ba-ba bi re Ko ma s'o lo run bi re'. The Soprano, Alto, and Tenor parts enter in the second measure with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Piano part enters in the fourth measure with a bass line. The score is divided into three systems. The first system covers measures 1-4, the second system covers measures 5-8, and the third system covers measures 9-12. The lyrics continue across these measures, with the Solo voice providing the main melody and the other voices providing harmonic support.

Music Example 3: The Solo and voices at the beginning of the song

The song itself is marked with clear established patterns with the lyrics giving us the clue as to where each pattern starts or ends.

The Voice

The solo voice is perhaps the major drive of this song, led by the lead vocal Pat Uwaje-King, the voice gives a sense of direction it gives to the song with several variations, embellishments and adlibs. It is the major icing on the cake for its success and acceptability. The solo section features lots of improvised phrases above the chorus section. The voice is powerful with a deep Alto register that is as well flexible to break through the upper vocal register. Its ability to switch sometimes from the nasal (issuing through the nose) to the 'normal' singing voice (from the throat) makes the song distinct. Sometimes, the huskiness of her voice (which suggests that her voice is raw with shouting or crying) is seen in some of the rendition in each section. Another major element used in the song is the finesse

of embellishments and melismas. The application of these elements also convey to the audience the perception of emotions experienced by the singers

8

E ba mi gb'O-lo-run to bi E ba mi gb'O-lo-run to

bi ye - i E ba mi gb'O-lo-run to bi ye - i

Music Example 4: Solo excerpts of the song

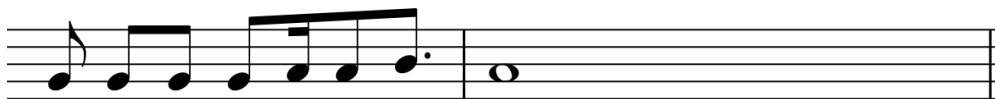
Harmony

The arrangement of the song in harmony is in tandem with the rise and fall of the melody. At the beginning, there is a tendency towards regular harmonic movement, such that we may find a sequence of either two to three harmonies, of equal length.

O-ba nla-O-ba to ga

O-ba nla-O-ba to ga

O-ba nla-O-ba to ga



E-du-ma-re O-ba to ga



E-du-ma-re O-ba to ga



E-du-ma-re O-ba to ga

Music Example 5: Harmony excerpts from the voices

The other characteristics of the harmonic progression in this song is that it is treated more as a priori vertical rather than horizontal movement.

Rhythm

The song Igwe is generally based around complex rhythmic patterns in both the melody and instrumentation. Furthermore, the technologically manipulated sound by Wole Oni develops into complex sound-structures. The rhythmic configuration of the instruments with syncopated running notes of semiquavers at the introduction is highly intriguing as it becomes the focal attention for response through dance. This is in tandem with (Theberge 1997) who states that any musicological consideration of a popular music genre should not overlook the connection between the sounds emanating from studio based production and their social reception.



Harmony 6: Rhythmic configuration of the horns section

The beat, in its most identifiable form, is the basic unit of temporal measurement, which, in its regularity, is associated with a certain release in energy. In effect, the

force of the beat shapes the energy flow (Moore, 2003). While beats occur in all types of intervals and permutations, they are essentially felt on the four-in-the-bar accents – usually on the kick drum. Igwe is constructed around highly repetitive structures and divided into polyrhythmic loops which sculpture the groove. Responsible for the kinetic flow of material, the groove functions as a unifying unit. Igwe is characterized by strong beats in groups of four and sometimes irregular beats of 2, as seen in this excerpt below:

2

8

E ba mi gb'O-lo-run to bi E ba mi gb'O-lo-run to

I - gwe O-ba nla-O-ba to ga

I - gwe O-ba nla-O-ba to ga

O-ba nla-O-ba to ga

Music Example 7: Beat patterns of Igwe

However, the use of syncopation is evident in this song with the displacement of the accents on the beats order than 2 and 4.

Analysis of lyrics

A characteristic feature of Igwe lyrics is the application of code switching technique by the composer. Code-switching can be described as a means of communication which involves a speaker alternating between one language and the other in communicating events. In other words, it describes someone who code-switches using two languages (interlingua) or dialects (intralingua) interchangeably in a single communication (Babalola & Taiwo, 2017). Milroy and Muysken (1995) see code-switching as 'the alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation'. Other terminologies commonly used in code-switching are 'intra-sentential', which describes switches within the sentence, and 'inter-sentential' used to describe switches between sentences. Igwe's creative process

deposits layers of resonance, cultural materials and meanings as the musicians work to fuse multiple genres and languages simultaneously. Four major languages are identified in this song- English, Nigerian Pidgin Yoruba and Hausa. The applications of these languages broadens the song, creates a unique variation and elaboration of themes within the songs. Figure 1 is the phase chart of the language as applied by the group

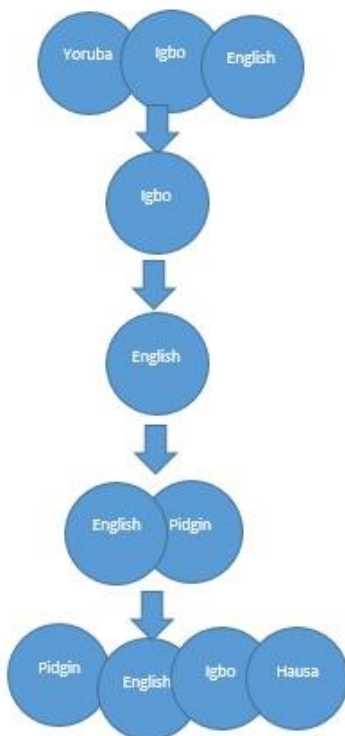


FIG. 1, Phase Chart of Language

Phase 1/b: - The song has three languages in this section, Yoruba, English and Ibo. The beginning of the song is in Yoruba while the chorus (Igwe) is in Ibo. The Soloist embellishes the tone of the music with Standard English language at the chorus.

Phase 2 – This was written in Ibo language, followed by the chorus

Phase 3 – written in English language.

Phase 4 – In English and Pidgin

Phase 5 – In English, Pidgin, Igbo and Hausa

The mood of this section which leans towards a Northern Hausa tone inflection is consistent with the social context of their vocal and instrumental performance. The Solo Voicing above the Hausa melisma tone also manifests the pidgin

sophistication which she belies via gospel practices of playful voicedness that are both historically and semiotically rooted in Niger Delta music culture.

You love me so tey

You die for my sins

You love me so tey

You bless me yafun yafun

A part of the lyrics, though Christian praise in nature, has a double reference. The line 'E ba mi gb'olorun tobi' invokes praise to the Almighty God- except that it exploits this bit of memory as its music supports and frames the nostalgic, familial, earnest tone of the Muslim prayer.

Muslim Prayer: Call: E ba mi agbolorun tobi Response Alau Akbar!

Igwe Song: Call: E ba mi gb'Olorun tobi Response: Oba nla. Oba t'o ga

Conclusion

This paper has discussed through analytical lenses 'Igwe', a Gospel song by the midnight Crew. It also attempted through code switching a lyrical analysis of the song based on the concept of codeswitching. From the analysis, it was found that the Midnight Crew stretched beyond the bounds of simplicity by harnessing several musical elements drawn from the western and local idioms. In the bid to reach out to the Nigerian populace, it attempted a synergy of four main languages in Nigeria and infused them into the music. Ultimately the analysis has facilitated to a better understanding of the song in terms of structural and musicological procedures, as it was assembled by the group before it found its way to the studio.

End Notes

- i. Taken from the Official website of midnight Crew
- ii. An interview conducted by the Guardian Newspaper.
- iii. Guardian Newspaper
- iv. Vanguard Newspaper
- v. Wole Oni is a prominent Music Producer in Nigeria
- vi. Oral interview with the researcher 2018
- vii. Oral interview with the researcher 2018
- viii. Oral interview with the researcher 2018

Discography

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