



Examining Beauty and Morality in Music through Ebenezer Obey's The Horse, the Man and His Son

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ABSTRACT

Music is as ancient as the existence of man and this fits well into the musical practice and expression in the African culture. This is seen in the mixture of music with life, events and activities of Africans, many of this music are focused on the socio-cultural aspects of the people than only amusement purpose therefore, music is seen as a means of uniting people, reinforcing morals and meeting other practical needs of the people. Building on this fundamental purpose of African music, it is discovered that, the contemporary music betrays this goal of music in the African context and it is seen that, modern music are missing on morals, cultural orientations among other factors that contributes to having a healthy presentation. With the understanding that music communicates the intention, emotion and thought of an individual, which has been seen in the musical content of many African evergreen songs, this paper evaluates one of the finest songs by Ebenezer Obey, "The Horse, the man and his Son" which encapsulates; morals, entertainment and cultural value. The paper thereby sees music as one of the means to ensure sanity and moral stability in the society and as such recommends that there should be synergy and mentorship between ancient singers and modern singers in order to promote cultural and moral value in African music continually.

Keywords Music, Ebenezer Obey, Morality, "The Horse, the man and the son"

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Introduction

The Yoruba traditional group in Nigeria maintained very pure cultural and moral norms prior to the arrival of colonialism. Folktales and folk songs are used by the elders to impart most of these principles to the younger generation, allowing them to learn through music at a young age. The aforementioned statement undoubtedly supports Idamoyibo's (2003) thesis that musical knowledge remains in memory for a considerable amount of time, until death occurs. As expressed by Ojukwu, Obielozie and Esimone (2016) Folk songs have the power to "capture the trust of people in a community and reach people's inner thoughts because of their popularity and cultural values," which increases sociocultural awareness and values. Sreekumar (2007) also believes that in the past, folk artists such as storytellers, singers, minstrels, and others have served as cultural and moral stewards. Sreekumar (2007) further to emphasise how these folk forms serve as a means of propagating, reinforcing, and perpetuating the people's values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices. Folk artists use humor to portray social issues in an effort to heal societal ills. In modern times, the values that are embedded in the African musical expressions are eroded and adulterated by contemporary music where, entertainment without moral is the order of the day in the music industry. The quest to rethink the initial value of music becomes expedient. Therefore, this paper assessed that one of the heroic singers with morally sound content and evergreen cognitive values is Ebenezer Obey, who have many songs to his credit and which are seen to have been filled with morals, culture and entertainment. Thereby emphasising that, music could be all encompassing. Thus, this paper appraises the didactic content in the song *'The Horse, the man and the Son'* by Ebenezer obey.

Concept of Music

Researchers from a wide range of disciplines; philosophy, musicology, sociology, cultural anthropology, history, archeology, theology, mythology, biology, humanities, cognitive sciences, neurosciences, and cultural studies among other disciplines, have been fascinated by the ontological question, "What is music?", and this had been a factor for a long time. The definition of music is intricate due to multiple aspects. There is music everywhere. It contains limitations and freedom, individualism and sociability. Within a complex system of symbolic meanings, it is situated historically, philosophically, culturally, politically, economically, and ideologically. It carries multiple connotations and has taken on multiple meanings. As opined by Kokkidou (2021) Music is multifunctional, or a complex signifier having numerous indications, in semiotic terms. Ejiogu (2021) states that, man effectively communicates with the different members of his community through music. In traditional Nigerian civilizations, music serves as an effective

medium for passing down shared beliefs and abilities from one generation to the next. Consequently, music is a sophisticated practice that expresses all of human ideas, ideologies, sentiments, and emotions, all of which are crucial to the advancement of a country. This therefore implies that, inherently, music contains the responsibility of ensuring national development and can be seen in light of communicating morality to the society.

Some highlight musical experiences and meanings in people's lives; others concentrate on the structural features of music; still others draw attention to the emotional reaction to music and its communicational potential; and still more emphasize the significance of its culturally distinctive components. As posited by Kokkidou (2021) music could be seen as human activity that consists of intentional, culturally defined expressive gestures with aesthetic value and symbolic potential. It should be further noted that every definition, by nature, is limited to a specific historical and cultural period (Kokkidou, 2021). In citing and weighing and consideration of various definitions by dictionaries like, Concise Oxford English Dictionary, Penguin Dictionary of music, compact oxford English dictionary, Merriam Webster dictionary, Kokkidou (2021) expressed that music is the art or science of combining or of arranging vocal or instrumental sounds to produce "pleasant sounds" (or "sounds in a pleasing way"), as well as compositions that have beauty, form, harmony, melody, rhythm, unity, continuity, emotional content, among other musical elements. Music is derived from the Greek word, *mousiké* which is in similar or identical words conveying the idea of the definition music expressed above. It could therefore be deduced that, music is focused at melody based on an individual's ability to combine various sounds together either pleasant to the hearing of all or not.

This is a concept that makes perfect sense in the Western part of Nigeria, where music is primarily viewed as an aesthetic item that may be utilized for mood setting, entertainment, and teaching. However, not all musical tones are "pleasurable," even within the canon of Western art. Many avant-garde genres, ambient music, experimental music based on natural sounds, are not included in the concept of beauty. Philosophers such as Davies (2014) have demonstrated that music need not always be beautiful, formless, discordant, or emotionally expressive. According to Morley (2014), dictionary definitions of music are limited and typically characterize it in the context of the western world. They fail to fully capture the variety of musical forms, effects, applications, and cultural conceptions that exist throughout human history.

Music industry in Nigeria

An industry is made up of different specialists who work in that sector. The "music industry encompasses the promotion of live musical performances in addition to the production, distribution, and sale of music in a variety of forms" (Miller). The term "industry" refers to a variety of organizations and activities run by various musicians who are all working toward distinct goals but are united in the production and distribution of musical products to consumers with the intention of turning a profit. The artistic and financial aspects of the music industry are closely intertwined; to be successful, a person must think and act like a business, regardless of their level of creative ability. Ojukwu, Obielozie and Esimone (2016), explain that, any nation's ability to maintain a social life is dependent on its music industry. It is located in the center of the nation's entertainment sector. As a result, the industry becomes a productive place for musicians to share their creativity and talents. The term "music industry" refers to the entirety of the various music production-related organizations that collaborate to achieve the shared goal of profiting from music distribution. The system is a collection of several organizations and activities that are all striving toward different goals but are connected by the desire to distribute music for financial gain. Thus, a number of parties benefit: the user, the agent, the producer, the manufacturer, the composer, the artist, and the marketer (Okafor and Okafor, 2009). Public relations, banking, advertising, and promotional services would all be considered entangled services. As a result, the sector provides opportunities for a variety of fields, skills, groups, and individuals. An individual with the necessary training, talent, or qualifications can establish himself in any of the industry's strategic divisions. There is no denying that Nigeria has one of the world's most diverse popular music industries. Given that Nigeria is home to over 250 different ethnic groups, one should not be shocked by the degree of diversity in the sector. Since most Nigerian musicians prefer to switch genres relatively spontaneously as the nation's ever-evolving music culture sweeps through, it is difficult to categorize any modern artist as belonging to a certain genre.

In general, music has been shown to entertain and console those who are experiencing hardship. Nigerian modern pop music has evolved over the ages to fit the prevailing trends by shifting from one stage to another. The sector is so well-known globally because of how active it is. Nigerian music is an essential part of the global music scene, which is why various international performers visit Nigeria to sing or perform (Ojukwu, Obielozie and Esimone, 2016). Nigeria's modern pop music includes a wide range of popular songs with influences from other foreign cultures, particularly the

West, as well as folk songs from the nation's numerous ethnic groups. But every type of song is so unique; they all have their own instruments, styles, and languages. Every performance has a target audience, and young people are the target audience for practically all current music. The music industry is so varied, with a wide range of genres, that it is a true platform for fostering constructive social ideals, particularly among young people, who are the lifeblood of any country. Okafor (2005) claims that music "is of course, very acceptable as an instrument of change because people digest it as entertainment while it leaves a mark on the psyche that re-directs the person towards a new personality, towards a new activity." The aforementioned perspective undoubtedly supports this claim.

The Man, Ebenezer Obey

"*The Horse, the man and the Son*" is a popular juju music composed and performed by Ebenezer Obey. This section therefore presents some basic info and biography of the great juju singer of Nigeria. He is by name, Ebenezer Remilekun Aremu Olasupo Obey-Fabiyi, though popularly referred to as Ebenezer Obey. He was born on April 3rd, 1942 to a family belonging to Egba-Yoruba ethnic background, and of the Owu subgroup of the Egba people (Waterman, 1990). He is known popularly with his nickname, Chief Commander and has been actively involved in music since the 1950s till present day 21st century. Obey worked odd jobs as a child to pay for his early education; such as being a site labourer or selling newspapers. Among his parents' three children, he was the younger son. He attended Methodist Primary school, Idogo, Ogun State between 1948-1954 and later proceeded to Methodist Secondary Modern School, Abeokuta. After relocating to Lagos, Ebenezer Obey started his professional career in the middle of the 1950s. He started a band called 'The International Brothers' in 1964, playing highlife-jùjú fusion, after receiving instruction from Fatai Rolling-Dollar's band. Later, in the early 1970s, the band changed its name to 'Inter-Reformers' and released a number of successful Juju album hits on the Decca music label in West Africa. Obey started experimenting with Yoruba drumming and growing the ensemble by include more drum equipment, guitars, and talking drums. Obey's ability to incorporate complex Yoruba principles into dance-floor tunes is one of his musical skills (Awoyinfa, 1992). Obey was a long time friend and also a contemporary of Sunny Ade (a fellow juju musician). Ebenezer Obey completed the original style of juju music by adding more guitars and Western drum sets in the 1960s, transforming it from an urban social music genre that was played in the 1950s by Julius Araba, J. O. Oyesiku, and others. In 1963, he made his first major hit, *Olomigbotemi*, by modernizing popular music and inventing the *miliki* system, a new musical style (Apoola, nd).

The Inter-Reformers band excelled in performing praise songs for wealthy Nigerian socialites and business moguls, as is typical of Yoruba social-circle music in the country. But Obey is also well-known for the Christian spiritual themes in his songs, and he retired into Nigerian gospel music ministry since the early 1990s. It is noteworthy to mention that during Pastor Kunle Ajayi's 30-year career as a stage performer in Lagos, Chief Commander, shared the stage with him (Mosobolaje, 2011). He got married to lady Evangelist Juliana Obey-Fabiyi, and together they had many children and grand children. His wife, Juliana Obey-Fabiyi died at the Lagos State University teaching hospital on August 23rd, 2011.

Appraisal of “*The Horse, the man and the Son*” Lyrics

As focused in this paper, *The Horse, the man and the Son* (ketekete) is basically about the narrative of a fiction about a man, who traveled with his son on a trip with their horse and to which they had different reactions, responses and review from people based on every action they took in the course of the journey. It is expedient at this junction to emphasize that, this song is one of the many evergreen songs which had been referred to and sung by many in the Nigerian Yoruba setting, for both entertainment and morality, this is vividly affirmed by the expression of Apoola (n.d) who detailed that, Ebenezer Obey was famed for a lot of evergreen hit songs which contained exceptional philosophical lyrics and style, he went ahead to mention some of the evergreen songs from the juju singer one of which is the song examined in this paper. The song appears to be widely accepted among both young and old.

Lyrics in Yoruba

Omu miran ti itan baba kan
 Pelu omo re ti won sin ketekete
 Esin pelu ketekete dabi mototi won gun lo sode
 Keteketeti dagba, baba pelu omo re
 won mura ode, won fe ri rin ajokan
 Gege bi agbalagba, baba gun ketekete,
 omo re ntele lo
 Bi won ti rin siwaju die, won pade adamo,
 Eda omo araye
 Om'araye ni awu, baba agbala gba omo re nrin nile,
 iwo gun ketekete
 Baba babo sile lori ketekete,
 oba gbomo re sori ketekete
 Won ba mu irin ajo won pon, won nlo/2x
 Bi won ti rin siwaju die, won tun pade adamo,
 eda omo araye
 Om'araye tuni awu, baba omugo oun rin nile,
 omo gun ketekete
 Baba ba tunsu're, ogbo' mosile, o sare gun ketekete
 otun gbomo gun ketekete
 eni meji lori ketekete,
 won mu' rinajo won pon, won lo/2x
 Bi won tirin siwaju die, won pade adamo,
 eda omo araye
 Om'ar aye tu ni awu, eyin mejeeji loriketekete,
 efe pa keteket eni
 Baba bawo'ke titi, oni ma te yin lorun
 eyin eda araye
 Baba ba somo re lori ketekete, oun na bosile,
 ketekete n lo lofo baba pelu omo re won fese rin tele
 Bi won tun se rin siwaju die, won pade adamo,
 edao mo araye
 Om'ara ye tu ni awu, eyin mejeeji, eru aye ni yin,
 enrin ni le ketekete nlolofo
 Baba bab ojuwo'ke o ranti
 orin chief commander
 pe, koso gbon teleda,
 kosi wa telewu,
 koso'na tele mo tele fit'aye lorun ooo.

Translation

I remember a man
 and his son who domesticate donkeys
 horses and donkeys were like cars for trips
 the donkey is all grown, the father and son
 were preparing to embark on a journey
 the aged man mounts the donkey
 while his son was trekking behind
 as they journeyed forward, they met
 some set of people
 they criticized him against his son trekking
 while he was on the donkey
 he immediately came down
 he made his son mount the donkey
 they continued the journey
 as they journeyed forward, they met
 another set of people
 they criticized him for trekking on foot
 while his son was sitting on the donkey
 he brought down the son, mount the donkey
 and also took his son on the donkey as well
 two people were well seated on the donkey
 they continued their journey
 as they journeyed forward, they met
 another set of people
 they criticized him for permitting two people
 to sit on the donkey as wickedness
 the man looked up and promised
 to satisfy people generally
 he came down, and did likewise to his son
 the donkey was empty, they trekked behind
 as they journeyed forward, they met
 another set of people
 they criticized- you are slaves to the world
 you are trekking while the donkey is empty
 the man looked up and remembered
 chief commander's song
 regardless of the wisdom employed,
 nor the good character displayed,
 You cannot satisfy everybody

The emphasis of the narrative lies on the fact that an individual cannot satisfy everybody at the same time and as a result people are to try their best and not to unnecessarily inconvenience themselves for the purpose of making other people see them as being good. This implies that everybody has various perspectives to different things at different places and at different times. The moral of the story is glaring for listeners as the expression combines both intriguing sound of music, which can aid emotional stability and also didactics of for people not to live to satisfy others at the detriment of their sanity. The man in the narrative aimed at satisfying everyone he met, which by implication was an intention of satisfying the whole world. But with all his attempt at satisfying humans, he was always being criticised and this led to the statement that “kosogbon teleda, kosiwa telewu, ko sana tele mo tele fit'aye lorun ooo. (regardless of the wisdom employed nor the good character displayed, one man cannot satisfy everybody). These deductive from the song by Ebenezer Obey simply points and ascertain that as important as the beauty of emotional satisfaction and intrigues can be, moral lessons can be circulated through the art of music especially within the African context where morality is highly placed and regarded in the society.

Lyrics of “The Horse, the man and the Son” as template for Music in Nigeria

Having considered the narrative contained in the song, “*the horse, the man and the son*” by Ebenezer Obey, it becomes expedient to examine modern music in the light of this music by the juju musician and to emphasize the need for singers to incorporate the art and acts discovered in this evergreen song in the modern music industry, especially as it concerns the lyrical part of the music. The lyrical part of the music is essential because, lyrics appears to be a unique trait in any type or form of music and as such, having the lyrics as a template for modern singers will help in further credibility of the music industry in Nigeria and which could be of great advantage to the society as a whole. The song by Ebenezer Obey points clearly to the fact that he is a creative singer and initiator which must have contributed to writing a song that will remain evergreen, decades after the song has been out to the public. Ejiogu (2021) detailed that, problem resolution demands imagination and creativity. When unlimited space and time dimensions are applied, our social, economic, and political problems can be resolved more effectively. This is because high intellect created them via the application of creativity and imagination. The position of Ejiogu explains that, solution can be provided with intentional imagination and creativity, this is seen to have been characterised in the song by Ebenezer Obey where he provided a solution to the problem of aiming to satisfy everyone. Singers are to be focused at conveying ideas that can improve the status quo of their listener rather than being focused on only making names and fame for themselves without being bothered on the influence of their lyrics on their listeners within the African context especially.

Furthermore, the song by Ebenezer Obey is discovered to be orderly and without oblivion in communication. Some modern songs today are only flooded and occupied with contents that literally have no direct meaning or positive effect on the society. They are simply characterised with melody without moral contents that could be positively adopted by youths and young adults who are the main audience listening to them. As a result of the lyrical content of Ebenezer Obey, many literature scholars have appreciated the juju genre from various prismatic lenses, some applauded the mode of music import it contained while some others saluted the auditory aesthetics generated from the content, as such Ebenezer Obey's song is largely approved from a pragmatic and semantic frame (Ejiogu, 2021). Another attribute that could be imitated by contemporary or modern music and musician from the song of Obey is the wisdom embedded in the song. Ejiogu (2021) further expressed that, though lot of approaches have been adopted by various scholars who examined the different songs of Ebenezer Obey, the most unifying factor in the various assessment as discovered in their researches is that fact that they all have emphasis on the wisdom that

flows out from the lyrical rendition of his songs. It implies that, the juju singer was not a singer for formality, he was intentional about conveying one wise saying or the other in his musical expressions, Ejiogu refers to this attribute of the singer as “wisdom that fills the moral gap of shaping behavioural patterns”.

Finally, modern musicians are to deduce the fact that, the richness of moral contained in their song can preserve and sustain the longevity and relevance of their music among listeners. It is noteworthy that the song, “the horse, the man and his son” was released as an album since 20th century precisely in year 1973, but after about five decades, the song is still very relevant to the 21st century. This implies that, if musicians (any genre) focus at instilling morale to the mind of their audience, they can remain relevant for a very long time frame rather than only emotionally entertaining content which is rampant today.

Conclusion

The song considered in this paper by Ebenezer Obey is an encapsulation of priceless wisdom that last ages. Obey, a talented juju musician, uses his artistic ability to share life lessons that have an impact on many aspects of society. If embraced, Ebenezer Obey's profound insight can lead to a happy existence. Also, the ability to capture dual meanings in his songs distinguishes his content vividly. On the surface, it presents a particular meaning, but on a deeper level, it creates a more spiritual, profound, and revelatory expression (Ejiogu, 2021). When it comes to eroding the nation's moral and cultural norms, young people are primarily at risk. These days, young people are dependent on social media and can spend hours each day alone on one or more social media platforms, downloading a wide range of content, including modern music, and this imply they formulate a worldview from the content and type of music they download or they come across. Additionally, Ojukwu, Onuora-Oguno, and Esimone (2014) note that parents rarely had time for their kids, which poses a serious issue. Youths in Nigeria are no longer taught by the elders through folktales and songs from their community, and as a result of this, they are allowed to absorb both the good and bad elements of other cultures.

With these challenging factors of immoral lyrics and uncultured content in the society, since music appears to be a widely accepted mode by majority in the society, musicians are to help in restoring sanity to the society by having a morally sound and culturally acceptable lyrics, this can help progress and sanity in the Nigerian society. This will place the musical industry to serve in multiple roles, that is not only entertainment purpose, but they also serve the didactic purpose for the society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and evaluation of this paper, the

following recommendations are proffered as means to reinstitute the beauty and morality that music can convey in the Nigerian society.

The music industry can formulate a formidable body which can be saddled with the responsibility of teaching and training themselves in order to orientate singers on the impact of their songs on the society.

Major synergy, mentorship and guide should be encouraged between the younger generations and the older generation in the musical industry.

Song composers are to aim at utilising their talents to solve a particular challenge in the Nigerian society, especially issues that are obvious in the society for example, selfishness, corruption among others. This will make the music industry to serve the purpose of addressing anomalies in the society.

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