



## Examining the Roles and Contributions of Evergreen Music in Archiving Nigerian Music

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### ABSTRACT

*This study focused on the roles and contributions of Evergreen Music Company in the archiving and documentation of music in Nigeria. It is observed that there is paucity of literature on archiving of Nigeria popular music. This underscores the need for this study. In carrying out this study, oral interviews, and available literature were utilised as sources of data. Respondents were selected from the staff of Evergreen Music Company. The study revealed that Late Mr. Femi Esho, the founding chairman of the Evergreen Musical Company, out of passion, started collecting several Nigerian popular music. Today, the company invariably owns the largest collection of Nigerian music of yesteryears. The study also highlighted the need for preservation of musical heritage and discussed the processes, challenges and importance of archiving music. Music archiving studies and activities should be encouraged by both public and private institutions as a way of promoting National heritage. Government at all levels and concerned citizens should provide adequate funding for researches into Nigerian music practices, especially in music archiving and documentation in order to have them documented and archived for future use.*

**Keywords** Archiving, music documentation, Evergreen Music Company, music of yesteryears, popular music.

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### AUTHOR'S BIO



JOHN, Funmi Rapheal, holds a Master of Arts degree in Music from Lagos State University. His research interests include African music, Art and Folk music with a focus on the presentation of folk songs in a contemplative art concert arena. He has explored Ogu vocal and instrumental music with a fusion of Western and Traditional African musical instruments and idioms presented as Art and Experimental Music. His works have also examined Ogu-Badagry musical instruments; performance practice, technology, and innovation as a reflection of social dynamics of the Ogu communities and societies in Nigeria. Funmi Rapheal John lectures in the Department of Music, Lagos State University, Ojo.

## Introduction

Archiving generally refers to a system of collecting, selecting, identifying, labeling and storing acquired material directly from the source, author or creator of the material by an individual otherwise called an archivist. Schwartz and Cook (2002) defined archiving as “the re-creation of the past through historical research in archival records and not just the retrieval of stored information, but the putting together of a claim about past states of affairs employing a framework of shared cultural understanding” (p. 3). Oladele, Talabi, Okunade, (2020) stated that “the idea of archiving is not just about storing information or documents, rather, it is about the critical processing of the claims that archival information embodies” (p. 1). The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2019) defined documentation as the process of classifying and annotating text and photograph. A second view into this definition provides basic information regarding the scope of documentation. It is a process where oral information and written document are received and stored for record purposes which may include date, day, month, time, and year of the particular event or information received. Tangible and intangible components of culture stand the chance of obliteration if standard documentation and archiving measures are not put in place to ensure adequate preservation and promotion.

Music archiving refers to an act of preserving and maintaining music found throughout the ages be it sculpture, paintings, books and several other recording means. Bimbo Esho (personal communication, 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2023) stressed that Archivists usually first start as collectors. The basic areas covered in music archiving and documentation are music and data collection processes, data coding and music archiving administrative process. However, concerning music, several factors militate against its documentation and archiving. With the sole essence of documentation for posterity, every musical event, product, recording or activity deserve proper attention. A musical archive is simply a place where historical music and musical documents are kept. The Oxford advanced learners' dictionary (2019) defined an archive as a collection of historical documents or records of a government, a family, a place or an organization or a place where these things are kept. An archive could also refer to providing information about a place, institution or group of people. Logically, a well-structured archive provides access to knowledge of the past and present for the progress, continuity and establishment of authenticity of facts. A well-structured archive is sectionalized for easy access with an index of the available materials. This study focused on the activities, roles and contributions of Evergreen Music Company being the largest custodian of Nigerian music of yesteryears and presently based in

Lagos, Nigeria.

There is paucity of literature on archiving of Nigerian popular music, which is the main concern of this study and how it filled this gap through an assessment and evaluation of archiving activities of popular musical genres by Evergreen Music Company. The primary aim of this study is to document the musical archiving activities of Evergreen Music Company, located at 356, Borno way, Alagomeji in the Yaba area of Lagos State, Nigeria and headed by Mrs. Bimbo Esho, the chairman and CEO. This study provided resource materials for further studies on the archiving and collection of Nigerian popular music. Since the Nigerian popular music has become an important player in the social, cultural and economic development of Nigeria. This study is therefore important as it helped to increase the knowledge of archival accounts of its popular music. Discussing how these musics have been preserved, archived and stored is a primary objective of this study.

## Methodology

Everyone involved in the music archiving process especially those associated with the Evergreen Music Company were consulted. These include Chairman and members of staff of the company. Review of related literature was also carried out from published and unpublished literary works of scholars in various fields. These were consulted before embarking on the field work. The researcher was privileged to interview and gather information from the CEO Mrs. Bimbo Esho, (the daughter of Mr, Femi Esho, the founder of Evergreen Music Company) and two of the staff at the Evergreen Music Company, at Borno way, Alagomeji, Yaba area of Lagos. This experience afforded an opportunity to learn about the music archiving process carried out in the company. The equipments used by the company was seen and pictures of them taken. Also, as part of the pre-field research process, questions were drafted along with unstructured questionnaire used in raising topical issues during the interviews with the respondents. Information gotten from the field was subjected to analytic processes. The interviews were recorded as a form of documentation.

## Music Archiving in Nigeria

In a country like Nigeria which is renowned for its multi-musical, cultural, lingual, social, artistic and socio-cultural traditions, the importance of music archiving cannot be overemphasized. This is because of the essential role Music archiving plays in facilitating research, promotion of cultural exchange and preservation of cultural heritage. In corroboration, Oladele, Talabi, and Okunade, (2020) opined that 'music archiving as an institution is an avenue for the critical

engagement and renegotiation of the peoples' social, cultural and economic realities' (p. 1).

Omojola (2014) observed that a lack of standardized cataloging, documentation and archiving practices across archival institutions, has made it difficult to access and retrieve musical recordings. Without proper documentation and archiving, valuable recordings risk being lost, overlooked or unnoticed. Additionally, Adegbite (2018), noted that the preservation and archiving of Nigeria's rich musical heritage faces numerous challenges. The author highlighted that the primary challenge is the lack of adequate infrastructure and resources for archiving, preservation and documentation. As a result, several Nigerian historical institutions are unable to adequately preserve and digitize musical recordings due to a lack of money, obsolete technology, and poor storage facilities. In addition, the author expressed the opinion that Nigerian music preservation faces difficulties as a result of the rapid development of technology. Digital technologies provide issues with data management and format obsolescence in addition to opportunities for marketing, diffusion, and preservation.

Omojola (2014), highlighted that despite these threat posing challenges, a number of measures geared towards addressing and possibly curbing the documentation, preservation and archiving of Nigeria's musical heritage have emerged. One of such notable initiatives according to the author is the Nigerian Sound Archive Project which was launched by the Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding in collaboration with UNESCO. The project aimed at digitalizing and preserving Nigeria's audio and audiovisual heritage, including music recordings, through the establishment of a national sound archive. In the same vein, the author stated that through copyright registration and enforcement, the Nigerian Copyright Commission has made efforts to support the documentation and preservation of musical recordings. The Commission works to promote the preservation and sharing of Nigeria's musical legacy by defending the intellectual property rights of artists and songwriters.

However, with regards to the enhancement of music archiving in Nigeria, Omojola (2014), identified that there is a need for capacity building and training programs to equip archivists with the skills and knowledge necessary for effective music archiving. Training programs could cover best practices in areas such as music digitization techniques, archiving standards, and preservation. Additionally, Adegbite (2018), highlighted several opportunities for improvement in music archiving and documentation. According to the author, there is a need for increased collaboration and coordination among archival

institutions, government agencies, and cultural organizations. By pooling resources and expertise together, these stakeholders can work together to develop comprehensive archiving strategies, standards and opportunities. The author added that digital technologies and online platforms can help improve access to Nigeria's musical heritage. By digitizing and cataloging musical recordings, archival institutions can make them accessible to researchers, educators, and the general public, both locally and globally.

Music archiving in Nigeria faces significant challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, lack of standardization, and technological obsolescence. However, through initiatives such as the Nigerian Sound Archive Project and efforts by the Nigerian Copyright Commission, progress is being made towards preserving Nigeria's rich musical heritage. By addressing these challenges and seizing opportunities for improvement, Nigeria can ensure the preservation and dissemination of its musical legacy for future generations.

#### **Principles and Practice of Music Archiving**

Music Archiving is a multidimensional practice that involves the preservation, documentation, and dissemination of musical heritage. The principles of music archiving revolve around the ethical, cultural, and scholarly imperatives of preserving musical heritage for future generations. Bastein (2016), stressed that one foundational principle of music archiving and documentation is authenticity which embodies an accurate representation of music recordings to maintain their integrity and historical context. According to Drotner and Schröder (2018), inclusivity, being another principle of music archiving advocates for the representation and preservation of diverse musical traditions and voices, including marginalized and underrepresented communities. The author explained that this principle stresses the importance of equity and cultural sensitivity in music archiving practices. Conversely, Deegan & Tanner (2006) clarified that accessibility is a tenet that underscores the significance of providing researchers, educators, and the general public with easy access to musical recordings. Accessible archives guarantee the active engagement and dissemination of musical legacy in addition to its preservation. The practices of music archiving according to Grout & Temko (2018), encompass a range of activities, from music digitization and preservation to music cataloging and data management. Digitization is the basic or simple practice of converting analogue recordings into digital formats to ensure their long-term preservation and accessibility. Oestreich (2014), stressed that preservation practices on the other hand, include measures to mitigate risks such as physical deterioration,

technological obsolescence, and environmental hazards. These practices may involve temperature and humidity control, storage in archival-quality containers, and periodic migration of digital files to newer formats

Baca (2015), opined that music cataloging and management are essential practices for organizing and facilitating access to music archives. Music data, which include descriptive, administrative, and technical information, enables users to search, retrieve, and contextualize musical recordings effectively. Also, outreach and engagement practices such as educational programs, exhibitions, and public performances that showcase the cultural significance and richness of musical heritage, play important roles in creating and promoting awareness and utilization of music archives. In conclusion, music archiving is guided by principles of authenticity, inclusivity, and accessibility, which inform practices such as digitization, preservation, cataloging, and outreach. By adhering to these principles and implementing best practices, music archivists can ensure the preservation and dissemination of musical heritage for present and future generations.

#### **The Evergreen Music Company**

The founder of Evergreen Musical Company, late Mr. Femi Esho, the founding chairman of Evergreen Music Company, started out as a collector of master tapes and recordings of Nigerian popular music and invariably, owns the largest music collections of yesteryears in Nigeria today. Bimbo Esho (personal communication, 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2023) explained that Femi Esho was a contemporary of Omoba Yemisi Shyllon founder of *OYASAF*, an organization with the largest collection of art works in Nigeria today. She further revealed that Femi Esho started his collection of musical works at the age of twelve as a show of passion and love for music. This passion made him travel all around Nigeria collecting different music and moving with the biggest names in the Nigerian music industry. Mrs. Bimbo Esho (personal communication 13<sup>th</sup> January 2023) disclosed that today, Femi Esho is acclaimed as the largest collector of music of yesteryears in Nigeria with over 100,000 original pieces of vinyl of the works of musicians from all over the world particularly those in Nigeria. Before his death, Femi Esho's Lagos office over time became a beehive of activities where researchers, musicians and students, all come to learn about the Nigerian music heritage.

In his possession were original works of several Nigerian musicians having obtained the copyright from the Musicians. On display at the Lagos office of Evergreen Music Company are old musical instruments

like Gramophone, a reel to reel player and turntable. Bimbo Esho (personal communication, 13th January, 2023) explained that it is important to know that collectors over time become preservationist as they think deeply about ways to safeguard most of their collected works for posterity. The respondent explained that at some point during his life, while sorting out his many collections, Femi Esho mistakenly broke one of the 78rpm record plates and tears began to roll down from his eyes. The respondent hinted that he believed he had lost a heritage and an entire musical work which may never be recovered.

#### **Music Archiving and preservation**

In explaining the archiving and preservation of Nigerian popular music, Bimbo Esho (personal communication, 2023) highlighted three major sub-divisions:

- Music storages materials and their evolution
- The future of music Archiving
- Need for preservation of our musical heritage.

#### **Evolution of Music Storage System**

With regards to musical storage devices and how it has been improved on over the years, Bimbo Esho (personal communication, 2023) explained that it is pertinent to trace it back to over 3,400 years ago when the first musical material was discovered in Syria during excavation process. This archaeological finding was a hymn inscribe on a clay tablet. The respondent revealed that it has since been transcribed and put into a song. Also, the earliest musical instruments such as the lyre which is about 1400BC and the Neanderthal flute which has been estimated to be over 60,000 years. In Nigeria, Canon Jesse Ransome-Kuti (Fela Anikulapo Kuti's grandfather) was the first to record and released songs in Nigeria on vinyl in the year 1925 under the zophonone record label. The Gramophone technology introduced in 1887 was used to play what was known as the 78 rpm plate, also known as breakable plates. The respondent pointed out that in the past, people believed that it was the dog on the gramophone that sang. Later in 1920, the reel to reel was introduced and this was later followed by the introduction of 33RPM record technology in 1948 from Colombia records, which was played on the turntable. About ten years later in 1958 the cassette player was invented and was followed in 1982 by the invention of CDs.

Bimbo Esho (personal communication, 2023) revealed that the CD system has been the poorest storage system. Once the CD scratches it loses its relevance and starts to skip when played. She explained that sometimes the musical content can disappear leaving the CD empty. The other devices are relatively better and have been able to stand the test of time. She noted that the MP3 project began in 1977 but was first put into use in 1998. The digital storage process allows songs from earlier mentioned

facilities storage to be converted MP3 then stored on hard drive and computer. In conclusion, the respondent emphasized her skeptic opinions for the digital era, because while trying to preserve these original works, some songs which are as old as hundred years end up losing the original sound texture and quality including the local musical instruments used in the production while trying to eradicate noise and scratches. This is no gainsaying that the digital age has helped musicians particularly in selling their music around the world unlike the sale of vinyl and cassettes which required physical purchase. Now artistes connect their fans easily through streaming of their works on different platforms online such as Amazon, iTunes, Boomplay, among others.

### The Future of Music Archiving

Bimbo Esho (2023) revealed that Global Music Vault, a private and international music archiving company has come up with trials on new technology that will keep music for 10,000 years on a platter stem technology from a Microsoft research project dubbed project silica which uses recent discoveries in ultrafast laser optics. According to them, the glass is capable of holding over 20,000 songs for around 10,000 years.

### Need for Preservation of our Musical Heritage

There is need to preserve our musical heritage to avoid distortion of original lyrics. Unavailability of our music will cause young minds to embrace available foreign musical cultures. We learn our culture and cultural practices through music. We all have noticed that music nourishes itself from older music traditions many of which are noticed in the songs remixes of the present age. The loss of musical heritage will mean the loss of our unique stories with themes related to our cultural heritage, mythologies, record of ancestors, taboos and social norms. Interestingly, Bimbo Esho (2023) explained that the older Nigerian music artists, who recorded in the 70s and 80s, sometimes consult the Evergreen Musical Company to enquire if their works are still available with them. Also a few years back the company had to take Victor Olaiya back to the studio to record some of his old tunes. She pointed out that collaboration has also served as a valid archiving tool. This is evident in the recording collaborations of Tuface Idibia with Victor Olaiya where they remixed the hit *Eba mi so fun sisi yen*.

### Roles of Evergreen Music Company to Archiving in the Nigerian Music Industry

Bimbo Esho, revealed that Evergreen Musical Company, the largest custodian of Nigerian music of the yesteryears, started as a passion by Mr. Femi Esho, who dined and wine with popular musicians of his day. He usually collected the master tapes from the artistes which

he keeps for posterity. Interestingly, what he started as passion has become the need of everyone today. Keeping recordings, according to Bimbo Esho refers to digitalizing these musical products. The digitalizing process involves converting the music from CDs to mp3 formats in a hard drive which is never taken out. The respondent revealed that the future of the Evergreen Musical Company is in its institutionalization. There is a need to take archiving to the next heights which will involve governmental bodies contributing to the institutionalization of music archiving. Other roles directly or indirectly executed by the organization according to the CEO include:

- safeguarding the national, regional and traditional musical culture of the country
- creating awareness among the people regarding the value of Nigerian indigenous musical culture.
- archiving of most recordings, old music recording materials and some old indigenous musical instruments of folk and popular music forms.
- preservation of important recorded documents for benefits of researchers, scholars and individuals.
- provision of a basis for people to reflect on their history.

### Problem faced during archiving and digital documentation

The two major problems faced in archiving and documentation according to the respondents are time and low funding.

#### Time

Researching and documenting of traditional and popular musical practices is time consuming. Most of these musical practices are seasonal. To get them recorded might take days, weeks and even months because the steps, processes and procedures which cannot be broken, interrupted or jumped due to our belief system. A lot of patience and diligence on the part of the researcher to get a full documentation of some of these musical practices is needed. The researcher might have to spend some time in the hinterland to get details of an event under harsh weather conditions. Most researchers do not have the wherewithal to embark on such venture.

#### Low funding

Government at all levels and concerned citizens should provide adequate funding for researches into Nigerian music practices especially in music archiving and documentation in order to have them documented and archived for future use. There is a need for financial intervention for entertainment and music archiving institutions in Nigeria through investment.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the roles and contributions of Evergreen Musical Company to archiving and documentation of the Nigerian popular music. The study revealed that the Evergreen Musical Company, a music archiving company that basically archive Nigerian music of yesteryears, plays a vital role in preserving and safe guarding of musical culture and also highlighted the process, challenge and importance of archiving Nigerian music.

The study recommended the following:

- Archiving and documentation of our music is very important and should be institutionalised
- Government at all levels and concerned citizens should provide adequate funding for researches into Nigerian music practices especially in music archiving and documentation in order to have them documented and archived for future use.
- There should be more archiving companies, whether private sector or a government sector.

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### Interview

Bimbo Esho interviewed at Evergreen Music Company at Alagomeji, Yaba, Lagos on 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2023.