FUNCTIONAL MUSIC OF THE IBIBIO PEOPLE OF NIGERIA

Dissertation for the Degree of Ph. D.
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
SAMUEL EKPE AKPABOT
1975

This is to certify that the

thesis entitled

FUNCTIONAL MUSIC OF THE IBIBIO PEOPLE OF NIGERIA

presented by

SAMUEL EKPE AKPABOT

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in Music

James Tiblock
Major professor

Date January 6, 1975

O-7639

ABSTRACT

FUNCTIONAL MUSIC OF THE IBIBIO

PEOPLE OF NIGERIA

By

Samuel Ekpe Akpabot

This research was undertaken following the discovery that there were certain customs and ritual ceremonies unique to the Ibibio people of Eastern Nigeria whose origin and migrations have up till now not been established. Whereas many African peoples worshipped objects like trees and animals in their ancient culture, the Ibibio people worshipped a supreme being and were overly concerned with the supernatural and good morals. Their belief in reincarnation resulted in the existence of various masquerades which represented the spirits of their ancestors.

Concern for good morals and purity was so deep seated that an Ibibio male would never marry a girl unless she was certified to be a virgin; and one of the conditions for admittance into any of the women's societies was proof that the new member's morals were above reproach. Since it is generally accepted by social anthropologists that music can affect behavioral patterns, part of this study was devoted to finding out about the character of the Ibibio

people by a t

musical conce

Five qu

(1) Why was t

(2) How did i

this music ha

singing and d

did the music

collectively

the answers t

found to what

tion, gave ae

enforced conf

and religious

The stu

different rhy

to examine me

and vocal sty

indispensable

examined with

At all

light of soci

attempt to ge

rhythmic beat

analyzed; and

these styles

people by a thorough examination and analysis of their musical concepts.

Five questions were devised as a basis for research. (1) Why was the music of the people shaped the way it was? (2) How did it relate to society? (3) What effects did this music have on behavioral patterns? (4) What part did singing and dancing play in ritual ceremonies? (5) How did the musical instruments in the area individually and collectively relate to the lives of the people? Through the answers to these questions, it was hoped it would be found to what extent Ibibio music allowed emotional expression, gave aesthetic pleasure, entertained, communicated, enforced conformity to social norms and validated social and religious rituals.

The study also set out to record and transcribe the different rhythms used by instruments of the orchestra, to examine melodic and harmonic devices, scale patterns and vocal styles. Since symbols and cosmologies are almost indispensable in African culture, Ibibio symbols were examined within their musical concepts.

At all times, musical expressions were viewed in the light of sociological and anthropological practices in an attempt to get at the <u>meaning</u> of every gesture, song and rhythmic beat. Women's and children's songs were also analyzed; and since true art cannot live in isolation, all these styles were compared to and contrasted with the

musical pract

Special atte

African expe

that cannot

Researc

Etinan, Opob

and Nsit thr

observations

later transc

rule was to

interviews a

Native doctor

parlance), old

of their home

and master mu

materials fo

Underst

great advanta

researcher wa

was out to di

people.

musical practices of the other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Special attention was paid to song texts because in the African experience, many things can be said in a song that cannot be spoken ordinarily.

Research was carried out at Eket, Etinan, Uyo, Etinan, Opobo, Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Itu, Anua, Ibesikpo and Nsit through oral traditions, legends, personal observations and recorded music materials which were later transcribed and analyzed for results. A cardinal rule was to bypass European musical concepts and avoid any interviews and performances that were obviously not authentic. Native doctors (commonly known as witch doctors in European parlance), old men and women versed in the oral traditions of their homeland, leaders of different ritual societies and master musicians in the various communities provided materials for this study.

Understanding the language of the area is always a great advantage in an undertaking of this nature; and this researcher was fortunate enough to be an Ibibio himself who was out to discover the fast-vanishing traditions of his people.

in part

FUNCTIONAL MUSIC OF THE IBIBIO PEOPLE OF NIGERIA

By

Samuel Ekpe Akpabot

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Music

1975

"Th
sk
re
he

Ded
who
dan

"There is something under the
sky of Africa that makes me
restless. . .something has happened
here, is happening, will happen. . ."

Peter Matthiesen, The
Tree From Where Man was
Born: The African Experience

Dedicated to Ibibio indigenous musicians
whose beautiful singing, playing and
dancing made this study possible.

The au

embers:

Profes

ent who gui

Profes

ducation De

Profes

as ever met

Profes

Specia

Dean S

nds which

ears;

Dean S

riendly sta

eriod as Ar

The st

usic and pr

Brigad

astern Stat

God, wi

at Michigan S

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is grateful and deeply indebted to committee members:

Professor James Niblock, Chairman of the Music Department who guided this research;

Professor Robert Sidnell, Chairman of the Music Education Department;

Professor Gomer Jones, the most exciting teacher he has ever met;

Professor Robert Erbes for his friendship.

Special thanks go to:

Dean Sullivan and Dean Winder for helping to provide funds which kept him at Michigan State University for two years;

Dean Smuckler of the International Center and his friendly staff for their cooperation during the author's period as Artist in Residence at the Center;

The students who registered for his classes in African Music and provided some very lively moments;

Brigadier U. J. Esuene, Military Governor of the South Eastern State of Nigeria for funding parts of this research;

God, who surprised him pleasantly quite a few times at Michigan State University.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF PLATES

LIST OF FIGURES

The Ibibio dialec

A as in Ah

I as in Ink

E as in Eh

E as in Egg

O as in Oh

O as in Odd

U as in Woo

In addition to t

have an explosiv

to pronounce N s

tongue in the ro

pronounce M say it

closed. With th

Eb

Ik

Mb

Ut

Ek

Ok

Ay

Ob

Ns

Ek

Ib

Ob

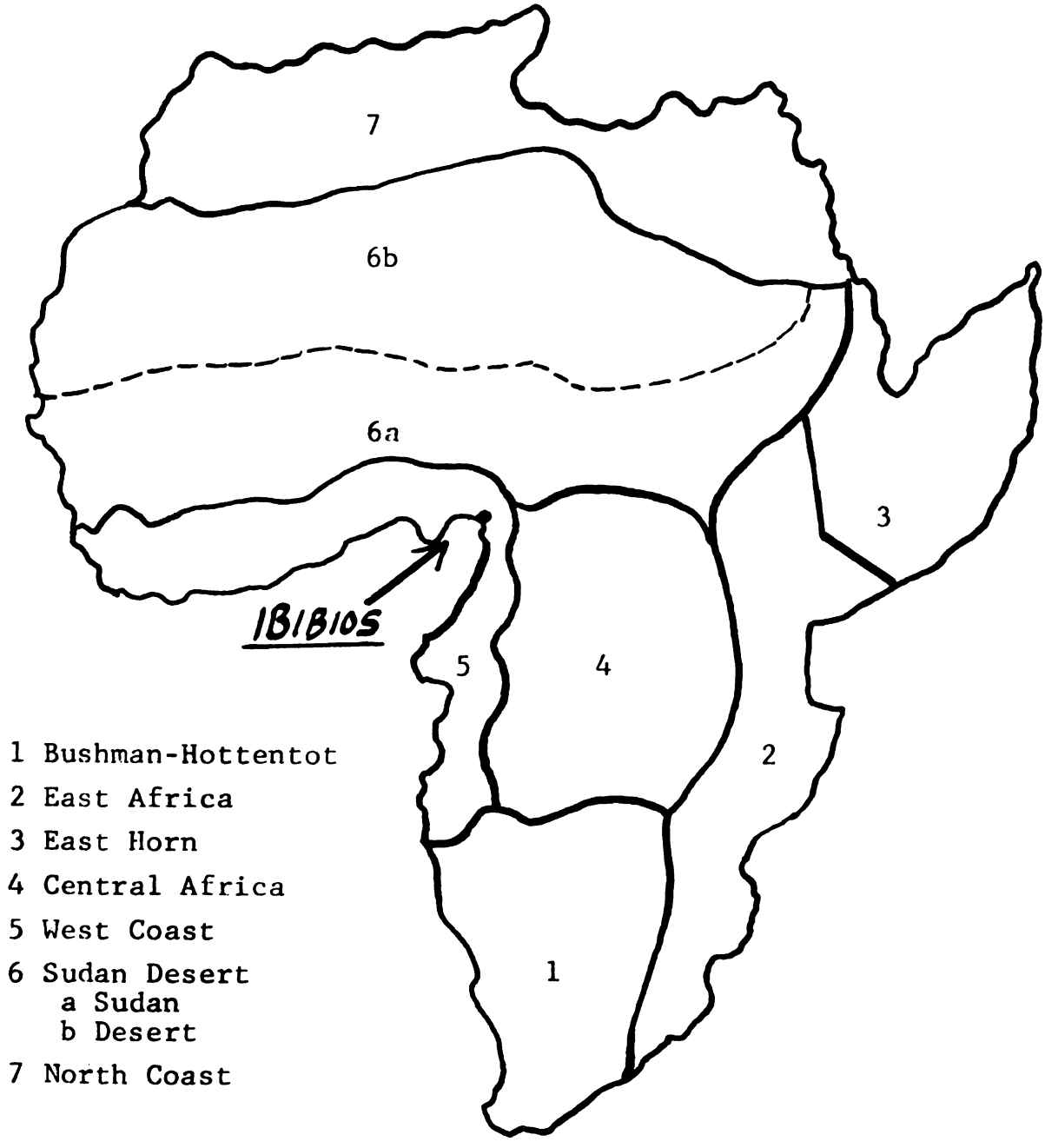
PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

The Ibibio dialect makes use of seven vowel sounds:

A as in Ah
I as in Ink
E as in Eh
Ë as in Egg with two dots on the Ë
O as in Oh
Ö as in Odd with two dots on the Ö
U as in Woo

In addition to these, the two consonants KP written together have an explosive sound that is very difficult to notate. To pronounce N say it as in Pe-n without the Pe with the tongue in the roof of the mouth. In the same way to pronounce M say it as in Pra-m without the Pra with the mouth closed. With the above as a guide,

Ebre will be pronounced	Ebb-re
Ikon	Eek-own
Mbopo	M-bo-po
Uta	Ooh-tah
Ekpo	Eh-kpo
Öko	Or-kor
Ayara	Ah-ya-ra
Obodom	Oh-bow-dome
Nsak	N-sak
Ekong	Eh-kong
Ibibio	Ee-bee-bio
Öbon	Or-born



CULTURE AREAS OF AFRICA
(After Herskovits)

The

The Federal

tes of which

3.7 million c

a. Three majo

k/Ibibio/Anna

e Ibibios alo

aring boundar

d the Kalabar

de. The prin

e Eket, Etina

ing Ikot Ekpe

d for the pu

e Ibibios.

shing and fa

il and palm k

e name Ibibi

ich means s

---

[1] See Th
Government of

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Ibibios and Their Origin

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is divided into twelve states of which the South Eastern State, with a population of 3.7 million covering an area of 13,166 square miles is one. Three major ethnic groups inhabit the State--the Efik/Ibibio/Annang to the south, The Ejagham and the Ekoi.[1] The Ibibios alone comprise 2.5 million of this population sharing boundaries with the Ibos of the East Central State and the Kalabari people of the Rivers State on its western side. The principal towns which make up the Ibibio area are Eket, Etinan, Uyo, Itu and Opobo. The Annangs inhabiting Ikot Ekpene and Abak are descended from the Ibibios and for the purposes of this study have been grouped with the Ibibios. The main occupation of the people is trading, fishing and farming and their natural products are palm oil and palm kernel. They are people of short stature and the name Ibibio is probably derived from the word Ibio which means short.

---

[1]See This is Nigeria's South East, issued by the Government of South Eastern State of Nigeria, 1967.

No one is re

by virtue of their

Bantu root; althou

50 years among th

probably right wh

seem to be a peop

they dwelt in thi

home can be trace

attempts to effec

have continued to

> "The Ibibi
> provide an
> all they c
> is a very
> or pattern
> they are c
> graphical,
> data again
> can be che

Major Leonard, a

Nigeria for many

wild and trucul

from whom it wa

but if it has b

where the Ibibi

---

[2] D. Amau
People: The I
and Company Lt

[3] G. I. J
London: O.U.P.

[4] M. D. W
Diploma Thesis
n.d.), p. 32.

No one is really sure of the origin of the Ibibios. By virtue of their dialect, they are thought to have a Bantu root; although Talbot who lived and worked for over 30 years among the people at the turn of the century is probably right when she states that "the Ibibios would seem to be a people of hoar antiquity and so long have they dwelt in this region that no legend of an earlier home can be traced to them."[2] In more recent times, attempts to effectively trace the origin of the Ibibios have continued to prove abortive. Jones writes:

> "The Ibibio traditions do not themselves provide any coherent historical perspective, all they can offer when taken collectively is a very broad and vague sequence of events or patterns of dispersion and this only when they are considered in conjunction with geographical, cultural, social and political data against which statements in the legends can be checked."[3]

Major Leonard, a British administrative officer in Eastern Nigeria for many years described the Ibibios as ". . .a wild and truculent people about whom nothing is known and from whom it was impossible to collect any information."[4] But if it has been frustrating not to be able to find out where the Ibibios migrated from, their far-reaching influence

---

[2]D. Amaury Talbot, Woman's Mysteries of a Primitive People: The Ibibios of Southern Nigeria (London; Cassell and Company Ltd., 1915), p. 5.

[3]G. I. Jones, The Trading States of the Oil Rivers (London: O.U.P. 1963), p. 24.

[4]M. D. W. Jeffreys, Notes on the Ibibio (Unpublished Diploma Thesis, Enugu Archives E.P. 7266 - C.S.E. 1/85/3831 n.d.), p. 32.

n the Ibos, their

annot be denied.

"According
Yellow and
Ibibio peop
Chi (God).
other races
the making
first men a

Igbo, a Nigeri

pological resear

he Ibibios, ora

nswers.[6] This

which has relie

personal observ

One of th

life is the cor

secret societi

woven into the

Ibibios where

ocial control

life cycle of

or musical st

areful analys

societies.

---

[5]P. Ama
Religions an
1971, p. 103

[6]See A
A Critique o
August, 1971

on the Ibos, their neighbours to the south and south-east, cannot be denied. Talbot writes:

> "According to the testimony of Chief G. A. Yellow and several Ibo: 'We regard the Ibibio people as the first ever made by Chi (God). Therefore they know more than other races of ancient knowledge concerning the making of the world, the coming of the first men and the secret of the gods'"[5]

Afigbo, a Nigerian historian, believes that where anthropological research has failed to trace the origins of the Ibibios, oral tradition might well provide the missing answers.[6] This has been the path chosen in this study which has relied much on oral traditions, legends and personal observations during the course of the research.

One of the most prominent aspects of Nigerian cultural life is the concern with the supernatural in the form of secret societies; and nowhere are these societies so interwoven into the daily life of the people than among the Ibibios where they are used as instruments of government and social control. Because they are so interwoven into the life cycle of the people, no historical, anthropological or musical study of the people is possible without a careful analysis of the patterns and functions of these societies.

---

[5]P. Amaury Talbot, Tribes of the Niger Delta--Their Religions and Customs (London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1967), p. 103.

[6]See A. E. Afigbo, "Ibibio Origin and Migrations: A Critique of Methodology," Nigeria Magazine, (December-August, 1971), pp. 60-69.

Bascom and

"The study
institutio
the fellow
the extra-
behavior,
between la
sonality
values th
modes of

belief in the s

among the Ibib

to find out (a

way it is, (b)

it has on beha

dancing play

instruments,

daily life of

will be used

stability of

"If mu
aesthe
elits
to soc
tutior
that
stabi

---

[7] Will
and Change
in African
1958), p. 7.

[8] Alan
Western Uni

Method and Materials

Bascom and Herskovits are of the opinion that:

> "The study of culture involves not only the institutions that frame man's reactions to the fellow members of his society but also the extra-institutional aspects of human behavior, including language, the relation between language and behavior, between personality and culture, and the system of values that gives meaning to the accepted modes of behavior of a people."[7]

Belief in the supernatural provides a great system of values among the Ibibios; and in this study attempts have been made to find out (a) why the music of the people is shaped the way it is, (b) how it relates to society, (c) what effects it has on behavioral patterns, (d) what part singing and dancing play in ritual ceremonies and (e) how musical instruments, individually and collectively relate to the daily life of the people. Throughout this study function will be used to mean "contributing to the continuity and stability of Ibibio culture." As Merriam puts it:

> "If music allows emotional expression, gives aesthetic pleasure, entertains, communicates, elits physical response, enforces conformity to social norms, and validates social institutions and religious rituals, it is clear that it contributes to the continuity and stability of culture."[8]

---

[7]William Bascom and Melville Herskovits, "Stability and Change in African Culture," in Continuity and Change in African Cultures, (University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 7.

[8]Alan P. Merriam, The Anthropology of Music (Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 225.

Two proble

is nature are

ailable data.

oses much when

ttening Room

e fed and fat

llow when co

ck Mbopo, wi

ythm. Furth

ying to exp

periences.

s called a

empted to l

the scale

s apt to c

loosely or

hat make

ould be f

nstrument

he instr

nner wor

nswers a

look for

Th

ents p

who see

Two problems generally encountered in research of this nature are those of communication and organisation of available data. For example a chant in Ibibio dialect loses much when translated into English and words like Fattening Room used to describe where damsels are led to be fed and fattened in preparation for marriage sound hollow when compared with the vernacular expression Ufok Mbopo, with its built-in speech melody and speech rhythm. Furthermore, there has always been some difficulty trying to explain African culture in the light of European experiences. Hearing that an African musical instrument is called a thumb piano, a European enquirer is at once tempted to look for white and black keys and semitones in the scale arrangements; not finding these things, he is apt to conclude that the African thumb piano is "loosely organised" in sound and that the pieces of metal that make up the notes are "tuned at random." Nothing could be farther from the truth. Every African musical instrument is constructed and tuned to a special pattern; the instrument makers may not be able to communicate the inner workings of their mind to an enquirer but the answers are always there if one knows how and where to look for them.

The importance of studying the role musical instruments play in African culture is best summed up by Merriam who feels that "very few studies have centered upon such

roblems as. . .s
nstruments used
ctivities or th
tates of being
eason, an impo
Libio musical
ossibilities a

The orga
pecially as
kind. Since t
ecounting of
end to obscu
the masquera
laborate pro
society on t
them in song
has therefor
a secret soc
ace the li
rescue by s
as an aspec
be made; al
purpose, t

---

9 Ala
Change in
University

problems as. . .special treatment of instruments, musical instruments used in specific types of musical or other activities or the representation of particular moods or states of being by particular instruments."[9] For this reason, an important part of this study has been devoted to Ibibio musical instruments--their make, range, rhythmic possibilities and functions.

The organization of data presented another problem especially as regards what to leave out in a study of this kind. Since this is principally a musical study, the mere recounting of anthropological or historical data would only tend to obscure the meaning of musical content. For example Ekpe masquerade is a secret society with many taboos and an elaborate process of initiation; but the real impact of the society on the community comes from their interaction with them in song and dance. The procedure adopted in this study has therefore been to give a short descriptive analysis of a secret society and then see how it uses its music to regulate the lives of the people. Merriam again comes to the rescue by suggesting that "it is only in dealing with music as an aspect of culture that truly penetrating studies can be made; although the collector of music serves a useful purpose, the full rewards in the study of music lie in the

---

[9]Alan P. Merriam, "African Music" in Continuity and Change in African Cultures, ed. Bascom and Herskovits, (University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 85-86.

epth analysis of

inal organizati

elevant chapter

hat "African ar

n the social st

f religious ri

nd as recreati

It is no

ental music i

bserved a lon

ithout dancin

he forms of

Bibio dialec

n character

ones during

n such a wa

is dead. Th

ace speech

rhythm and

Instrumenta

10 Al

11 Le

Sahara"
1972), p. 4

12 E

Africa, V

depth analysis of musical patterns of culture."[10] The final organization of available data in this study into relevant chapters has been reinforced by Goines's belief that "African arts, especially traditional music, function in the social structure at three principal levels--as part of religious ritual, as an expression of social organization and as recreation."[11]

Vocal and Instrumental Music

It is not always easy to separate vocal and instrumental music in the study of African culture. As Hornbostel observed a long time ago, "African music is not conceivable without dancing nor African rhythm without drumming, nor the forms of African song without antiphony."[12] For example, Ibibio dialect, like most African dialects is inflectionary in character with the vowels producing high, low and medium tones during speech; thus the word Akpa can be pronounced in such a way as to mean variously, seashore, first or he is dead. The inflections in the words of the sentence produce speech melody and the accents on the words speech rhythm and rhythmic patterns influence drumming and dancing. Instrumental music derives much from vocal music in the

---

[10]Alan P. Merriam, African Music, p. 85.

[11]Leonard Gionés, "Music of Africa South of the Sahara" Music Educator's Journal, Vol. 59,(October 1972), p. 48.

[12]E. M. von Hornbostel, "African Negro Music" Africa, Vol. 1, (1928), p. 62.

frican experienc

peech melody in

ents.[13] In the

across a four-no

The four notes d

in the area, but

the songs perfo

which used only

with words and

the songs were

o see how the

messages. Try

as a musical

tions. Words

ontext to v

There

Ibibio cultu

predominates

accompanime

instrument,

used as an

ast is in

oticed.

are preser

[13] I

Wii pai

the penta

African experience and there are parts of Africa where the speech melody in a sentence is used to tune musical instruments.[13] In the course of this research, the author came across a four-note xylophone played as a solo instrument. The four notes did not conform to any of the known scales in the area, but the music produced was similar to some of the songs performed by a women's group in the same area which used only four notes of the scale. One was a song with words and the other a song without words; but since the songs were derived from speech patterns, it is easy to see how the xylophone music could be used to transmit messages. Trying to analyze the xylophone music purely as a musical sound would be to do injustice to its functions. Words and music have to be taken together in one context to view the totality of the musician's performance.

There is no absolute vocal or instrumental music in Ibibio culture. In any one setting, one or the other predominates; the instrumental music can be used as rhythmic accompaniment to a vocal group or where there is a melodic instrument, made to play a ritornello. It can also be used as an accompaniment to dancing where the main interest is in the dancing and the hard toiling drummers hardly noticed. But, at all times, song, instruments and movement are present in Ibibio music as indeed in all African music.

---

[13] In Central Africa the speech melody in the sentence Wili pai sa sunge is used to tune the harp to the notes of the pentatonic scale.

hen the music is

ddition audienc

hether his musi

No study c

he use of certa

frican music l

lready been us

restated togeth

uring the cour

been specially

(1) Call-and-

(2) Cantor

(3) Speech m

(4) Speech r

(5) Ritualis

(6) Improvis
Counterp

(7) Vocal p

When the music is performed for pleasure, there is in addition audience reaction which lets the performer know whether his music is going down well or not.

Terminology

No study of African music can be complete without the use of certain words that have become standard in African music literature. A few of these terms have already been used in this introduction; they are here restated together with a few others that will be used during the course of the study. Some of these terms have been specially coined by the author to press home his points.

(1)	Call-and-response	another name for solo and chorus. The call is always sung by the cantor and the response by the other members of the group.
(2)	Cantor	the lead singer in a group.
(3)	Speech melody	produced by the rise and fall of the vowels in a sentence plotting a melodic pattern.
(4)	Speech rhythm	the syllabic rhythm in the words of a song.
(5)	Ritualistic	concerned with the supernatural.
(6)	Improvisatory Counterpoint	caused by one or more members of a chorus trying to enrich the music by anticipating or imitating the cantor or singing a phrase or group of phrases at irregular intervals during a cantor's call.
(7)	Vocal pedal point	a drone by one or more members of a chorus holding the tonic or dominant note or both notes at once for a long period.

(8) Nonsense v

(9) Fattening

(10) Specialis

(11) Standard

(12) Bell rhyt

(13) Masquera

(14) Masquera

(15) Ibibio s
rhythm

(16) Iambic

(17) Trochai

(18) Ululati

(19) Pentato

(20) Heptato

(21) Scat s

(22) Singin
voice

(8)	Nonsense words	words that do not exist in the Ibibio language but are used for effect.
(9)	Fattening room	place where young girls are fed and fattened in preparation for marriage.
(10)	Specialist music	music played by professional musicians in a secret society group.
(11)	Standard rhythm	rhythm most commonly identified with a particular instrument.
(12)	Bell rhythm	standard rhythm of the gong used throughout Africa.
(13)	Masquerader	a member of a secret society dressed specially to represent the spirit of an ancestor. He is usually covered from head to toe, with a mask on his face.
(14)	Masquerade	another name for a secret society, e.g., Ekpo masquerade.
(15)	Ibibio standard rhythm	iambic rhythm.
(16)	Iambic rhythm	Greek rhythmic mode of short-long (u —)
(17)	Trochaic rhythm	Greek rhythmic mode of long-short (— u)
(18)	Ululation	yodelling or shout by a chorus during a music performance.
(19)	Pentatonic scale	a scale of five notes. On a tonic C the notes would be: C,D,E,G,A.
(20)	Heptatonic scale	a scale of seven notes like the diatonic scale but without equal temperament.
(21)	Scat singing	the use of nonsense words.
(22)	Singing-speaking voice	alternating speech melody with ordinarily spoken words.

(23) Secret so

(24) Chief

(25) Backbeat

It is pos

were able to m

and why some c

not found anyw

very long time

colonial adve

of the South

the Portugues

their culture

heartland of

had to fight

as a result o

colonialists,

in some of th

people. For

Cibio-Annang

parts of Ibib

minor differe

into the rese

ties tended t

in such cases

(23) Secret society — society that is ritualistic with membership regulations.

(24) Chief — Headman of a village.

(25) Backbeat — same as iambic rhythm

Conclusion

It is possible that one of the reasons why the Ibibios were able to maintain their traditions for such a long time, and why some of the cultures found among the Ibibios are not found anywhere else in Nigeria, is the fact that for a very long time they were cut off from the influences of colonial adventurers. The Efiks of Calabar in the island of the South Eastern State came into early contact with the Portuguese around the sixteenth century and as a result their culture suffered severe acculturation. To reach the heartland of the Ibibios, the British expeditionary force had to fight fierce battles with the Annangs; and possibly as a result of having come into contact first with the colonialists, we find that there is a slight difference in some of the Ibibio customs as practiced by the Annang people. For example, Ekpo masquerade as practiced by the Ibibio-Annangs is slightly different from that of other parts of Ibibioland; and in this study of Ekpo music these minor differences have been recognized and incorporated into the research. It was also noticed that some communities tended to have a local name for a musical instrument; in such cases, the widely used name has been recorded.

but at all tim
have been of u

Also of

what is known
tional music
harmonies fou
results of th
of sprechstim
call and res
instrumental
for which St
bone of Afri

This is
eyes of the
the music o
the author
which could
and African
music is o

14 See
sity Press

But at all times, the functions of the different instruments have been of more concern than terminology.

Also of great interest have been the parallels between what is known in western music as modern music and the traditional music of the Ibibios, e.g. the sometimes unconscious harmonies found in Bartok String Quartets which are the results of the movements of the individual parts; the use of sprechstimme commonly associated with Schoenberg; the call and response vocal patterns similar to the Baroque instrumental ripieno and concertino; and the polyrhythms for which Stravinsky became famous and which form the backbone of African instrumental music.

This is a study of Ibibio music as seen through the eyes of the author who is himself an Ibibio. It is not the music of all Nigeria; but this research has convinced the author that there are many aspects of Ibibio music which could be applied to Nigerian music in particular and African music in general. As Stravinsky puts it, music is order[14] and Ibibio music certainly has order.

---

[14]See Stravinsky, Poetics of Music. (Harvard University Press, 1947), p. 6.

IBIBIO MUSIC

Curt Sachs

stringed instru

struck or shaken

a skin), aeropho

electronic inst

nicely into the

instruments int

and brass (aero

difficulty aris

instruments rig

is a idiophone

differ from tha

struck. A xylo

instances of p

a wooden drum'

since it is ca

functions only

into one categ

does not there

[1] Curt Sa
(New York; W.

CHAPTER II

IBIBIO MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

Curt Sachs divides world instruments into chordophones (stringed instruments), idiophones (instruments that are struck or shaken), membranophones (instruments covered with a skin), aerophones (wind instruments) and electronophones (electronic instruments).[1] This classification fits in nicely into the European conception of dividing orchestral instruments into groups of strings (chordophones), woodwind and brass (aerophones) and percussion (idiophones). The difficulty arises when we try to group African musical instruments rigidly into this classification. A xylophone is a idiophone because it is struck; but its functions differ from that of a wooden drum or skin drum which is also struck. A xylophone has purely melodic functions capable in instances of producing all the notes of a heptatonic scale; a wooden drum's function is rhythmic with melodic overtones since it is capable of producing two tones whilst a skin drum functions only rhythmically. Lumping all these instruments into one category in the study of African musical instruments does not therefore lead to fruitful conclusions.

---

[1]Curt Sachs. The History of Musical Instruments. (New York; W. W. Norton and Co., 1940), pp. 455-467.

Sachs's c

a world musica

it is the writ

have to be vie

melodic functi

The whistle sc

ment which pe

song which is

together. Ag

people of Nor

producing mel

Zos of East

suggested cl

xylophone an

with the ski

is a kind o

skin drums

According t

a membranop

melodic fu

xylophone,

It i

with rhyth

a distinc

ments. T

instrumen

Sachs's classification as a starting point of looking at world musical instruments will suffice; but specifically, it is the writer's view that African musical instruments have to be viewed from two points: (a) instruments with melodic functions and (b) instruments with rhythmic functions. The whistle so widely used in Ibibio music is a wind instrument which performs purely rhythmic functions rather like the gong which is struck. The two instruments should be grouped together. Again, the five-stop flute used by the Hausa people of Northern Nigeria (Algaita) is played melodically producing melodic rhythm, whereas the two-stop flute of the Ibos of Eastern Nigeria (Oja) is used rhythmically. In the suggested classification, Algaita would be grouped with the xylophone and one-string fiddle whereas Oja would be grouped with the skin drum and woodblock. Among the Ibibios there is a kind of xylophone whose notes are produced from tiny skin drums tuned to the pentatonic scale called Ikon Ikpa. According to Sachs, this instrument would be classified as a membranophone because of its skin covering; but it fulfills melodic functions and should be classified with the wooden xylophone, which is an idiophone.

It is here being further suggested that instruments with rhythmic functions be subdivided into drums which have a distinct place in African music and other rhythmic instruments. The complete classification of African musical instruments would therefore be: (a) instruments with

melodic functio

(c) Drums. Ibi

chapter will be

Apart fro

tal music, drum

special study

special functi

principal vari

pot drum, (c)

wooden drum.

and character

In

This is

open end and

closed. Thi

is capable o

as an obblig

be used as a

declamations

out of an e

horn) and t

royalty or

---

[2]For

Instrumenta

thesis, Tri

melodic functions; (b) Instruments with rhythmic functions; (c) Drums. Ibibio musical instruments discussed in this chapter will be examined from these three perspectives.

Apart from being the foundation of African instrumental music, drums come in so many varieties that only a special study of each variety will do justice to their special functions. In Nigeria, for example, there are five principal varieties of drums in use:[2] (a) skin drum, (b) pot drum, (c) calabash drum, (d) hourglass drum, and (e) wooden drum. Each drum differs in shape, tone, function and character.

Instruments with Melodic Functions

Oduk (Transverse Horn)

This is usually made from the horn of a deer with one open end and a blowing hole near the other end which is closed. This instrument, played only by master musicians, is capable of producing up to four tones used by the player as an obbligato to an orchestral ensemble. It can also be used as a solo instrument to punctuate statements or declamations by a cantor or chief. When the horn is made out of an elephant tusk it is known as Akua Oduk (large horn) and traditionally this instrument is only played by royalty or for royal occasions. Among the Onitsha Ibos

---

[2]For a description of these drums see Samuel Akpabot, Instrumentation in African Music (Unpublished Fellowship Thesis, Trinity College of Music, London, 1959), pp. 31-41.

f Eastern Niger

ach have an ele

eremonies as a

n Uta orchestra

male uta) is pl

being that one i

ther of calabas

figures as the I

he author did

ration and no

mong the Ibibi

he absence of

limitation of

trong suspici

raditional cu

ountry throug

These a

mong the Ibi

Most times th

to songs and

in such a way

Ikon Eto is a

banana stems.

vary and some

rather like

of Eastern Nigeria, the chiefs at the King's (Obi) palace each have an elephant tusk horn which they display during ceremonies as a symbol of power and play on occasionally. In Uta orchestras, the principal horn called Akpan Uta (male uta) is played in same way as the Oduk, the difference being that one instrument is made of an animal horn and the other of calabash. The Ibibios do not possess any wooden flutes as the Ibos and the Hausas do; where they do (which the author did not come across) it is as a result of acculturation and not traditional. All melodic instruments among the Ibibios are of the horn variety. Judging from the absence of flutes among the Yorubas also and the limitation of Ibo flutes (only two stops), there is a strong suspicion that melodic flutes are foreign to Nigerian traditional culture and were probably brought into the country through Arabic migration.

Ikon Eto (Wooden Xylophone)
Ikon Ikpa (Drum Xylophone)

These are the two main types of xylophones found among the Ibibios; and they both fulfill the same functions. Most times they are used to supply melodic accompaniment to songs and orchestras; at other times they are played in such a way as to convey messages like the talking drum. Ikon Eto is a series of tuned slabs placed across two banana stems. The number of slabs on any given xylophone vary and some have been known to have as many as fifteen, rather like the Kundun xylophone found in Northern Nigeria.

either one or
player suppl
instrument a
the two, imp

During
across a xy
to the note
during his
the D sharp
there as a
the solos
and E. A
perhaps th
he had de
was not a
of a nine
scale by
and cons
the note
easily c
tuned to
not true
to the
made be
those t
instrum

Either one or else two people can play on a xylophone--one player supplying an ostinato at the bottom half of the instrument and the other, usually the more skillful of the two, improvising over this.

During the course of this research, this writer came across a xylophone with only four slabs which were tuned to the notes, C,D,D sharp, E. The curious thing was that during his performance, the xylophonist very rarely used the D sharp which led one to believe that it was perhaps there as a tuning guide rather than a musical note. All the solos he played were centered around the notes C, D and E. A conversation with the musician disclosed that perhaps the instrument was not authentic but was just one he had designed himself for his own personal use. This was not an isolated case as there was yet another instance of a nine-tone xylophone tuned to the western diatonic scale by a musician who had been trained by the church and constructed that instrument to enable him to reproduce the notes in his Anglican church hymnal. One could easily conclude from this evidence that there are xylophones tuned to the diatonic scale in Ibibio music; but this is not true as all the other xylophones examined were tuned to the pentatonic scale. A clear distinction has to be made between unadulterated traditional instruments and those that have been specially constructed by an ingeneous instrument maker to serve nontraditional purposes. There

are, in fact,

xylophones tes

as having four

scale regardl

Ikon Ikp

pentatonic sc

drums played

the number of

still tuned

used like a

orchestral p

Ibibios make

the melodies

rise or fal

these speec

invariably

At no time

This

do use the

goes to su

"

Afric

emplo

penta

pent

3 Hug

African M

are, in fact, some semitones in Ibibio music but all the xylophones tested, with the exception of the one mentioned as having four notes, were tuned mostly to the pentatonic scale regardless of the number of slabs on the instruments.

Ikon Ikpa consists of small skin drums tuned to the pentatonic scale. There is generally a minimum of five drums played by one person; although in one or two cases the number of drums was found to be more than five but still tuned to the pentatonic scale. This instrument is used like a talking drum to send messages rather than for orchestral purposes. In their singing, though, the Ibibios make use of the heptatonic scale because some of the melodies are derived from speech inflections which can rise or fall to any degree of the scale; trying to restrict these speech melodies to the pentatonic scale, would invariably distort the true meaning of the words of a song. At no time do these melodies use semitones.

This means that the Ibibios as a pentatonic people do use the heptatonic scale in some of their music which goes to support Hugh Tracy when he writes that

> ". . .it is clear, therefore that a few African communities may not recognise or employ a single scale. . . .A naturally pentatonic people may sing not only in pentatonic modes, but in several modes."[3]

---

[3]Hugh Tracy, "Towards an Assessment of African Scales," African Music, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1958), p. 16.

The thu

South Africa

it is played

in different

version, like

strips strapp

hollowed-out

by the finge

tuned to the

It is not us

over which t

voice. This

to the hept

to be tuned

Gong

are all co

gongs join

gong is th

4 See

Musical In

dissertat

Ikpa Mboto (Thumb piano)

The thumb piano is used all over Africa and in South Africa where it is known as the Sanza or Mbira it is played with great dexterity. This instrument comes in different shapes in parts of Africa; but the Ibibio version, like the Ibo version,[4] is made of tuned metal strips strapped over a wooden board which is placed over a hollowed-out calabas (gourd). The instrument is supported by the fingers of both hands, and the notes (which are tuned to the heptatonic scale) plucked with the thumbs. It is not used orchestrally, but produces melodic rhythm over which the player tells a story in a singing-speaking voice. This is probably the only Ibibio instrument tuned to the heptatonic scale. All the others tested were found to be tuned to the pentatonic scale.

Instruments with Rhythmic Functions

Nkwong (Large Gong)
Akankan (Twin Gong)
Ekere (Ritual Gong)

Gongs in Ibibio music come in different sizes but are all conical in shape. Twin gongs are like two small gongs joined together at the tip. Next to the drum the gong is the most frequently used in Ibibio music. It is

---

[4]See William Wilberforce Chukudinka Echezona, Ibo Musical Instruments in Ibo Culture (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1963), pp. 90-108.

ery prominent i

an be used as a

ppearance of a

effects.

Twin gongs

a minor third o

ost widely use

rue of gongs f

gong used speci

<u>Ekere</u>. It is s

nd when struck

t from the or

o imitate the

peak in false

<u>Ekere</u> gong is

ery flexible

t a time and

attern withi

he twin gong

Rattle

ibbio music

n Nigeria.

arieties--s

ut both hav

very prominent in the music of secret societies, where it can be used as a solo instrument to announce the impending appearance of a masquerader or orchestrally for coloristic effects.

Twin gongs in Nigeria are tuned to a major second, a minor third or a perfect fifth; among the Ibibios, the most widely used interval is the second. This is also true of gongs found in the Ibo area. A variety of the gong used specifically for Ekong Ekpo music is known as Ekere. It is shaped like a single gong only much smaller and when struck produces a squeeky sound that distinguishes it from the ordinary gong. This typical sound is designed to imitate the voice of the spirits who are supposed to speak in falsetto voices. An outstanding feature of the Ekere gong is that when used orchestrally, its rhythm is very flexible and not fixed. It is played by many people at a time and each player improvises his own rhythmic pattern within the strict time signature of the music. The twin gong Akankan is also known as Nkerude.

Nsak (Rattle)
Ekput (Ritual Rattle)
Ntung (Foot Rattle)
Ekpat Obon (Ritual Rattle)

Rattles, like gongs, play a very prominent part in Ibibio music. Generally, rattles come in many varieties in Nigeria. Among the Yorubas of the West, there are two varieties--Sekere (small rattle) and Agbe (large rattle)--but both have the same structure: a gourd with beads

strung around i
nd Ibibios use
oven like a ba
effect. Nsak,
re used princ
played solo.
nd children w
s well as rhy
ther hand, ar
haped like a
nside it for
t is played
d libitum--i
usic rather
layed in sec
nto the Obor
plies (Ekpa
ade by filli
attling sou
Ntung
asqueraders
dd musical
r a virgin
eople of th
hat Ekput,
or the wors
he same fur

strung around it to produce a rattling sound. The Ibos and Ibibios use a type of rattle made of small containers woven like a basket with stones inside them for rattling effect. Nsak, as these rattles are known in Ibibioland, are used principally in ceremonial orchestras and seldom played solo. They feature prominently in music for women and children where they are used chiefly for coloristic as well as rhythmic effect. Ekput and Ekpat Obon, on the other hand, are rattles used for ritual music. Ekput is shaped like a small hourglass with two small sticks tied inside it for rattling effect. Like Ekere described above, it is played by many members of a secret society at a time ad libitum--its chief function being to add color to the music rather than rhythm per se. Ekpat Obon is always played in secret and must only be seen by those initiated into the Obon secret society that uses it. As its name implies (Ekpat in Ibibio means "bag") it is an instrument made by filling a small bag with stones which produce a rattling sound when the bag is shaken.

Ntung is a rattle worn on the ankles by dancers, masqueraders and virgins. When used by dancers, it is to add musical color to a performance; when used by masqueraders or a virgin just out of the fattening room, it is to warn people of their approach. It is rather interesting to note that Ekput, the ritual rattle, is also used in Hindu music for the worship of ancestral gods in India, where it serves the same functions as in Ibibio society, making us wonder

hether there i

ocieties. Be

se the Ekput

nly found in

ot found in a

The mos

Dibio music

tandard rhyt

ell Rhythm,

o find other

n the transc

omen's musi

or this mus

hythm which

ent comes i

alled Nkpor

he gong, to

mportant ar

Ekpe

aists duri

hich is sh

f her appr

whether there is any cultural connection between the two societies. Because Idiong and Obon secret societies which use the Ekput and Ekpat Obon rattles in their music are only found in Ibibioland, these musical instruments are not found in any other part of Nigeria.

Ntakorok (Small Woodblock)
Nkporo (Large Woodblock)

The most interesting feature of the woodblock in Ibibio music is that in most cases, it takes over the standard rhythm of the gong known all over Africa as the Bell Rhythm, leaving the gong free, in orchestral ensembles, to find other rhythms to play. A good example of this is in the transcription of the rhythmic patterns in Ebre women's music discussed later. There are three gongs used for this music and none of them plays the traditional bell rhythm which they all leave to the woodblock. This instrument comes in small and large sizes and the larger type is called Nkporo. It is also sometimes played solo, like the gong, to attract the attention of villagers before an important announcement by the town crier.

Nkanika (Bell)
Ifiom (Whistle)
Nyoro (Tiny Bell)

Ekpe and Obon masqueraders always tie a bell to their waists during their outing ceremonies. The bell, Nkanika, which is shaped like a European school bell, warns the people of her approach.

Ikw

Stringe
extinct, if e
but in ritual
found trying
Stringed musi
also rare; a
instruments,
Nigeria, got
The Hausas h
Libios, who
would at bes
Igwot as its
imitates th
this instru
Igri Akata
away from h
coloristic
rhythmic p

The
(a) skin
the woode
sizes, t
and size

Ikwot (Instrument Imitating the Frog)
Anana (Musical Bow)

Stringed instruments among the Ibibios have become extinct, if ever they were present in the community at all. But in ritual music, the musical bow, Anana, can still be found trying to fulfill the functions of a string orchestra. Stringed musical instruments among the Yorubas and Ibos are also rare; and there is the possibility that stringed instruments, which are common among the Hausas of Northern Nigeria, got into the country through the advent of Islam. The Hausas have a delicacy of touch not found among the Ibibios, who are vigorous people; and a stringed instrument would at best be considered too feminine among the community. Ikwot as its name implies is a musical instrument which imitates the sound of a frog. It was not possible to examine this instrument at close quarters because it is played by Ekpri Akata members who only operate in the night hours away from human scrutiny. It is an instrument used for coloristic effect and does not contribute to the strict rhythmic pattern of the music.

Drums

There are three types of drums in Ibibio music: (a) skin drum, (b) wooden drum and (c) pot drum. Whereas the wooden and pot drums come either in large or small sizes, the skin drums come in several different shapes and sizes. Drums in the Ibibio tradition are conceptualized

families o

female dr

this concept

also conceive

and in the wo

used are call

rum), Emele

family concep

being inflect

a drum choir

rum, low pit

cases, there

begotten all

been how this

and orchestra

other Ekpo,

Charter of U

born Uta and

conclude tha

orchestral m

is of some s

as a culture

an ideal fam

and sister.

different pi

astute use o

in families of four: mother drum, father drum, male drum and female drum; and together they form a drum choir. But this concept is not peculiar to the Ibibios. The Yorubas also conceive their drums as a family of four in many cases; and in the worship of the god of thunder, Sango, the drums used are called Iya Ilu Bata (mother drum), Emele Ako (male drum), Emele Abo (female drum), and Kudi (baby drum). This family concept is also tied to the idea of Nigerian speech being inflectionary with high, low and medium tones. Thus a drum choir can also be seen as mother drum, high pitched drum, low pitched drum and medium pitched drum. In all cases, there is a mother figure that is supposed to have begotten all these other drums. In Ibibio music we have seen how this concept is also carried to secret societies and orchestral music. The Ekpo masquerade groups have mother Ekpo, father Ekpo, male Ekpo and female Ekpo; and a quarter of Uta horns has mother Uta, first born Uta, second born Uta and third born Uta. From all this we can safely conclude that the number four as it relates to Nigerian orchestral music in general and Ibibio music in particular is of some significance; we can also use the number four as a culture indicator to conclude that among the Ibibios, an ideal family was made up of father, mother, brother and sister. We can also view the use of four drums with different pitches as a pointer to the Ibibio musician's astute use of tone color in his music.

The dr

sentative of

all these dr

Bid[5] (large

will reveal

same pattern

and by the s

attached to

bolts for tu

two-tone dru

at the end o

wooden bolts

drums, with

as Ekomo; an

groups they

the tall thi

Ekomo drums

The tw

Ibibio ritua

---

[5]The I
sing exactl
other while
though the c
drum is a bi
is the power
Ekpo masquer

Ibid (Skin Drums)

The drums pictured on the next three pages are representative of most of the skin drums used in Ibibio music. All these drums are referred to generally either as Eka Ibid[5] (large drum) or Etok Ibid (small drum). A closer look will reveal that these drums are all constructed in the same pattern--a hollowed-out tree trunk covered on one end by the skin of a wild animal; strands of rope are attached to the end of the skin and nailed down with wooden bolts for tuning purposes. Sometimes, as in the case of two-tone drums, both ends of the wood are covered by skin. At the end of a performance, the musician slackens the wooden bolts to relieve the tension on the skin. All these drums, with the exception of the tall thin ones, are known as Ekomo; and in the instrumentation for various orchestral groups they are referred to as small Ekomo or large Ekomo. The tall thin drums are called Nting and some varieties of Ekomo drums are called Mkporo.

The two drums on page 27 are very significant in Ibibio ritual music. The three-legged drum, the only one

---

[5]The Ibibio word Eka can mean either mother or large using exactly the same inflection. Thus Eka Ekpo means mother while Eka Ibid means large drum. In both instances though the concept of power is present. Eka Ibid--large drum is a big powerful sounding drum; Eka Ekpo--mother Ekpo is the powerful mother figure that begets all the other Ekpo masquerades.

Plate 1. Six drums used in ritual music. The tall drum on the right is called Nting; the others are known collectively as Ekomo.

Plate 2.

Plate 2. Nsing Obon (three-legged drum) used for Obon masquerade music and Ibid Ekpo, drum used for Ekpo masquerade music.

Plate 3. Small and large drum used for ritual music.

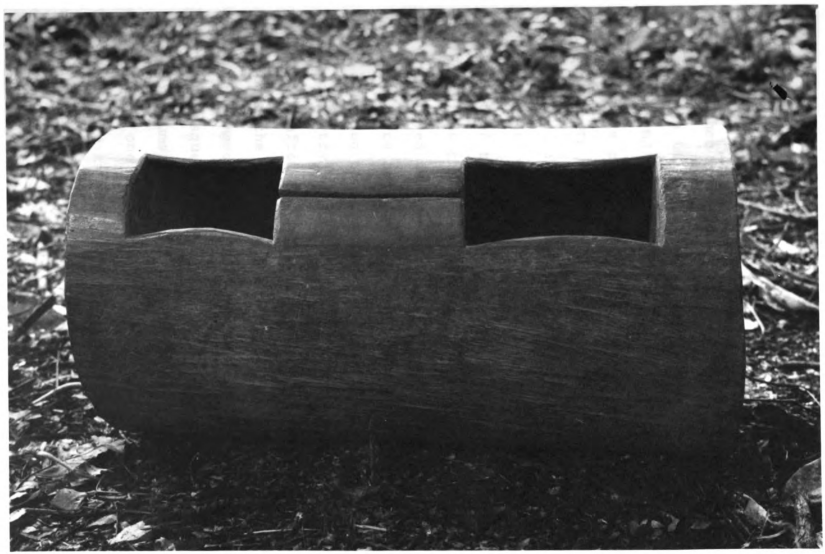


Plate 4. Obodom, the wooden drum producing two tones.

of its kind, is

a prominent mem

two sizes--very

along with oth

very large one

Ubon society a

second drum

and is used b

When used as

the Ekpo soci

by the Chief

Sometim

sizes are pla

who uses the

all the drum

the musician

by naming it

thus we have

for Eka Ekpo

Ekong Ekpo

Twin

one person

These drums

both ends

when the m

drums are

Ebre music

of its kind, is called Nsing Obon and is only played when a prominent member of the Obon society dies. It comes in two sizes--very large and small. The small drum is played along with other instruments of the Obon orchestra; the very large one is kept at the house of the leader of the Obon society and played occasionally as indicated. The second drum is called Ibid Ekpo or Nkrong Ekpo (Ekpo drum) and is used both orchestrally and as a solo instrument. When used as a solo instrument it is played by a member of the Ekpo society who walks around to make an announcement by the Chief of the village.

Sometimes three Nting (tall thin drums) of varying sizes are played at once by a special village musician who uses them to announce the death of a warrior. Since all the drums on page 26 are used for different masquerades, the musicians try to distinguish the functions of each one by naming it after the masquerade for which it is used; thus we have the same drum called Ibid Eka Ekpo (drum used for Eka Ekpo masquerade) or Ibid Ekong Ekpo (drum used for Ekong Ekpo masquerade).

Twin drums can either be two small drums played by one person or one drum covered on both ends with skin. These drums are known as Mima Ubok Ibid when covered on both ends and played hung around the neck, or Aqua Isong when the musician sits at two drums to play on them. Twin drums are used prominently in Oko music played by men and Ebre music performed by women.

This is

in such a way

sizes and is

producing int

perfect fifth

be played eit

musician in t

of the villag

Whereas you

you cannot h

This musical

and Kalabari

large open e

end. It is

striking the

the small ho

a flat instr

strike the

functions wh

in large an

ensemble is

6For

Keith Nickl

Vol. VII, (A

Obodom (Wooden Drum)

This is a slit drum, a hollowed-out tree trunk made in such a way as to produce two tones. It comes in different sizes and is played with two beaters made out of bamboo producing intervals of a major second, a minor third or a perfect fifth which is the least commonly found. It can be played either as a solo instrument by a specialist musician in the village to transmit messages from the Chief of the village, or in groups of two or three in an orchestra. Whereas you can have an orchestra comprising only skin drums, you cannot have an orchestra of wooden drums only.

Abang (Pot Drum)[6]

This musical instrument is peculiar to the Ibibio, Ibo and Kalabari people of Nigeria. It is a pitcher with one large open end and a small hole at the side near the open end. It is capable of emitting two muffled tones by striking the large open end with the palm of one hand and the small hole with the palm of the other hand. Sometimes a flat instrument made of rafia called Ifiot is used to strike the small hole. This is an instrument with rhythmic functions which is played by women only. Pot drums come in large and small sizes and their number in any given ensemble is variable.

---

[6]For details of how this instrument is constructed see, Keith Nicklin, "The Ibibio Musical Pot" African Arts, Vol. VII, (Autumn, 1973), pp. 50-55..

It is p

nd function

ay be lost

1. The
   use
   of
   pla
2. Hor
   fol
   bro
3. Two
   the
   Bot
4. Thr
   sin
   is
   thi
5. Thr
   rat
   Onl
6. Thr
   dru
   com
   but
   woo
   tun

Summary

It is possible that this discussion on the organization and functions of the musical instruments of the Ibibios may be lost in a maze of names; so to recapitulate:

1. There are no flutes in Ibibio music; horns are used instead and these are made from the tusk of an elephant or the horn of deer. Only royalty plays on the elephant tusk horn.
2. Horn orchestras are organized in groups of four following a family system of mother, father, brother and sister.
3. Two types of xylophones exist among the Ibibios, the wooden xylophone and the skin xylophone. Both are tuned to the pentatonic scale.
4. Three types of gongs exist, the twin-gong, the single gong and the ritual gong. The twin-gong is tuned to intervals of a major second, a minor third or a perfect fifth.
5. Three types of rattles are in use, the ritual rattle, the foot rattle and the hand rattle. Only the hand rattle is used in orchestral groups.
6. Three types of drums exist--skin drum, wooden drum and pot drum. You can have an orchestra composed entirely of skin drums or pot drums but never wooden drums. The two tones of the wooden drum, like those of the twin-gong, are tuned to intervals of a second, third or fifth.

7. Women
cultur
8. Drums
and wh
the m
9. Skin
in fo
of th
10. Both
with

7. Women play only pot drums in traditional Ibibio culture; never skin or wooden drums.
8. Drums are referred to either as small or large; and when used for ritual music are named after the masquerade for which they are played.
9. Skin drum groups, like horn groups, are conceived in fours with the largest (and most talkative) of the group known as mother drum.
10. Both the pentatonic scale and the heptatonic scale with semitones exist in Ibibio instrumental music.

The Ibi

hat the spir

he form of E

ocial contro

he British c

f Ekpo socie

nstance, the

and cultivat

f the Ekpo s

n an Ekpo dr

he people an

announcement,

lanted at th

o one would

radition has

would be foun

victim of the

[1] See Da

Speaking Peop

niversity Pr

CHAPTER III

MASQUERADE MUSIC

Ekpo Masquerade

The Ibibios believe in reincarnation. They believe that the spirits of their ancestors usually come back in the form of Ekpo (spirit) to help in the government and social control of their community. Before the advent of the British colonialists in Ibibioland in 1903,[1] the laws of Ekpo society were the laws of the community. If, for instance, the chief of a village did not want a piece of land cultivated for some time, he would send out a musician of the Ekpo society who would go round the village playing on an Ekpo drum (Ibid Ekpo) to attract the attention of the people and announce the chief's decision. After the announcement, a branch from a palm tree (Eyet) would be planted at the entrance to the reserved piece of land and no one would ever dare to cross that mark; if he did, tradition has it that he would never come back alive but would be found dead under mysterious circumstances, a victim of the ancestral spirits.

---

[1]See Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria. (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 68.

Secret

nd what make

usic and dan

re allowed t

ocieties are

t is signifi

he whole con

bservers cal

ll secret so

he secret ri

The ori

tional legend

"The Eg
but in
strengt
whom th
play th
the usu
complet
for any
pierce
intrude

t is perhaps

llowed at al

heir actual

s limited to

2 Ritual

ean concern
onfused with

3 P. Ama
agic, Belief
acmillan and

Secret societies in Ibibioland are usually ritualistic;[2] and what makes them secret is that at some point in their music and dancing, only the initiated members of the society are allowed to take part in the ceremonies. These secret societies are known as Mbre Idem (music of the spirits). It is significant to note that the people themselves call the whole concept of ancestor-worship music whereas western observers call them secret societies. To the Ibibio people all secret societies are really musical experiences with the secret rites serving only as general rules for admission.

The origin of Ekpo masquerade is shrouded in traditional legend. Talbot tells us:

> "The Egbo cult was first a women's society; but in course of time men, glorying in their strength, wrested its secrets from those to whom they were first entrusted and learned to play the rites for themselves. Gradually, the usurping male drove out the women so completely that a death penalty was proclaimed for any such who should dare to attempt to pierce its mysteries or even become unwitting intruders upon its rites."[3]

It is perhaps on the basis of this legend that women are allowed at all to become members of the society, although their actual participation in the affairs of the society is limited to being allowed to watch an Ekpo masquerader

---

[2] Ritualistic here and in all future references will mean concern with the supernatural; this is not to be confused with the colloquial use.

[3] P. Amaury Talbot, Life in Southern Nigeria: The Magic, Beliefs and Customs of the Ibibio Tribe. (London; MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1923), p. 162.

ithout being
he special a
hey are forbi
he Ekpo musi

The num
is very stron
join the Ekpo
n the ground
from an allig
is led throug
community is
before he ca
into all the
he number t
spirit of th
he name of
umber thirt
is supposed
It seems tha
people in ar
and odd numb
and three--a
men (out).
plays when a
usually a na
witch doctor
in the worst

without being molested, and helping to cook food and prepare the special arena where an Ekpo performance takes place. They are forbidden to wear a masquerade or play on any of the Ekpo musical instruments.

The number significance in the music of the spirits is very strong in Ibibio tradition. Before anyone can join the Ekpo society, the high priest draws seven circles on the ground with his left foot; he then drops seven seeds from an alligator pepper in each circle and the novitiate is led through the seven circles. A powerful man in the community is nick-named Eren Itiaba (seven men in one); but before he can earn that name he must have been initiated into all the known ritualistic secret cults in the area. The number three is also significant in that to invoke the spirit of the ancestral gods, the high priest has to intone the name of the god three times. Also significant is the number thirteen. In the western world, the number thirteen is supposed to be unlucky, but not so in Ibibio traditions. It seems that without actually conceptualizing it, the people in ancient times could differentiate between even and odd numbers. Thirteen is an odd number--as is seven and three--and a powerful man in the community is an odd man (out). For example, the Ekpem Ekpem orchestra only plays when a prominent heathen in the village dies. He is usually a native doctor, whom western writers refer to as witch doctor, or a non-Christian who has spent a lifetime in the worship and practice of the ancient traditions of

Plate 5. Ekpo Masquerader in full regalia. The cutlass is for slashing at a nonmember of the Ekpo society whom he comes in contact with.

is people. Th

usicians. No

There are

about fifteen a

ekpo); (2) Ete

ekpo); (4) Ubo

elongated ekp

Ekpo Ndok (fun

(9) Atat Ekpo

(11) Akpan Ebe

Ekpo (lazy ekp

(14) Odo Odion

natural ekpo).

Knowing

asquerades i

behind their

times individ

supposed to b

also interest

like some mus

into families

initiated in

money plus s

the number s

30, she beco

its amenitie

to parade as

his people. The Ekpem Ekpem orchestra employs only thirteen musicians. No more.

There are many varieties of Ekpo societies of which about fifteen are easily identifiable: (1) Eka Ekpo (mother ekpo); (2) Ete Ekpo (father ekpo); (3) Ayara Ekpo (male ekpo); (4) Ubo Ikpa Ekpo (female ekpo); (5) Ekong Ekpo (elongated ekpo); (6) Ekpo Nyogo (ubiquitous ekpo); (7) Ekpo Ndok (fun-poking ekpo); (8) Ikpe Ekpo (foremost ekpo); (9) Atat Ekpo (bee ekpo); (10) Inuen Ekpo (bird ekpo); (11) Akpan Ebe Ekpo (son of foremost ekpo); (12) Inyon Ekpo (lazy ekpo); (13) Okpok Odo Oko Ekpo (lizard ekpo); (14) Odo Odiong (blessed ekpo); (15) Idiong Ekpo (super-natural ekpo).

Knowing the names of all these varieties of Ekpo masquerades is not as important as knowing the principles behind their organization and their collective (and sometimes individual) functions. All the Ekpo groups are supposed to be a reincarnation of dead ancestors. It is also interesting to note the organization of various groups, like some musical instruments we have already come across, into families of mother, father, son and daughter. To be initiated into any of the Ekpo societies, you pay some money plus seven jars of palm wine--another reference to the number significance. When a woman attains the age of 30, she becomes eligible to join the Ekpo society and enjoy its amenities and immunities, although she is never allowed to parade as a masquerader. An Ekpo masquerade usually

aints himse
with strands
looking mask
utlass with
tead of a ma
ut dared to

Specia
for example,
ship of Ikpe
sed for the
gong, rattle
Ekpo masquer
Nkwong, beco
usic) when

Not ev
usic, and n
of the vario
(2) woodbloc
are commonly
absence of a
significant;
all with an
woodblock an
Idiong socie
as Okpon Idi
societies.

paints himself very black with charcoal, covers himself with strands of rafia matting and places a black, ugly-looking mask over his face. He carries a razor-sharp cutlass with which, in the olden days, he could sever the head of a man or woman who was not initiated into the cult but dared to stay and stare him in the face.

Special drums are named after the various Ekpo groups; for example, Ibid Ikpe Ekpo means a drum used for the worship of Ikpe Ekpo; and Ibid Ekong Ekpo means a drum (ibid) used for the worship of Ekong Ekpo. Instruments like the gong, rattle and horn when used in the music of a particular Ekpo masquerader are named after it; thus the gong known as Nkwong, becomes Nkwong, Ekpo Nyogo (gong for Ekpo Nyogo music) when used in that context.

Not every instrument in Ibibioland is used for Ekpo music, and not all instrumentations are alike. A survey of the various instrumentations shows that only (1) gong, (2) woodblock, (3) wooden drum, (4) drum and (5) rattle are commonly in use in Ekpo music. There is a notable absence of any blowing instrument, which is unique and significant; and in Idiong music no skin drums are used at all with an instrumentation made up of wooden drum, gong, woodblock and a special kind of rattle. Members of the Idiong society wear a special kind of black crown known as Okpon Idiong which distinguishes them from other secret societies.

Ekong El

youths freely

can be initia

with its laws

societies. I

with an instr

1. Obo

2. Nta

3. Mkp

4. Eka

5. Nsa

Ekong Ekpo is

Akan, (2) Utu

and (6) Obio

initiated int

become a memb

of the coloni

specially pre

had been buil

a piece of cl

By joi

duced to drur

musicians gre

of the societ

a traditiona

4John

rites of Eko

Vol., XLl, (

Ekong Ekpo[4] is a branch of the secret society where youths freely participate. Youths from the age of eight can be initiated into this society, which is more flexible with its laws and entrance requirements than the other societies. Its music is also performed more frequently, with an instrumentation consisting of:

1. Obodom (wooden drum)
2. Ntakorok (woodblock)
3. Mkporo (large woodblock)
4. Eka Ibid (large drum)
5. Nsak (rattle)

Ekong Ekpo is subdivided into six little groups: (1) Udo Akan, (2) Utudo, (3) Eka Efut, (4) Ada Usung, (5) Oko Okot and (6) Obio Akpan; and unlike the other Ekpo groups, when initiated into one of these little groups you automatically become a member of the other groups. Before the advent of the colonialists this masquerade was performed at a specially prepared clearing in the bush where a shrine had been built; the entrance to the shrine was covered with a piece of cloth called Mbang Ekong.

By joining the Ekong society, young people were introduced to drumming, singing and dancing and future master musicians grew out of this group; thus one of the functions of the society was affording the young a chance to acquire a traditional music education.

---

[4]John C. Messenger gives a detailed description of the rites of Ekong Ekpo in his article "Ibibio Drama," Africa, Vol., XL1, (July 1971), pp. 208-22.

Plate 6. Ekong Ekpo masquerade during a performance. This is the society that initiates young boys from the age of eight upwards.

Ekpe in

is a ritualis

initiation ar

most ferociou

why it was us

leopard is k

not allowed

originally c

ethnic group

let the Ibib

Today Ekpe r

and in the

society. I

draw water

masquerader

tell their

and built a

the people

There

a leader k

to have be

(1) Nya Nk

Akama, (6)

Ekondo, (1

Iyamba soc

groups.

Ekpe Masquerade

Ekpe in Ibibio dialect means leopard. Like Ekpo it is a ritualistic society with elaborate ceremonies for initiation and continued membership. The leopard is the most ferocious beast in the Ibibio area which is probably why it was used as a symbol for the society. Whenever a leopard is killed, its face is always covered as women are not allowed to look at it. Tradition has it that Ekpe originally came from a place called Usangade where the Efot ethnic group live in the island of Calabar; it was they who let the Ibibio people of Uruan into the secrets of the cult. Today Ekpe masquerade is played both in the Ibibio area and in the island of Calabar. Legend also surrounds this society. It is believed that women going to a stream to draw water were the first people to meet with an Ekpe masquerader standing near the stream; they rushed home to tell their menfolk who went there and brought Ekpe home and built a shrine for him to live. He has remained among the people ever since.

There are in all twelve varieties of the society under a leader known as Eka Ekpe (mother Ekpe) who is supposed to have begotten all the other Ekpes. The twelve groups are: (1) Nya Nkpe, (2) Mboko, (3) Okpogo, (4) Ebonko, (5) Akua Akama, (6) Nkanda, (7) Bakara, (8) Nse, (9) Ibang, (10) Ekondo, (11) Akpab, (12) Eyamba. Anyone initiated into the Eyamba society is exempted from joining any of the other groups.

It cost

into the Ekpe

timally had

plenty of fis

and hot drink

him and place

where he was

sent home, to

himself to an

to the market

the society,

known as Urua

plenty of win

society at th

With th

for the new m

pays some mon

room at the s

him. The ent

piece of clot

uninitiated p

is like the h

Once he is ac

a full-fledge

5The m

by the Ibibi

of exchange

It costs a lot in money and materials to be initiated into the Ekpe society. The person to be initiated traditionally had to pay 100 manilla,[5] slaughter a goat, provide plenty of fish known as Ukang Iyak and plenty of palm wine and hot drink (alcohol). The next step was to blindfold him and place him on a special stone at the Ekpe shrine where he was covered with feathers (Ntankanda) and eventually sent home, to remain there for one week without showing himself to anyone. After this period, his wife was escorted to the market by other women who had been initiated into the society, on a special day set aside for Ekpe ceremonies known as Urua Ekpe (Ekpe market day). She carries with her plenty of wine and fish to entertain other members of the society at the market.

With this little ceremoney completed, it is now time for the new member to meet Eka Ekpe (mother ekpe). He pays some money to the society and is led into a special room at the shrine where the Eka Ekpe is waiting to receive him. The entrance to that room is covered by a special piece of cloth called Ukat which is centuries old. No uninitiated person is ever allowed to enter this room which is like the holy of holies of the ancient Hebrew temple. Once he is admitted into that room, the novitiate becomes a full-fledged member of the Ekpe society.

---

[5]The manilla was a semi-circular iron bracelet used by the Ibibios as money. 100 manilla by the present rate of exchange will be equal to three dollars.

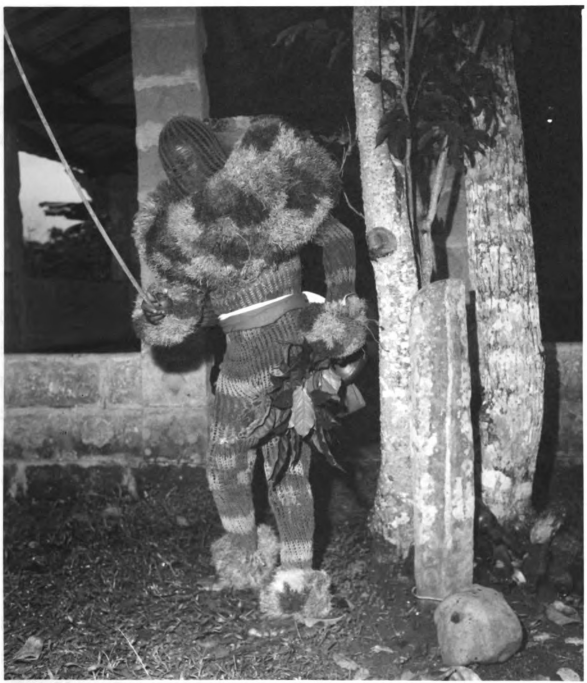


Plate 7. An Ekpe masquerader in ceremonial dress. The stick in his hand (Iboto) is used for sign language understood only by the members of the society.

The Ekp

me made fro

face is alw

people of h

in the perf

This instr

the differ

it differs

tation fo

deliberat

with thes

Cant

Cho

These wo

they are

traceabl

meaning

moves a

date fo

The Ekpe masquerade is a very elaborate and colorful one made from a specially woven material. The masquerader's face is always covered, and a bell hanging at his waist warns people of his impending approach. The instrumentation used in the performance of Ekpe music is a standard one of:

1 Ibid Nya Nkpe (large drum)
2 Ibid Ekomo (small drum)
1 Nkwong (gong)
1 Nsak (rattle)

This instrumentation is standard regardless of which of the different Ekpe musical groups is concerned; in this way it differs from Ekpo music which has a different instrumentation for each of its complementary groups. Before any deliberation, members of the Ekpe society greet one another with these declamatory code words:

Cantor: Uyo bari bari nya nkpe
Chorus: Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa } repeated twice

These words are not easy to translate into English since they are not Ibibio words and their origin is not easily traceable. They are more like nonsense words with a special meaning to Ekpe society members. As the Ekpe masquerader moves around the village on a specially appointed outing date followed by a band of musicians singing and playing,

Plate 8.

Plate 8. Musical instruments used for Ekpe masquerade music. (From left) Bell, gong, Nting drum, small and large Ekomo drums and rattle. The decorated cloth called Ukat covers the entrance to the holy of holies where only full members enter.

wo clear r

hythm of t

as it moves

$\frac{4}{4}$

accompanyin

usical ins

$\frac{12}{8}$

The effect

is heighter

which rings

period more

much of Ibi

wo beats o

two clear rhythms are easily discernible. One is the rhythm of the dance the masquerade does from time to time as it moves along:

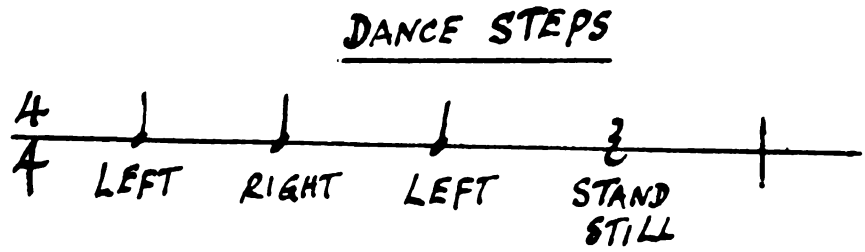


Figure 1.

accompanying this dance is the resultant rhythm of the musical instruments:

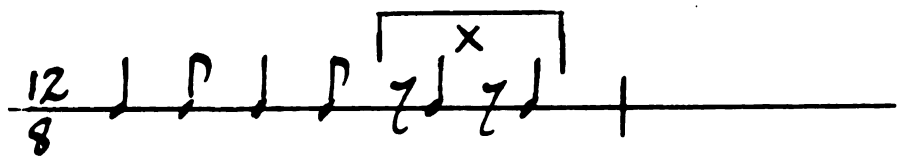


Figure 2.

The effect of this combination of dance steps and rhythm is heightened by the bell hung on the masquerader's waist which rings in rhythm with his steps, making the rest period more pronounced. The iambic rhythm that characterizes much of Ibibio music dance steps is suggested in the last two beats of the instrumental accompaniment marked (X).

Obon mus

oth masquerad

e only two r

s part of the

bon music is

nstruments th

1 Nsin

2 Eka

Ntak

Ekpr

Nkan

Ekpa

he bell used

ike a wester

ince Obon li

hich did tra

ecame one of

uration. Ns

nly one of i

he house of

ut to be pla

dies. It has

nto the hear

eremonies, a

ith other mu

Obon Masquerade

Obon music is very complementary to Ekpe in that both masquerades are conceived along similar lines and are the only two masquerades among the Ibibios that use a bell as part of their paraphernalia. The instrumentation of Obon music is of special interest because it has two instruments that are unique in Ibibio music:

1	Nsing Obon	(drum with three legs)
2	Eka Ibid	(large drums)
	Ntakorok	(woodblock)
	Ekpri Ekomo	(small drum)
	Nkanika	(bell)
	Ekpat Obon	(rattle)

The bell used in this and the Ekpe masquerade is shaped like a western church bell; the origin is obscure; but since Obon like Ekpe originated from the island of Calabar which did trade with the Portuguese, it is possible that it became one of the instruments of the society through acculturation. Nsing Obon, the drum with three legs, is the only one of its kind in the region and is usually kept at the house of the leader of the society, and only brought out to be played when a prominent member of the society dies. It has a very penetrating sound which strikes terror into the hearts of all who hear it. For ordinary Obon ceremonies, a smaller version of the drum is used along with other musical instruments.

Ekpat

nembers are

described in

serve its se

spirits duri

these perfor

1. Th
th
al
th
2. Th
me
3. Th
ar
4. Th
or
(n
th
g
5. W
s
t
t
a
U

Ekpat Obon is a rattle which only the initiated members are allowed to watch being played. It is fully described in the chapter on musical instruments; to preserve its secrecy and those imitating the voices of the spirits during a performance, a fence is built to hide these performers from the public.

Summary

1. There are three main masquerade societies among the Ibibios: Ekpo, Ekpe and Obon. They are all ritualistic and are supposed to represent the spirit of reincarnated ancestors.
2. These societies are used as instruments of government and social control as in the Ekpo society.
3. The Ekpo society has about fifteen subdivisions and Ekpe twelve.
4. The Ekpo society is organized on a family system of father, mother, brother and sister. Eka Ekpo (mother Ekpo) is supposed to have begotten all the other Ekpos. The chief of all the Ekpe groups is known as Eyamba.
5. Women who attain the age of 30 can join an Ekpo society; children from the age of eight can join the Ekong Ekpo society. Women members enjoy the privileges of the society but are never allowed to play skin drums or wear a masquerade. Uninitiated women must not see Ekpo.

6. Ek
on
wh
sp
7. Id
th
in
th
ti
8. Th
ma
ar
9. Ce
Ek
(c
mu

6. Ekpo, Ekpe and Obon masquerades appear usually once a year for four weeks at a time except when a prominent member of the cult dies and a special performance is put on in his honor.
7. Idiong society, a division of the Ekpo group, is the only secret society that does not use a drum in its music. All the others do. Members of the Idiong society wear a special crown to distinguish them from others.
8. The number seven is very significant in ritual masquerade. It is used both in instrumentation and in initiation ceremonies.
9. Certain musical instruments like Ekput (rattle), Ekpat Obon (rattle), Ekere (gong), Nsing Obon (drum), Nkanika (bell), are only used in ritual music.

Ne

tied to c

true as t

unrelated

complete a

ence, as t

audience c

it is not

together

for the f

backgrour

song in w

session"

ment hap

In all t

dictate

"Drive

CHAPTER IV

ORCHESTRAS WITH SPECIAL FUNCTIONS

The Uta Orchestra

Nettl is of the opinion that all African music is tied to ceremonial occasions;[1] but this is not entirely true as there are many aspects of African music totally unrelated to any traditional ceremony. There is an almost complete absence of absolute music in the African experience, as there is always a reaction between performer and audience during any musical activity. Among the Ibibios it is not unusual to find musicians in a community gather together after supper to make music in the moonlight just for the fun of it. The music on such occasions can be background music for a wrestling contest, a general sing-song in which everyone takes part, or an instrumental "jam session" where any musician present grabs whatever instrument happens to be around and joins in the rhythmic fun. In all these instances, the mood of the moment is what dictates the type of music played and its instrumentation.

---

[1]Bruno Nettl, Music in Primitive Culture. (Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 6.

he songs th

lays are al

nd choruses

nows.

There

dentified w

personalitie

tion; and ev

be used for

rchestra ev

particular c

hese orches

from the fou

ensemble.

which goes:

Translated:

This senten

indicator.

of Annang (

Eta players

copied by o

there. Thi

from among

ore than s

The songs the people sing and the type of music the orchestra plays are all improvisatory with occasional use of melodies and choruses from folklores which almost everyone present knows.

There are, however, certain orchestras which are identified with special ceremonies, deities and local personalities. These orchestras perform a special function; and even though there are instances when they can be used for other purposes, the mention of a functional orchestra evokes at once in the mind of the people the particular ceremony with which it is associated. One of these orchestras is the Uta orchestra which gets its name from the four gourd horns that form the backbone of the ensemble. There is an interesting Ibibio expression which goes:

Da uta of ke fit ke Annang

Translated: Go and play your uta in the Annang community.

This sentence is very important because it is a culture indicator. A thorough investigation showed that the people of Annang (who also speak Ibibio language) were very famous Uta players, and the instrumental style which has now been copied by other communities in Ibibioland originated from there. This study of the Uta orchestra, which is taken from among the Annangs, shows that the ensemble is never more than seven players made up of:

Eka Uta	(mother uta)
Akpan Uta	(first male born uta)
Udo Uta	(second male born uta)
Etuk Udo Uta	(third male born uta)
Eka Ibid	(large drum)
Etuk Ibid Iba	(small twin drum)
Ntakorok	(woodblock)

The Uta instruments in the ensemble are conceived as a family of a mother and her three chilren. But this is not peculiar to the Ibibios alone. Among the Yorubas of the Western State of Nigeria, the group of drums used for the worship of the ancestral god Sango[2] have the names:

Iya Ilu Bata	(mother bata drum)
Emele Ako	(male bata drum)
Emele Abo	(female bata drum)
Kudi	(infant bata drum)

The Eka Uta (mother uta) and the Iya Ilu Bata (mother bata drum) are the instruments in their respective groups which talk the loudest; and the name mother attached to them points to the sense of humor of the African musician who sees women as being too talkative.

In the seven-man uta orchestra, the musician who plays the woodblock also acts as cantor with the two drummers as

---

[2]The god Sango is worshiped even today in Brazil and Haiti, obviously carried there by the slaves from Africa. The Bata drum is a drum of the hourglass variety played with two sticks.

Plate 9. A quartet of Uta (gourd) horns. (From right) Eka Uta; Akpan Uta; Udo Uta; Etukudo Uta.

horus. T e

usic has lr

usic; but th

ale child en

instrument --

ensemble c t

ra orches ra

mitting a y

more puzzl na

played at he

in the cor u

Some in

decides to r

to play fo

of friends a

ra orche r

invoke the s

her youth il

The ru

some exam la

horns is le

is usuall

who is al

ra horns

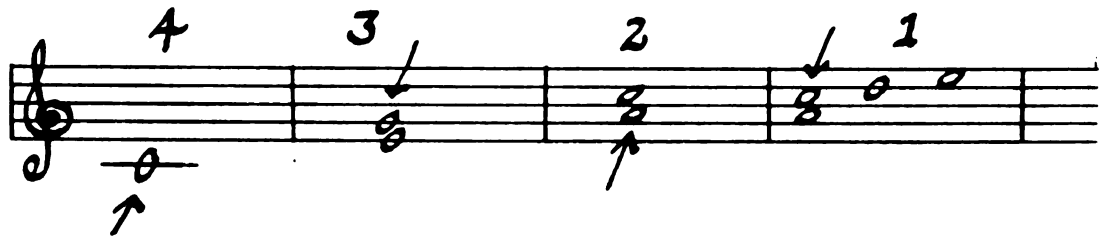
while the

tested ha

chorus. The significance of the number seven in Ibibio music has already been mentioned in the chapter on Ekpo music; but the emphasis which Ibibio tradition places on male children is evident in the names given to the four uta instruments--a mother and three sons. Unlike the Sango ensemble of the Yorubas which mentions a female drum, the uta orchestra emphasizes its virile conception by completely omitting any mention of a female member. This fact becomes more puzzling when we learn that Uta music is traditionally played at the funeral of an old woman who is very prominent in the community.

Sometimes a woman who finds age creeping on her, decides to revitalize herself by calling on Uta musicians to play for her. She kills a cow and calls a special party of friends and prominent people in her community; as the Uta orchestra plays, she believes that their music will invoke the spirit of her ancestral gods to give her back her youthful powers.

The musical organization of the four uta horns bears some examination. Ironically, the smallest of the uta horns is the mother uta able to produce three tones. It is usually played by the most skillful member of the group who is also the leader. The first male and the second male uta horns are each capable of producing two tones each; while the last uta can only play one note. Four uta horns tested had this range:



Note: Arrow denotes the natural note that the instruments produce to form the pentatonic scale--C, D,E,G,A, spread over the four instruments. The other notes are the alternate notes which the player can call upon as he pleases.

Figure 3.

Since pitch in African music is generally not regulated, another group of Uta horns tested may have different pitches, but the principle will always be the same--the organization of the notes of the four horns to form the pentatonic scale which is the dominant scale among the Ibibios. In actual performance, the cantor sings, the two-man chorus answers and the uta players punctuate this in chordal rhythm playing two or three chords in syncopated rhythm at a time. A closer look at the above chart will reveal that chords of ninths and tenths are possible as are tonic chords; it will also reveal that each horn, except the lowest sounding is capable of producing a sound a third above or below its main tone (arrow mark). The choice of which note to play in a chord is left entirely to the performer and it is possible to have the following permutations:

The extra no
the group ar
to another.
to play a se
the chord va
notes availa

This
serves a fur
Whereas Uta
old women i
burial of p
mentation o

Again it wi

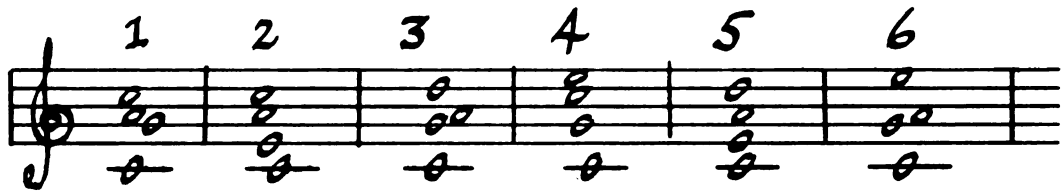


Figure 4.

The extra notes capable of being produced by the leader of the group are used mainly as passing notes from one chord to another. This writer asked a group of Uta musicians to play a series of chords and it was found that each time the chord varied because the players chose either of the notes available to them at random rather than by design.

The Oko Orchestra

This orchestra is being treated next because it serves a function exactly opposite to that of Uta orchestra. Whereas Uta music is played for the burial of prominent old women in the community, Oko music is played at the burial of prominent old men in the village. The instrumentation of the orchestra is:

1 Oduk (horn)
2 Nsak (rattle)
2 Ntakorok (woodblock)
2 Singers

Again it will be seen that there is this tendency to stick

to the number seven in the conception of the instrumentation. This time the accent is clearly on a vocal eulogy of the deceased, recounting his many noble deeds and brave escapades, with the rattles and woodblocks supplying a steady rhythm and the mother Uta playing an obbligato to the words of the singers. The Oko orchestra usually accompanies the Oko Dance, perhaps the most exciting and certainly terror-striking in the whole of Ibibioland.

The musicians and dancers must all be members of a secret ritualistic cult. First they sharpen their machetes to razor sharpness and test them on their tongues, their neighbor's bodies and tree trunks; a mark is left on the tree trunks but not a drop of blood is shed from their tongues and their neighbor's bodies. They rub charcoal on their faces and legs and cover their heads with dry branches in an obvious attempt to look very weird and strike terror into the hearts of the spectators. As the music plays, they dance; first slowly and then very wildly as the rhythms gather momentum. Some of the members carry fully loaded rifles which they fire into the air as they dance. The climax of the performance is reached when the dancers start slashing at themselves with the razor-sharp machetes and firing at one another at point blank range and no damage is done--not a drop of blood is spilled and not a bullet hole can be seen on any of the men.

In the days when there were inter-tribal wars, these men who were capable of being fired at without any hurt or

Plate 10. Members of the Oko society. The member on the extreme left is testing a very sharp cutlass on his tongue. Note their weird ceremonial dress which is designed to make them look like devils.

being macheted without any injury were always in the fore-front of the invading army. All attempts by this writer to find out the science (if it could be called that) behind this imperviousness to hurt and injury met with a blank wall. Spectators could marvel and watch, but no one except the initiated was allowed to discover the secrets of the soceity. The process of initiation was such a frightful one that only the bravest dared to submit themselves to the ceremony.

There was a slight disagreement among my informants as to the exact composition of members of the accompanying oko orchestra. Seven musicians were generally agreed upon to be the traditional number; although some felt that it was possible for this number to be reduced to five and for the instrumentation to be altered to two Uta horns, two rattles and one singer.

The Ekpri Akata Orchestra

Because of its name, which sounds Efik in origin rather than Ibibio, there is the suspicion that this orchestra has its roots among the Efiks who inhabit the island of Calabar in the South Eastern State. The Efik word for small is Ekpri, while the Ibibios say Etok; and the word Akata means more to the Efiks than it does to the Ibibios. In spite of all this, Ekpri Akata has come to stay as one of the functional orchestras commonly used among the Ibibios. Ekpri Akata music is that of social control played and sung

by young men in the village who set themselves up as watch-dogs of their society. As is typical of orchestras not related to ritual worhsip, the instrumentation is flexible although there are one or two instruments consistently present in any given orchestra. A typical orchestra studied by the author had this instrumentation:

1 Akua Oduk (horn)
1 Akang kang (twin gong)
1 Ntakorok (woodblock)
1 Nsak (rattle)
3 Ibid (drums)
1 Ikwot (instrument imitating frog sounds)

In their day-to-day activities, members of this group make it their business to listen to the latest gossips, check on men and women of suspicious characters, and especially look out for thieves and fornicators. On a given night when there is no moon, the members gather together around two o'clock and move from house to house singing and warning people of evil-doers in the village: the pastor of a church who is carrying on a secret love affair with a member of his flock; the outwardly respectable businessman who engages in burglary on the side; the young school girl who tells her father she is travelling out of the village to a school picnic but secretly spends the night with a lover at a nearby rendezvous—these are some of the topics which engage the

attention of the Ekpri Akata orchestra. The result of this is that by the morning, quite a few people have found their careers ruined overnight; and this writer remembers the incident of a church pastor who had to flee a village the morning after Ekpri Akata scandalized his name. Even though the activities of these musicians may seem outrageous, they are encouraged by society, which feels that those with nothing to hide need not fear any scandal. To protect themselves against any victim who might be tempted to come out and fight, these musicians are usually armed with cutlasses and women are forbidden to see them.

In order to sound like spirits, the cantor of the group and members of the chorus speak with unnatural voices and the cantor narrates the latest scandal speaking into what looks like a kazoo of the western world. They start out with a loud invocation repeated again and again until the household is awake, then they start to play and sing. On hearing this, the eldest man in the household comes to the door to listen to the current village chronicle, after which he presents the cantor with some money and they move on to the next house.

In Ekpri Akata music the horn plays an obbligato over the steady rhythm of the other instruments and from time to time the instrument that imitates a frog is heard distinctly above the entire ensemble.

The Ikon Orchestra

The traditional role of the Ikon (xylophone) orchestra is to play at the initiation ceremony of an Mbopo—a virgin sent to the fattening room. Ikon Eto (wooden xylophone) as opposed to Ikon Ikpa (drum xylophone) is always preferred at these ceremonies. The instrumentation of an Ikon orchestra is flexible and could range from five to eight or nine musicians depending on the circumstances under which it is to be played. According to ancient tradition, Ikon music evolved from folklore sessions held at village amphitheatre during moonlit nights. There, after a hard day's work, the villagers gathered together to tell stories and jokes. Every folksong has a chorus in which everyone present joins in. At first they tried using drums as a means of orchestral accompaniment but, as this did not seem to satisfy their exact needs, they turned to the xylophone as an instrument with melodic functions.

They started off with a xylophone of just two notes, and the xylophone markers kept on adding more notes until today it is possible to find a xylophone with all the notes of a pentatonic scale. From being a means of supplying background music for folklore sessions, the Ikon orchestra achieved status, and only the rich people of a village could afford to ask an Ikon orchestra to play for their pleasure. Having achieved this status, it became an honor for an Ikon orchestra to play for any particular occasion; and one of

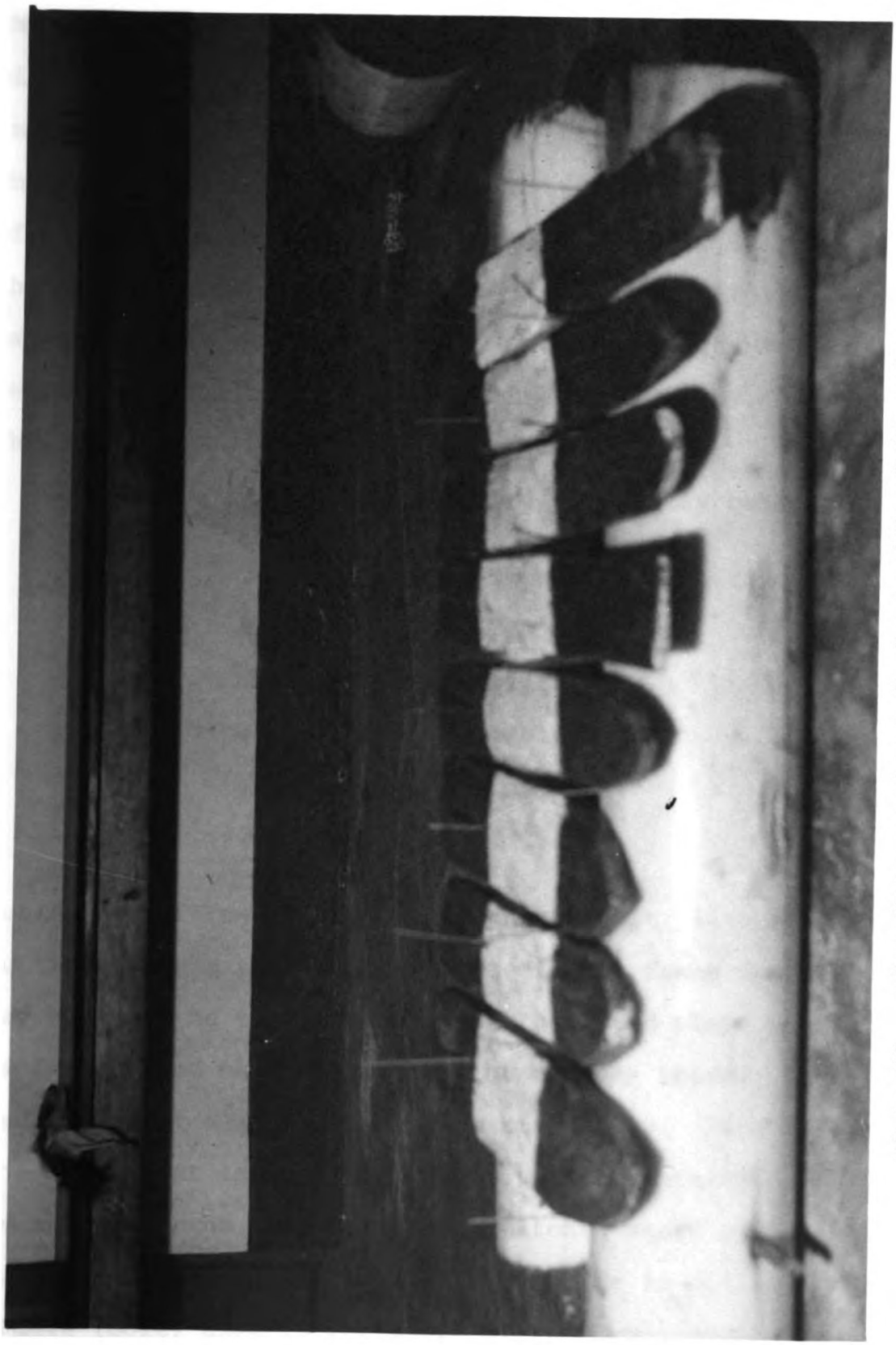


Plate 11. Ikon Eto, wooden xylophone with eight notes.

the ceremonies it got attached to was the Mbopo ceremoney with which it became traditionally identified. Since the instrument used is one with many notes—some have been known to have as many as fifteen notes—two people instead of one sometimes play on one instrument. When this happens, the organization of the music follows the traditional African pattern of one player playing an ostinato in the bottom register of the instrument, and the other improvising over this.

A typical Ikon orchestra would generally consist of:

1 Ikon (xylophone)
1 Ibid (large drum)
1 Akpan Ibid (small drum)
1 Ntakorok (woodblock)
1 Akang kang (twin gong)
2 Singers

During a performance, the xylophone soloist plays an introduction using a theme that is immediately taken up by the two singers; he then abandons the theme and plays an accompaniment based on fragments of the opening theme. In between each verse of a song, he plays a ritornello. Even though the instrument is sometimes tuned to the heptatonic scale, usually only the notes of the pentatonic scale are utilzied by the player. This situation is similar to the one-string fiddle (Goge) used in the music of the Hausa people of Northern Nigeria. This instrument, which uses a bow like

the western violin bow, is capable of playing a diatonic scale on its one string complete with semi-tones; but the player makes use of only the notes of the pentatonic scale which is most frequently encountered in Nigerian traditional music.

Summary

1. Certain orchestras are associated with special ritual and nonritual ceremonies.
2. The Uta (gourd horn) orchestra made up of seven members is played at the funeral of an old woman. the four Uta present in the group are tuned to the notes of the pentatonic scale.
3. The lowest-sounding Uta can only produce one note and the highest-sounding three notes. The others can produce two notes each. During a performance a quartet of Utas never play contrapuntally but homophonically in varying rhythms.
4. The Oko orchestra plays for the obsequies of an old man. The music is accompanied by dancing where the members of the Oko cult slash at one another with machetes or shoot at one another with rifles. Nobody is ever hurt as they are supposed to be protected by ancestral spirits.
5. The Ekpri Akata orchestra functions only after midnight and goes from house to house denouncing evil-doers in the village. It does not admit women into its group.

6. The Ikon (xylophone) orchestra traditionally plays at fattening room ceremonies although it can and does play at other nonritualistic ceremonies. Its instrumentation is not regulated although it generally has twin-gongs, rattles and woodblocks in its instrumentation.
7. The Utah orchestra produces four-part harmony with a range of a tenth between the largest and smallest utas.

CHAPTER V

MUSIC OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Mbopo Music

In Ibibio traditional society when a girl reached the age of puberty which was determined by her breasts being noticeable, usually around the age of sixteen, her parents arranged for her to be admitted into a special room designed for fattening up girls in preparation for marriage. If she was already married, this ceremony was to make her more beautiful for her husband; if unmarried, then she had to be a virgin to be admitted into the room. It was the custom to get a girl bethrothed very young because as a virgin she would fetch a better dowry for her parents than in later years. If a girl grew up to be about twenty without anyone asking for her hand in marriage, she became a source of embarrassment to her parents. This ceremony was called Mbopo and placed any girl admitted into it in very good standing with the community, for it publicized her virginity which was regarded as the highest mark of purity.

This ceremony was interwoven with musical activities; and at the initiation ceremony elderly women sang and played musical instruments in her honor, the music of the

gong and xylophone being very symbolic. The length of her stay in the fattening room is usually four weeks, although it has been known to be longer depending on whether the parents of the girl can afford the costs. During this period she takes no exercise but just eats and sleeps; every morning she is bathed by those in charge of the place, and at night her pelvis is massaged because it was believed this would make child-bearing easier at a later date.

Before each bedtime, she is rubbed with a special kind of oil called Mmem which has a most distasteful odor, to discourage any man (including her husband, if she is married) from sneaking in to have intercourse with her. It was the belief that if a girl became pregnant while in the fattening room it was a source of disgrace, and she was immediately banished from the place with the women of the society making up songs of insult and abuse to discredit her. At the end of her confinement period, a masquerader known as Ekong Mbopo goes to examine how she has reacted physically to the treatment. If he finds her fat and glowing with health, he rubs her over with Ndom Otong, a kind of whitish chalk, to signify his approval. If she has not grown as fat as expected, he rubs her with a kind of charcoal which reacts unfavorably with her body causing itching and much discomfort; he then sallies forth into the village to scandalize her in a song which he improvises to fit the occasion.

Plate 12. Mbopo (Virgin) in full regalia. Note the iron rings around her legs.

Plate 13. Mbopo in full regalia just before entering the Fattening Room flanked on both sides by Ekong Mbopo.

When an Mbopo is ready for the outing ceremony, her mother notifies the people of the village through the village chief and throws a little party where palm wine, the local brew, is consumed in large quantities. On a special day known as Udua Mbopo (market day for virgins), Ntung (rattles) are slid on her ankles and a dead chicken hung around her neck; tiny cow bells (Nyoro) are fixed round her waist to warn the people of her approach. She is led in a procession in which her husband (if she is married) fires gun shots, a group of women holding an umbrella over her head and an orchestra featuring wooden drums preceding her singing:

Mbopo ayaiya o
Nsuto eyen ayaiya ntem.

Translated: Mbopo is very pretty
What a pretty girl this is.

After parading for some time in the market to be seen and admired by all, she does a little dance to an accompaniment played by a women orchestra using gongs and rattles. During this dance interested men and women come forward to bestow presents on her, usually in the form of money to meet her fattening room expenses. If she is unmarried, this is the time when interested suitors come forward to ask for her hand in marriage. If the mother of the girl is a member of Ebre Society, which is a society for women of the highest virtue, then Ebre music is also played in her honor during this festivity. Only elderly women and possible

suitors are allowed to attend the market on this day. Young girls and unmarried women are prohibited by tradition from showing their faces there as they might jeopardize her chances of finding a suitable bridegroom.

On returning from the market place, the husband notifies those in charge of the fattening room that he is ready to take his wife home. This calls for yet another ceremony at which he presents about 100 dollars to members of the household and buys some more palm wine and food for the villagers. Before he leaves with his bride, a fowl is decapitated and the blood allowed to flow to mother earth.

The initial outing ceremoney takes place during a day of the month called Ede Obo. First the girl is led out and made to sit on a stool and Ekong Mbopo, the masquerade which will be visiting her later to see how she is doing, dances round her and eventually embraces her. He breaks a raw egg over her, a gun shot is fired and she retires into the fattening room but not for long. Having finished his own part of the ceremony, the masquerade leaves and a ladies' orchestra featuring gongs and pot drums comes to serenade her chanting:

Ikpoko ibid Ekpo ko nno
Iko ama nde ama
Iyo iyo iyo
Iyo. . . . . .

Translated: Beat a tatoo on the Ekpo drum
For the lovely damsel
Iyo. . .Iyo. . .Iyo. . .
Iyo. . . . . .

The girl emerges from the fattening room dancing to this music after which her husband (if she is married) presents her with articles of clothing and some fineries and initiates the members of her family into the Ekpo cult. Together with members of her family, her husband and other relatives, she re-enters the fattening room where there is eating and drinking and breaking of cola nuts.[1] A young bride who is newly pregnant may be allowed to go into the fattening room for the alloted four weeks; but if signs of her pregnancy are plainly visible she is denied admission. A pregnant girl who is admitted into the fattening room is referred to as Uwok.

Music used in Mbopo ceremony is an example of where the text of a song is more important than the music. When the Ekong Mbopo masquerade visits an Mbopo during the period of her confinement to note her progress, the song of praise or scandal that he sings after the visitation is improvised and varies from occasion to occasion. His listeners are not concerned with the music of the song but his social commentary. The texts of Mbopo songs can be set to different kinds of music depending on the improvisatory ability of the

---

[1]The breaking of cola nuts is a custom common to all ethnic groups in Nigeria. The youngest member in a group breaks the cola nuts into little pieces and the eldest member has first pick. Simultaneous with this custom is the one that the oldest member of a group drinks Ntak Ukot, the last remnants of palm wine in a calabash (gourd) container.

singers and the location of the ceremony. At all times they are conceived in such a way as to meet the required needs of the singers and an Mbopo in a particular situation.

Also notable in Mbopo ceremony is the use of musical instruments as symbols. The xylophone, wooden drum and gong are always present in any music connected with this ceremony; instrumentation is usually very flexible.

Ebre Music

The period of harvesting new yams is always a special one among ethnic groups in Eastern Nigeria. Among the Onitsha Ibos, this takes the form of a festival known as Ofala when the chief of Onitsha himself joins in the festivities among the Ibibios, this is the one time when women, generally relegated to the background in the day-to-day activities of a village, assert their rights and position. During the festival of new yams known as Ekpo Abasi (the god of creation), Ekpo masqueraders parade around the village and no woman is permitted to see or meet them. If a woman wanted to go out during this period which lasted four weeks, she had to be accompanied by a man who was himself a member of the Ekpo society. When the Ekpo festival ends, there is a feast called Usoro Abasi (feast of the god of creation) when women can now come out without being molested.

A kind of bulbous root of the yam variety called Ebre is allocated to the women for their celebration. Each woman goes to her farm to harvest this yam, which she

presents in symbolic fashion to her husband as a mark of respect. He in turn gives her a present to show his appreciation for her industry in planting and harvesting this yam. The bigger the yam she is able to harvest, the better the present she receives from her husband. It is during this period that Ebre music is organized by women who are members of this secret cult.

Morality in Ibibio tradition has always been a great concern of the people. Very high value was placed on virginity and thieves and women of easy virtue were not well regarded in the community. Thieves were regarded as outlaws in the society and anyone caught stealing faced a death penalty from the court of the chiefs and elders. Because of this, no woman suspected of being a thief was admitted into the Ebre society. Members of the society had a status symbol within the community because they were seen as people whose morals were unquestionable. On an appointed day, the members would go to the house of their leader where they would sing and dance throughtout the night. The following day, they all wended their way to the market dressed in gay costumes singing and dancing to Ebre music. The instrumentalists in the group were all members of the society. Two prominent features of Ebre music were the instrumentation, which was fixed, and the style of dancing, whose basic rhythm was iambic. The Ebre orchestra consisted of three gongs, one large drum, one small drum, one pot

drum, one woodblock and one rattle. Some of the rhythms used in Ebre music bear examination:

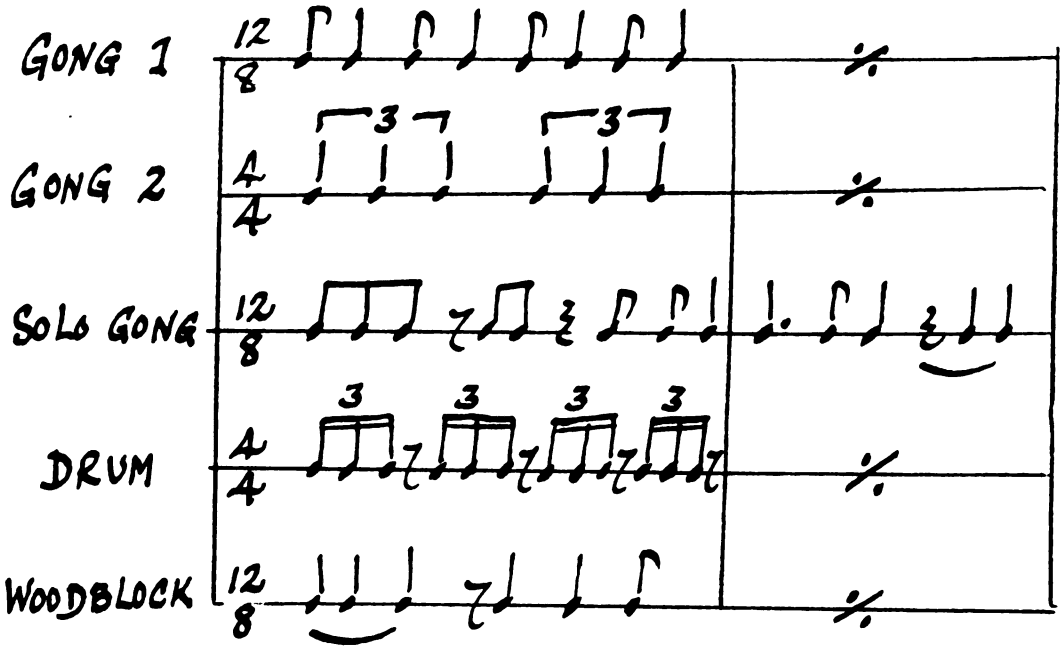


Figure 5.

The leader of the group played on one of the gongs in the same improvisatory style as a leader-drum plays in an all-drum ensemble. With the other members of the group playing in steady rhythm, she played changeable cross rhythms above this and generally directed the dance formations. The rhythm by the first gong is the typical Ebre music rhythm and the woodblock rhythm is the bell rhythm which is usually played by the gong. The rhythm of the small drum played against that of the second gong forms a kind of hemiola.

Plate 14. Some musical instruments used by women of Ebre society. Twin drum, gongs and woodblock.

On their way to the market the musicians sing:

Idapa ikang ekikon nno
Nwon nduk enen
Edem ete ndianake
Edem ebe ndianake
Idapa ikan ekikon nno
Nwon nduk enen.

Translated: Hand me my pipe
Let me smoke my way to the market
I am not attached to my father
I am not attached to my husband
Hand me my pipe
Let me smoke on my way to the market.

The lyrics of this song show how fiercely independent the members of the Ebre society regarded themselves when they got together. By intimating that they were neither attached to father nor husband they were enjoying an independence that came to them once a year; for in traditional Ibibio society, the woman was very subservient to the man.

From the market in their village, they sang and danced their way to neighboring villages before returning to the original starting point where they continued making merry until the last male had left the market. They then performed their last ceremony—that of burying a special knife in the ground where it will remain until the next gathering a year later. One of the conditions for being admitted into the society was that the prospective member must have passed through the fattening room as a virgin. In this way they maintained a continuity of virtuous living from puberty to old age. The Ebre society was a means of

Plate 15. Women of the Ebre society in everyday dress worn by Ibibio women. Note the playing position of the twin drum at the far right.

exerting social control among the women of the community and exposing thieves and women of easy virtue to ridicule. Reminiscent of when they first showed themselves to the public as Mbopo fresh from the fattening room with nothing on, members of the Ebre society leave their breasts bare, tie a small cloth around their mid-section to show that they were no longer virgins and hang the teeth of small animals threaded into beads around their necks. As a final defiance to male chauvinism they chant before dispersing:

Cantor: Ladies, what is this sweet music?

Chorus: Ebre music

Cantor: Ladies you will not compromise will you?

Chorus: No we won't

Cantor: Ladies you will not tolerate any nonsense will you?

Chorus: No we won't.

Cantor: Ladies, you serve as mattresses for men don't you?

Chorus: Yes, we do.

Cantor: Ladies, men lie on top of you don't they?

Chorus: Yes, they do.

Cantor: Ladies, will you continue to tolerate this?

Chorus: No we won't.

Cantor: Are you sure you won't?

Chorus: No we won't.

Cantor: Scream and let me hear you.

Chorus: Ayiriririririririririri (scream).

Other Women's Societies

Mbopo and Ebre music are the only two surviving from a number of types of women's music of social control that existed prior to the advent of Christianity in the Ibibio area. These societies were labelled "pagan" by the missionaries, and today it would take a very diligent search to find communities where this type of music is still being played. For instance, it was the belief that members of the Ebre society were blessed with supernatural powers, and the church frowned upon the sometimes obscene language in their music and chanting. Some of these societies had a lot of entertainment value, like the Ndok Ufok Ebe music which was performed by a society of women who felt that their husbands were maltreating them. So from time to time, they went topless, tied rattles around their ankles and with their musical instruments went to the market place to show their disapproval and annoyance in public. Any husband who did not want people to know that he was maltreating his wife was thus forced to change his ways, or have fingers in the village pointing at him as we went about his daily routine. Ndok Ufok Ebe translated literally means Indignities suffered at the hands of a husband. Music for Nkerebe, meaning thinking of a husband, was performed by girls of about fifteen years of age just prior to being admitted into the fattening room. Asian Ubo Ikpa and Asian Mbre Iban were performed by maidens who wished to remind the young men of the village how

beautiful and eligible they were. There was also Akan, Asamba and Uwok women's groups who sang and danced periodically in the community.

All these groups had one purpose—to affect social control in the community.

An Ibibio women's society that was not widespread over the area, but which had some influence on Mbopo ceremonies in parts of the community, was the Nyama or Uso society. Because the Ibibios believed that clitoridectomy aided child birth, just as they believed that massaging the pelvis of a girl in the fattening room performed the same function, the Nyama society existed primarily to perform clitoridectomy on prospective Mbopo girls. Usually the ceremony was performed shortly before the girl entered the fattening room. It was done without any anaesthetic and the girl was not supposed to utter one cry of pain.

Music played a very prominent part in this ceremony both before and during the ceremony. Before, the parents of the girl had to buy food and wine for the villagers; and according to Jeffreys, one of the songs sung then had the lyrics:

> "The food chokes the child of the Idem;
> the food chokes, the palmwine chokes. So,
> pay a manilla. The food chokes, the water
> chokes, so pay a manilla. The food chokes,
> the meat chokes, so pay a manilla."[2]

---

[2] M. D. W. Jeffreys, "The Nyama Society of the Ibibio Women," African Studies, Vol. 15, (1956), p. 20.

Pay a manilla was the chorus line repeated over and over again to remind the parents of the girl of their financial obligations; a reminder that would have sounded offensive if spoken instead of sung. During the ceremony itself, the people present sang in loud voices to drown out the possibility of a yell from the girl. If it happened that she cried out in pain, she was ridiculed in song by the women after the ceremony.

Summary

1. The age when the breasts of a girl become noticeable is a very important one among the Ibibios. It is a time when a girl can be admitted into the fattening room. The confinement period lasts about four weeks.
2. Mbopo music is an example of when ritual and non-ritual music are used in one ceremony.
3. Ekong Mbopo is the masquerade that visits an Mbopo during her confinement period to check on her physical development. If he finds her responding to treatment, he sings praise songs in her honor; if not, he sings songs of insult which are all improvised.
4. The texts of all songs used during Mbopo ceremony serve as social commentaries on the novitiate.
5. Only married women take part in Mbopo ceremony. Maidens are not allowed to be present at a market on the day of her outing.

6. Virginity is highly prized by the Ibibios. All Mbopos must be virgins even if married.
7. The music performed at Mbopo and Ebre ceremonies are in a way music of purification. No thieves or women of dubious moral character are admitted into the Ebre society.
8. The Ebre orchestra is made up of women only, and gongs are symbolic instruments. There are usually three of them in an ensemble.
9. Ebre ceremony is in a way a salute to the god of fertility as it is performed during the harvesting of new yams.
10. Mbopo and Ebre ceremonies compliment each other in that the members of the Ebre society go to perform for the Mbopo if the virgin's mother is a member of that society.
11. The Ebre ceremony is the one time when women, who are traditionally not recognized in Ibibio culture, rebel against their men folk singing songs of protest which can be very obscene at times.
12. Ndok Ufok Ebe is a women's group who feel that their husbands are not treating them right and so decide to show their displeasure in public by singing songs of protest and songs of derision. This group is an instrument of social control which forces husbands to mend their ways or face being disgraced in public.

13. Other women's societies among the Ibibios include Akan, Asamba, Uwok, Asian Ubo Ikpa, Nkerebe and Asian Mbre Iban, all designed to draw the attention of the eligible bachelors to how beautiful and desirable their womenfolk are.
14. Even though Ibibio girls married at a very early age, the marriage was not consumated until the bride reached the age of about sixteen.

CHAPTER VI

CHORAL PATTERNS

From our study so far, it is clear that all music-making among the Ibibios can be divided into two headings: (a) music that is concerned with the supernatural, and (b) music that controls the day-to-day activities of the people. Broadly it can be said that music in the first category is mainly performed by men, and that in the second category by women and children. It can also be said that music in the first category is specialist music performed by professionals, while music in the second category is mainly improvistory and more flexible in structure. During an Ekpo or Ekpe masquerade the content and form of the choral music is one that has been handed down through generations. When a member of a secret society dies, the songs at his funeral are those with a fixed form, and any slight variations are all within the concept of this fixed form. When women and children go out to sing and dance on a festive occasion or in the moonlight, the shape of the music is dictated by the circumstances.

In ritual music, the words used are usually those in praise of the gods, supported by a rhythmic accompaniment that is at times strict and at other times flexible; and though this interplay of music and words may sound improvisatory

to a casual observer, it is true that these same words and rhythms have been used so many times before that in reality they have an unwritten format. As a contrast, if someone is elevated to a position of authority in the community, the custom is for him to slaughter a cow (which is a mark of authority), buy a lot of palm wine and invite musicians to come and play for him. These musicians as a rule will not be the same people who perform at the shrines; they will be nonspecialist musicians in the village who picked up their musical knowledge without any special tuition, and are playing to enjoy themselves, singing songs in praise of the celebrant.

The general style in nonritualistic songs is that of call-and-response so common throughout Africa. Since the members of the group are not a regularly organized group like the ritualistic musicians, they cannot tell before hand what the cantor will sing about or what form his words will take. He starts out tentatively by tossing about a few ideas in the style of unaccompanied recitative; as he warms up, he develops a pattern by stressing certain words repeatedly, usually at the end of a phrase. At this point the other members of the group join trying to learn the words of the improvised song. The chorus section then can easily pick out; but the other improvised part they hum with the cantor, or scat sing, always ending with the chorus which they know well by now.

The rhythmic pattern has by now been established, and the instrumentalists can come in with each player trying first to see whether the standard rhythm of his instrument fits into that pattern, or whether he has to make some adjustments. Eventually everyone gets going and the performance gains in volume and tempo, with yodelling and ululation thrown in at regular intervals. This uncertainty on the part of the musicians trying to go along with the cantor produces an improvisatory counterpoint which is a great feature of Ibibio music.

Harmonies in Ibibio music are invariably in parallel fourths or fifths in strict organum style; thirds and sixths are used very infrequently and generally at cadential points. The improvisatory counterpoint mentioned can be in two or three parts; at other times it may take the form of a second cantor matching his skill against the chief cantor, trying to enrich the melody. He does this by imitating the first voice in canon at the fourth or fifth, but never at the octave; sometimes he uses the hocket technique so common in African music.

When the music is at its highest point, with cantor, chorus and instruments playing and singing away, one or two members of the group may decide to enrich the music even further by holding the tonic and dominant notes in a kind of drone so reminiscent of the instrumental drone in Bartok's string quartets.[1] To add to the general excitement, a

---

[1]See Bartok, Fifth String Quartet. 1st movement Violas, bars 55-58.

member of the chorus may suddenly decide to repeat the chorus line continuously, answered by his associates; in which case the cantor stops for some time to allow them to get that off their chest before returning to the established format of call-and-response.

In the middle of the performance, without changing the tempo, the cantor is permitted to change the song, and the singers have to go through the same process of trying to hum along with him, scat sing and even try to anticipate him before they finally get the hang of the new song. This process is easier than at the start since there is an established rhythm within which to work.

The general format of a nonritualistic choral group performance with instrumental backing can be summarized as follows:

1. The cantor starts a song of his choice in a singing-speaking voice without accompaniment. He repeats this two times.
2. Some members of the chorus join in uncertainly the third time, echoing some of the cantor's words, singing the words with him where possible, and humming the melody sometimes.
3. By this time a definite call-and-response pattern has been established and members of the chorus join in lustily at the responses.
4. From the speech rhythm in the words of the song, a clear rhythmic pattern emerges and the

instruments take this as their cue to join in; instruments with standard rhythmic patterns try to adjust these to the melodic rhythm.

5. The ensemble is now fully organized with a definite call-and-response pattern and instrumental backing.
6. A few members of the group try to enrich the proceedings by yodelling, ululating or employing a vocal drone using either the tonic note or the tonic and dominant notes together.
7. To end the performance, the cantor throws in a few extra words like, "now we are about to end. . ." or "this song is getting too long. . ." or perhaps gives a knowing smile or wink to the other musicians; and the music ends with the chorus line drawn out in the form of a fermata, to give the instruments time to bring their phrases to a full close.

This choral pattern is used chiefly by adult groups, as children's songs are not usually improvisatory but well-known ones handed down through the years. The above pattern can be employed by an all-women group or a group made up of men and women who are out to make music purely for entertainment and not in praise of any supernatural being. When the performance is by a secret society the format is markedly different from this. Different societies have one or two ceremonies peculiar to their gods; but an analysis of

performance by many secret societies tended to conform to a general pattern. There is the use of call-and-response and of flexible and steady rhythmic accompaniment; there is also the use of invocation and at times long instrumental solos in unmeasured rhythm; all of which can be broken down to this format:

1. The cantor sings a short improvisatory recitative using a singing-speaking voice without accompaniment.
2. At the end of his solo, an instrument (usually the wooden drum or gong) plays a crisp staccato-like rhythmic pattern which is improvised by the performer.
3. The cantor continues his recitative, but this time the solo instrument comes in at irregular intervals to punctuate important statements.
4. Another improvised solo instrumental interlude.
5. At his third entrance, the cantor is joined by members of the chorus and together they sing in two-part harmony in fourths or fifths a capella. This part of the performance varies in length depending on the mood of the people.
6. The cantor invokes the spirits in a loud speaking voice three times or more, answered by the chorus.
7. The cantor breaks into a well-known ritualistic song, supported almost at once by the instruments and chorus.

8. The masquerader enters the arena and dances to the music, his every movement greeted with ululation by some members of the group.
9. The masquerade retires and the music comes to an end with a signal from the cantor in the same way described in nonritualistic music.

It follows from the two descriptions given that it is possible to listen to a piece of Ibibio music and tell from its content whether it is ritual or nonritual music, assuming that the performers are stationary. On the other hand when a masquerader is dancing around the village followed by instrumentalists, the musical pattern is slightly varied to allow one or two instruments to simulate his fancy dance steps. Listening to a recording of this type of music, it is possible for the initiated to "see" the movements of the masquerader purely from the recorded sound. An ululation during the course of the music would immediately tell us that the masquerader was executing some improvisatory dance steps; the sound of the bell tied to his waist, if he is an Ekpe or Obon masquerader, will always coincide with his bodily movements during the dance.

In a way this instrumental style of punctuating every important movement of a masquerader by ululation or a musical instrument (usually the gong), is very comparable to what happens in a European circus; a drum roll always indicates that the man on the flying trapeze is about to

execute a difficult movement or that a clown is about to do something funny or unusual.

Jones[2] is not sure that it is possible for an instrumental group to end as one body as happens in western music. He is of the opinion that ". . .in drumming the main beats never coincide. . .thus it is impossible for a drumming to come to a dramatic end. . .it just fizzles out when one drummer gets tired and stops playing." This is yet another instance of trying to analyze African music in the light of western conceptions, which many times produces distorted views and conclusions.[3] Jones was probably looking out for a conductor's sign or an obvious movement by the leader of the musical group he was observing which was not forthcoming. In African musical practices, a sign by the leader of a group can take the form of a smile, a flash of the eyelids, a nod of the head or even a special rhythmic pattern on the solo talking drum which is understood by the players only.

A similar rhythmic drum signal exists also in western military band music. In a ceremonial parade, the bass drum player signals the end of apiece by accenting the first and third beats of a quick march or the second beat of a slow march:

---

[2]A. J. Jones, "African Rhythm," Africa, XXlV,(January 1954),p. 27.

[3]See Samuel Akpabot, "Theories in African Music," African Arts, VI, (Autumn, 1972), pp. 59-62.

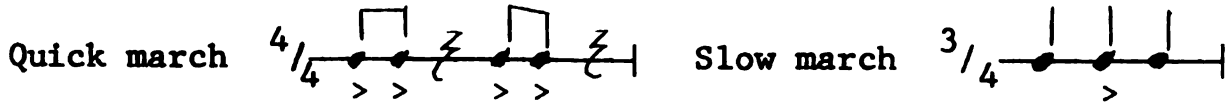


Figure 6.

We also have an example in jazz music where the leader of the group indicates to the other musicians that a chorus is not to be repeated by glancing significantly at them.

When we come to consider the vocal pattern in children's songs, we find that a chief feature of this type of music is the shortness of the melodic line. Here is an example from a children's game song where each player passes a small stick to his neighbor following the rhythmic pattern of the song. The player who is unable to maintain this rhythmic movement ends up accumulating other children's sticks and is ruled out of the game.

Mkpok Eto

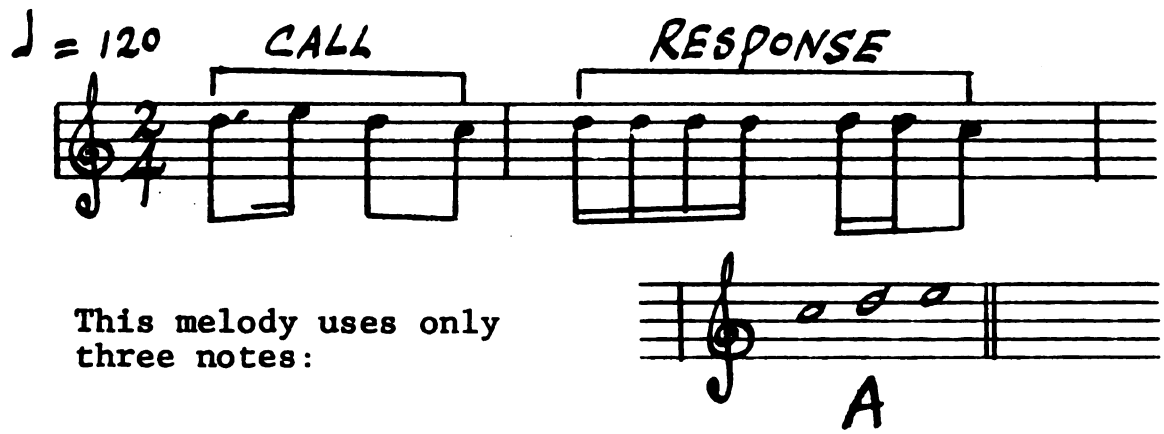


Figure 7A.

In the course of the game, the children start adding a second part to the call-and-response pattern producing improvisatory counterpoint in the response and two-part harmony in thirds and fourths in the call.

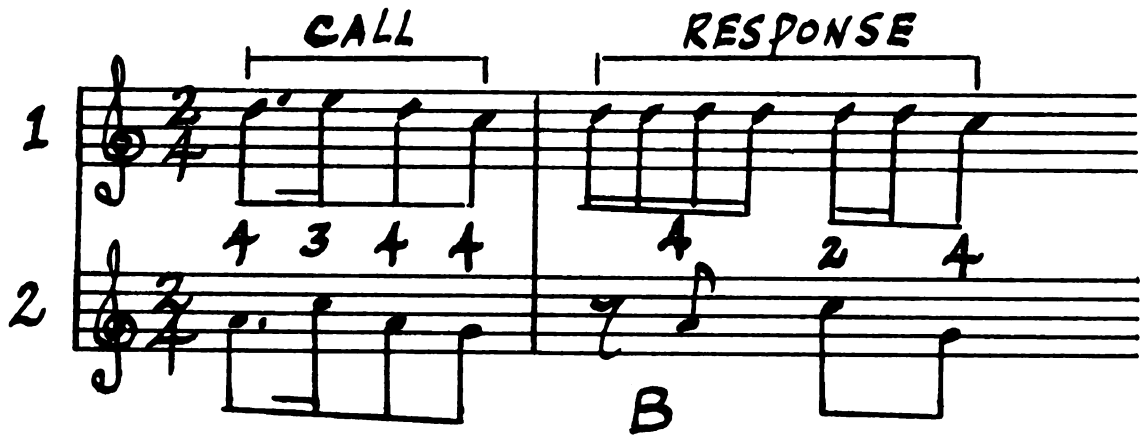


Figure 7B.

Children's songs are usually accompanied by clapping, or the twin-gong, which fulfills the same rhythmic function. In one game called Nti Eweb, the children stood facing one another in pairs, each child clapping his right hand against the left hand of the child opposite him in rhythm, singing a nursery rhyme at the same time. As the game progressed, it was noticeable that, whereas the song was in 4/4 time, the clapping had suddenly changed into 3/4 time without the rhythmic pulse being disturbed, producing something like Figure 8.

The children did not know the mechanics of matching triple time against quadruple time but were performing the music with accuracy. It was clearly not a case of

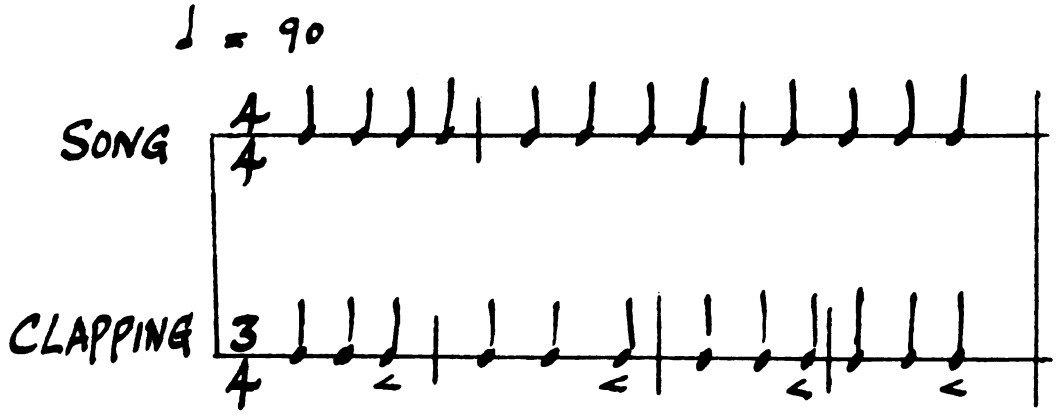


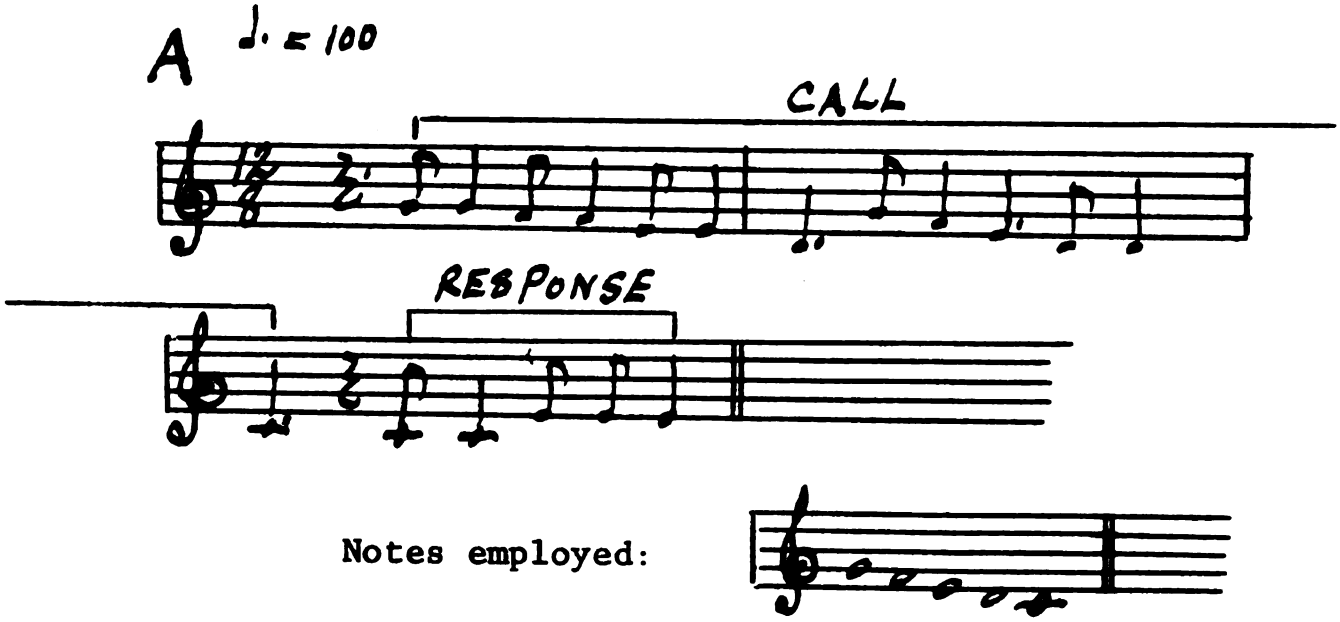
Figure 8.

deliberately trying to match two beats against three, but an instinctive exercise producing polymeter which is unique to the Ibibio people. It was also noticeable that while the children were moving their bodies rhythmically to the duple meter of the song, they were not offset by the triple meter of their clapping.

Sometimes the songs by women employ neither a strictly pentatonic scale nor indeed a heptatonic scale but a mixture of these two scales. The following women's song does not use the pentatonic scale as we know it, but rather employs the first five notes of the heptatonic scale, as shown in Figure 9A. Figure 9B illustrates another song that uses only three notes of the heptatonic scale.

What these songs go to show is that the melodic line in Ibibio music is very short and the form of the

Ekpe kom kom



Ambo-o

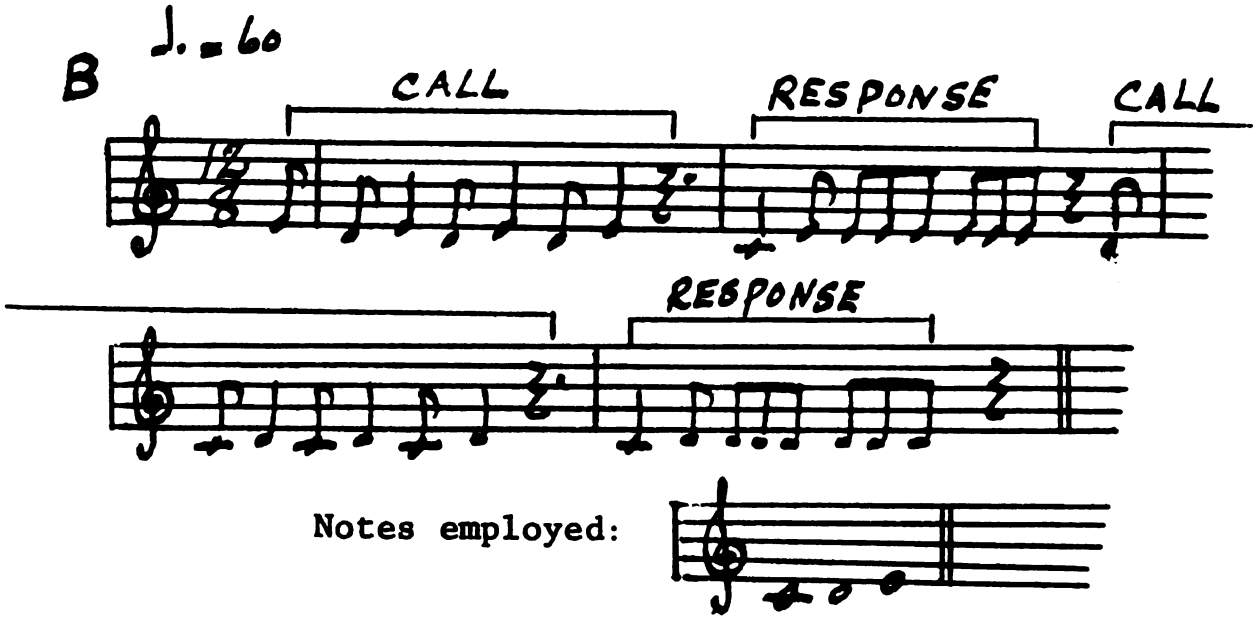


Figure 9.

melody can only be described as Unary.[4] The harmonic elements in both cases were in the style of strict organum in fifths. Sometimes a spontaneous contrapuntal treatment was added in the form of a humming pattern by two other voice-parts against the words sung by a third voice part producing this result:

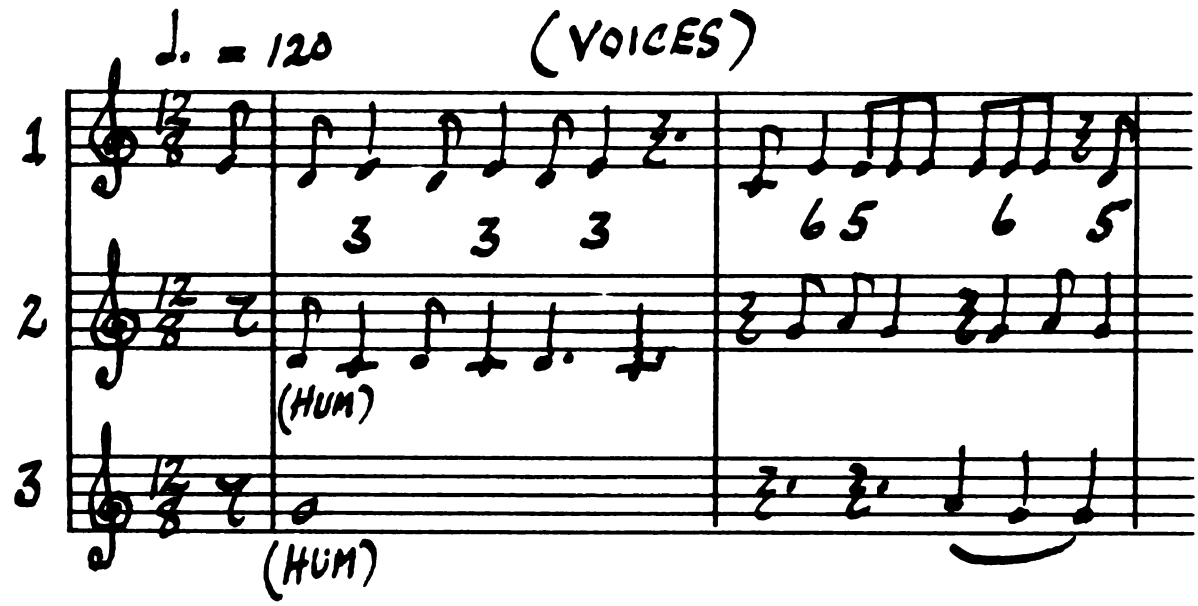


Figure 10.

The harmonic content in this extract was clearly the result of the movement of the individual parts. While this was going on a fourth voice-part made up of members of the chorus was singing the melody in the first voice-part a

---

[4]Conversation with Professor Gomer Jones of Michigan State University, who in a discussion of the String Quartets of Bartok labelled one or two movement-sections Unary as opposed to binary and ternary.

fifth below. As the author observed it, after the melody was announced by the cantor, it was harmonized in two parts in fifths for some time, and then the version in Figure 10 was introduced using thirds, fifths and sixths in combination performance. Both the children's and the women's songs were modelled after the pattern of call-and-response; after a time an orchestra joined the women's ensemble whereas the children used clapping for accompaniment. Here are three more Ibibio folk melodies to support the contention that people who are primarily pentatonic as the Ibibios are, can also sing in other modes.

Adiagha Mma

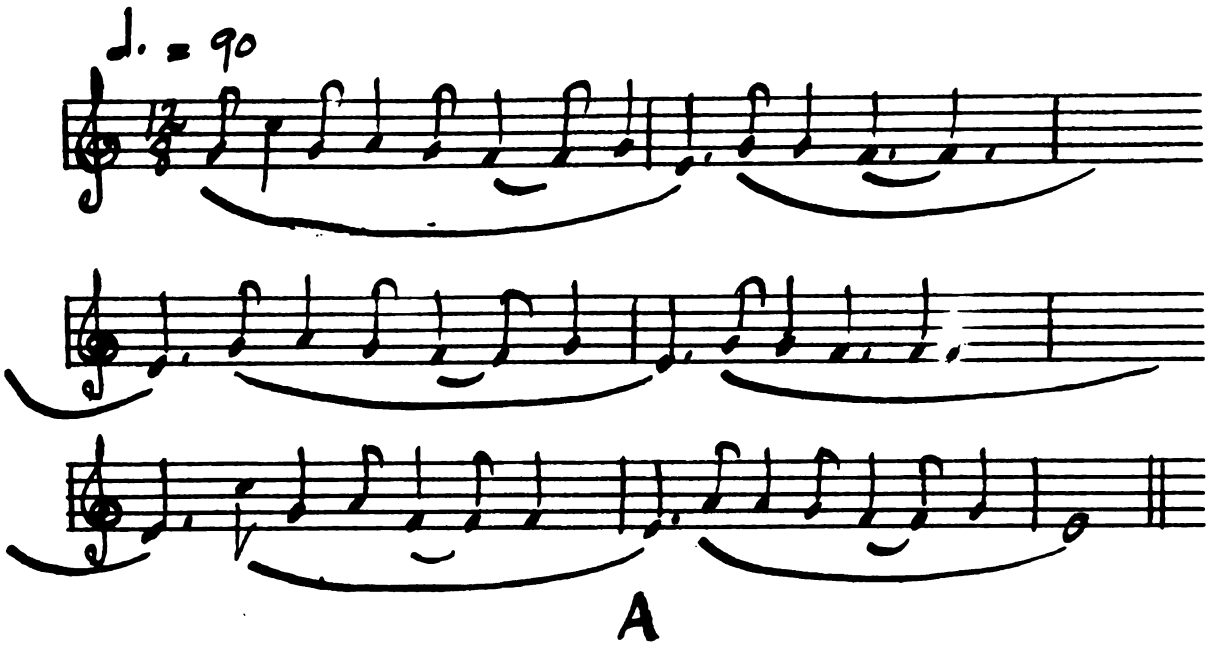
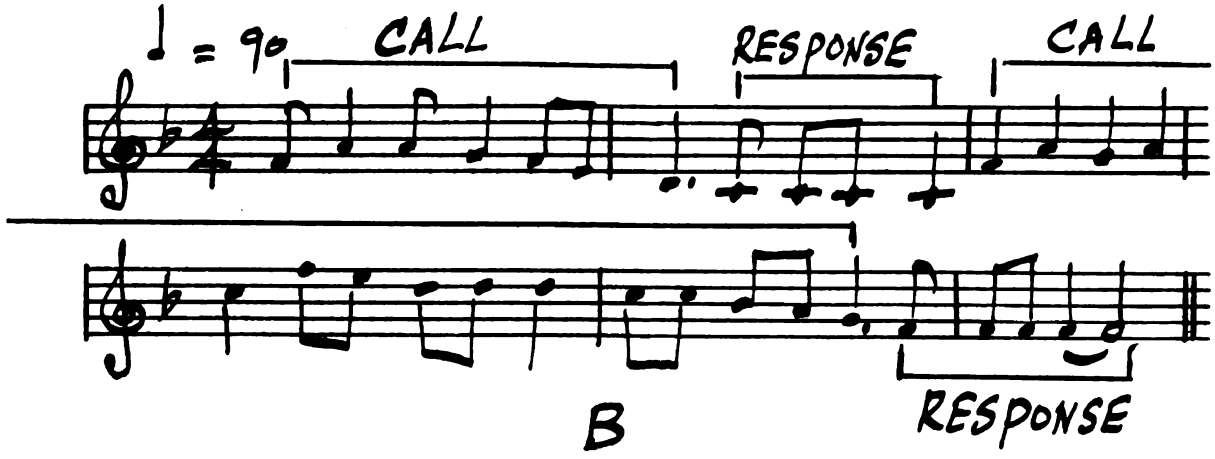
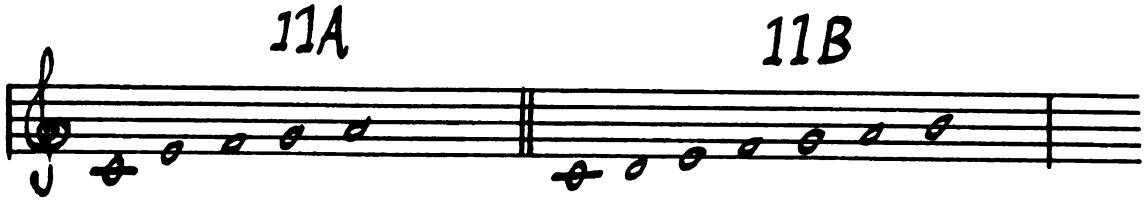


Figure 11A.

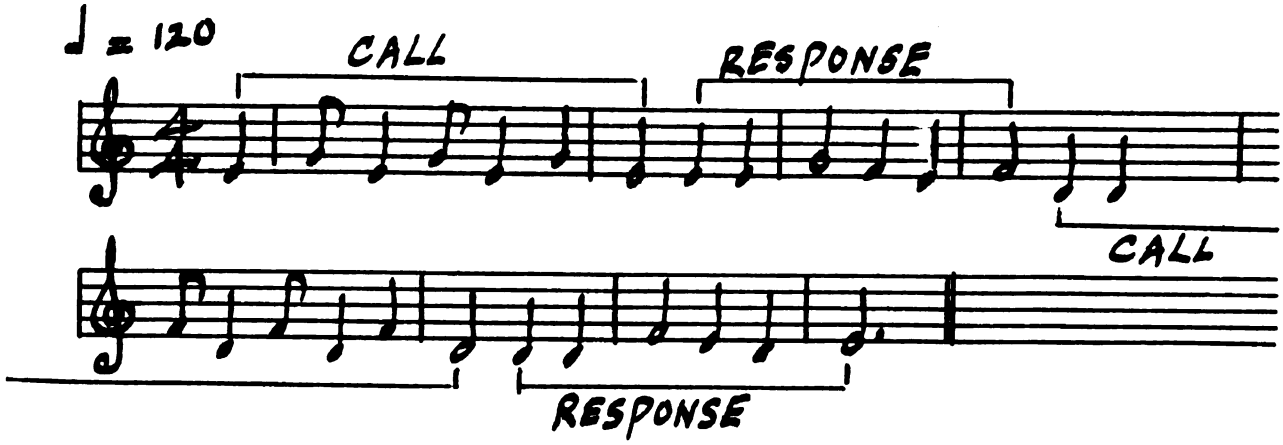
Kpanyogo yogo



Notes Used:



Eya Mio



Notes Used:

Figure 11B and 11C.

The three melodies in Figure 11 use four, five and seven notes of the heptatonic scale in addition to the three-note melody of Figure 9. The rhythm of all these melodies is conceived in what has been referred to throughout this study as Ibibio standard rhythm proving that this iambic rhythm occurs both in the vocal and instrumental music of the people. Figures 11B and 11C are conceived in call-and-response pattern suggesting that they are dance tunes (which indeed they are) or refrains from folklore sessions. Figure 11A, making use of all the notes of the heptatonic scale suggests that the melody is either a dirge or the type of song one sings with a thumb piano accompaniment (which it is). In Figure 11C the melody of the response is adapted from that of the call, whereas in Figure 11B the chorus line reiterates the last note of the call as the response; in other words, the response in a call-and-response situation in Ibibio music can be made up of either a melodic phrase or just one note repeated rhythmically. These examples of Ibibio songs serve as rebuttals to some of the theories propounded on African music. Hornbostel was of the view that up-beats are unknown in African music[5] and that an African song could not be conceived without antiphony; Ward believed that there was no syncopation in African

---

[5]E. M. von Hornbostel, "African Negro Music," Africa. Vol. 1, (1928),pp. 25-26.

melodies as this was already present in the gong and drums.[6] Figure 11C in these transcriptions contradicts Hornbostel while Figure 11B proves Ward wrong. Herskovits and Bascom sounded a warning about the danger of generalization about African music when they wrote:

> "The diversity of African cultures and of African reactions to European culture presents a major obstacle to understanding contemporary Africa even for experienced observers. It makes the task of describing Africa to those who have never seen it the more difficult because of the temptation to draw generalizations that are valid only for specific African groups and particular African regions."[7]

To the author's knowledge, very little research has been done in Nigerian traditional music, and although much has been written on Ibibio religion, it has always been divorced from its musical association in an attempt to fit it into the patterns of religions of the western world. This is like trying to narrate an African folklore and omitting the vocal refrain that binds the story together.

Summary

1. Ibibio traditional melodies can employ anything from three notes to seven notes. They can be

---

[6] W. E. Ward, "Music in the Gold Coast," Gold Coast Review, 111, July-December, 1927, p. 221.

[7] Melville Herskovits and William Bascom, "The Problems of Stability and Change in African Culture" in Continuity and Change in African Culture, ed. Bascom and Herskovits, (University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 4.

conceived either in the pentatonic scale or the heptatonic scale, sometimes using semitones.

2. Harmonies are usually in fourths or fifths in strict organum style but sometimes in thirds.
3. The choral pattern is that of call-and-response sung by cantor and chorus.
4. Ritual choral music is organized differently from nonritualistic singing. The songs in ritualistic music are those handed down through the years; those of nonritualistic groups are usually improvised.
5. The rhythms of nonritualistic music are generally regular; those of ritual music mix flexible rhythms with strict tempo.
6. The use of nonsense words, yodelling and ululation are features of the choral patterns in Ibibio music.
7. Children's songs are traditional, not improvised, and are generally accompanied by clapping. Mixed meters have been known to exist in their songs, which make use of very few notes.
8. It is possible to listen to a choral performance and determine whether it is masquerade music or music for pleasure.
9. The use of instruments to accompany a recitative in the style of a recitativo secco is a feature of ritual music, which is generally absent from nonritual music.

10. There is nothing like absolute vocal or instrumental music among the Ibibios. All vocal music is accompanied by instruments and sometimes dancing.
11. Embellisments, anticipation, canon at the fourth or fifth and improvisatory counterpoint are all special features of Ibibio choral music.
12. Not all Ibibio choral music is antiphonal.
13. Ritual and nonritual choral music is always preceded by an a capella section designed to enable the singers to get their bearings.

CHAPTER VII

IBIBIO INSTRUMENTAL RHYTHMS

Standard rhythms are rhythms commonly associated with certain instruments. In Ibibio music, there are certain instruments that have recurrent rhythmic patterns regardless of the orchestral group with which they are used. These rhythms have through the years been associated in the minds of the musicians with these instruments; and the first thing anyone starting out to learn a particular instrument does is to try to master its standard rhythm. Perhaps the most famous example of a standard rhythm in African music is that of the gong known as bell rhythm which Jones tells us is common throughout Africa.[1]

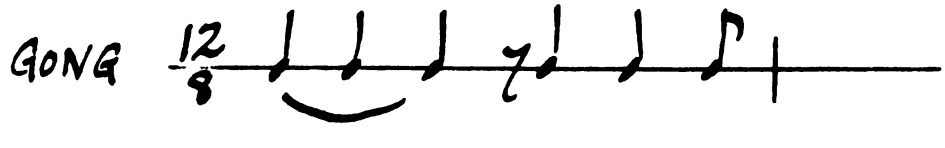


Figure 12.

---

[1]A. M. Jones, Studies in African Music. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 210-212.

This rhythm is used extensively in Nigerian music; but among the Ibibios, the bell rhythm is usually heard played by the woodblock. The standard rhythm for the rattle, whether played as an accompaniment to the hourglass drum of the Yorubas or in Ibo music is this:

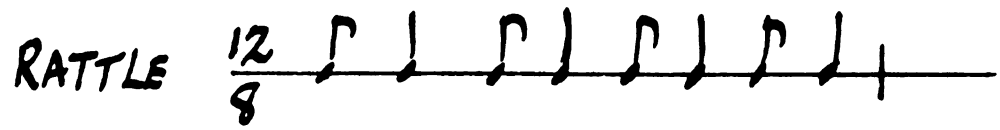


Figure 13.

But in Ibibio music, this rhythm is the standard one for the large drums. This does not mean that no other instrument plays this rhythm; what it does mean is that this is the dominant rhythm of the large drums, and in all transcriptions of large drum rhythms all or part of this rhythm will be found in one form or another. If one is able to understand all the standard rhythms played by principal instruments in any ensemble, the task of notation becomes much easier. The complexity often mentioned in any discussion of African rhythms is nothing more than individual rhythms put together to form a whole. A transcription of all instrumental rhythms encountered in the course of this research produced these models.

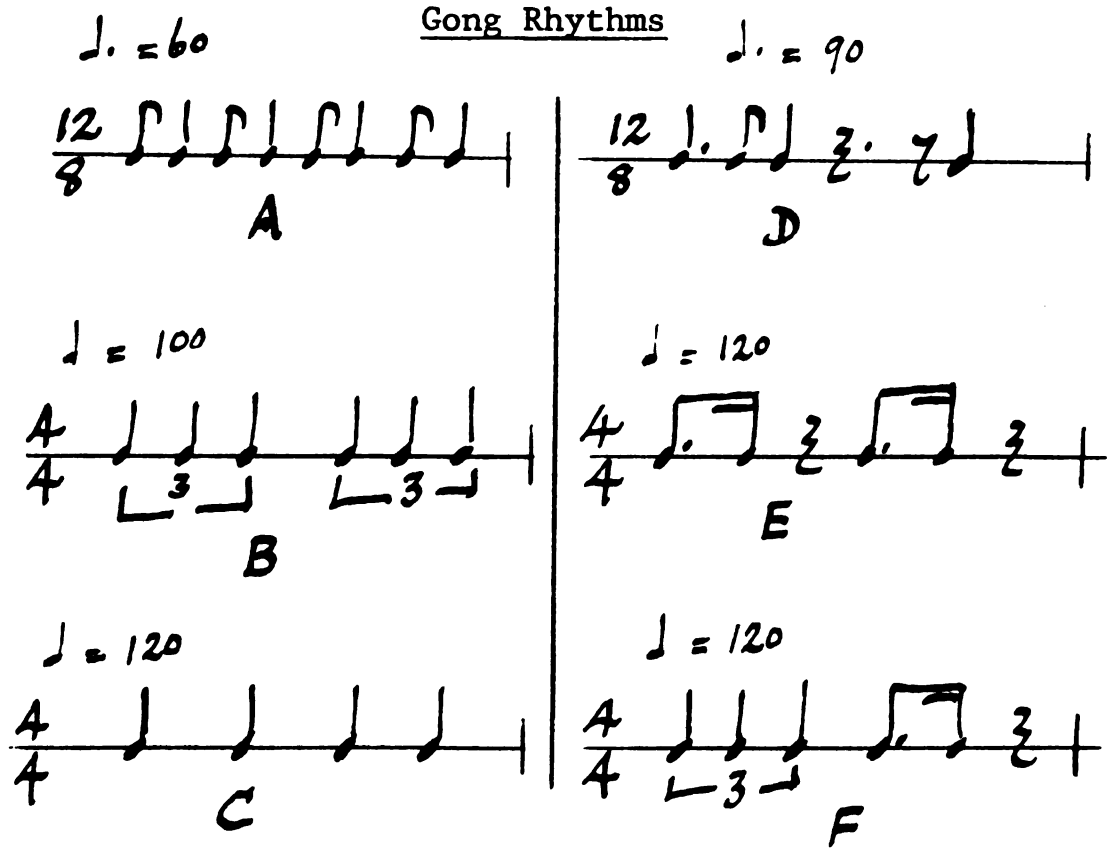


Figure 14.

We can easily identify Figure 14A as the standard rattle rhythm in Nigerian music; but here it is transferred to the gong. In Ebre music this rhythm is used to guide the dancers who move their hips in a series of jerky iambic rhythms. It will be seen at a glance that gong rhythms are mostly conceived in quadruple rather than triple time. The rhythm at Figure 14E is that of the Ekere, an instrument of the gong variety used in Ekong Ekpo music. Usually it is played by many musicians at once ad libitum; but on one occasion this steady rhythm was recorded. All the other transcriptions are of the large gong as distinct from the twin-gong, which is a much smaller instrument. An

excellent example of African cross-rhythms can be obtained by getting six people to perform all these rhythms at once by clapping their hands or tapping on the table. Figure 14F is the standard rhythm for the gong.

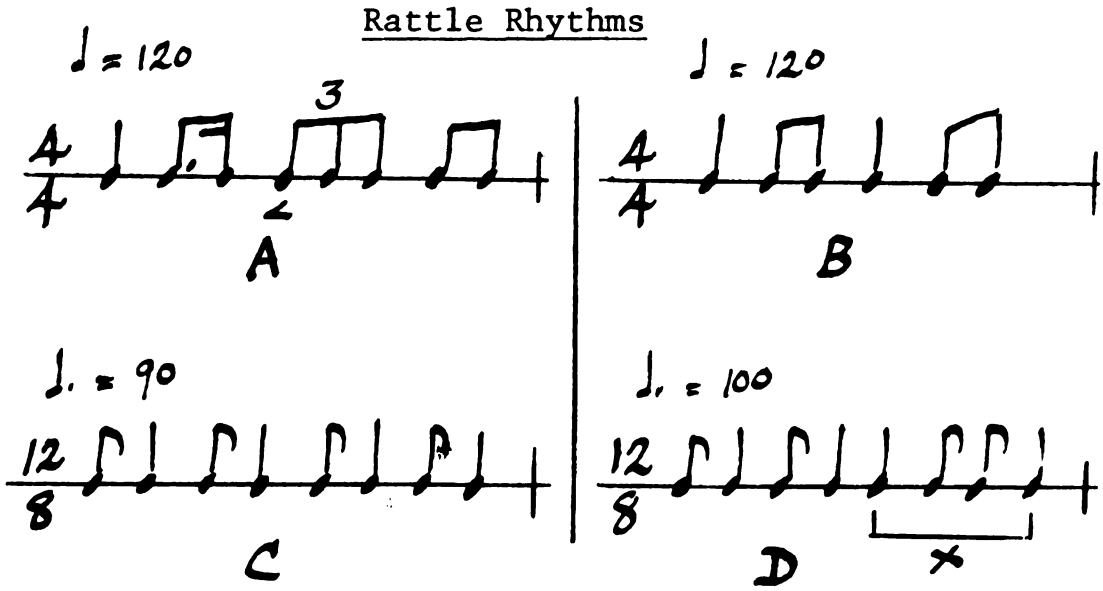


Figure 15.

Figure 15A is the standard rhythm of the rattle as used in Ibibio music. It will be observed that it combines a quarter note, a skip, a triplet and two eight notes — rhythmic elements that are found in all the transcriptions. The first note of the triplet is always accented to suggest an iambic rhythm; and Figure 15D combines iambic and trochaic rhythms. Figure 15C which we have come across twice before and will meet many times more, will from now on be identified as Ibibio standard rhythm. With the exception of Obon masquerade music where as many as six rattles are

used at once, only a pair of rattles is normally used in any given ensemble; in Oko music where the instrumentation consists of rattles, woodblocks and a horn, two pairs of rattles are used for better effect.

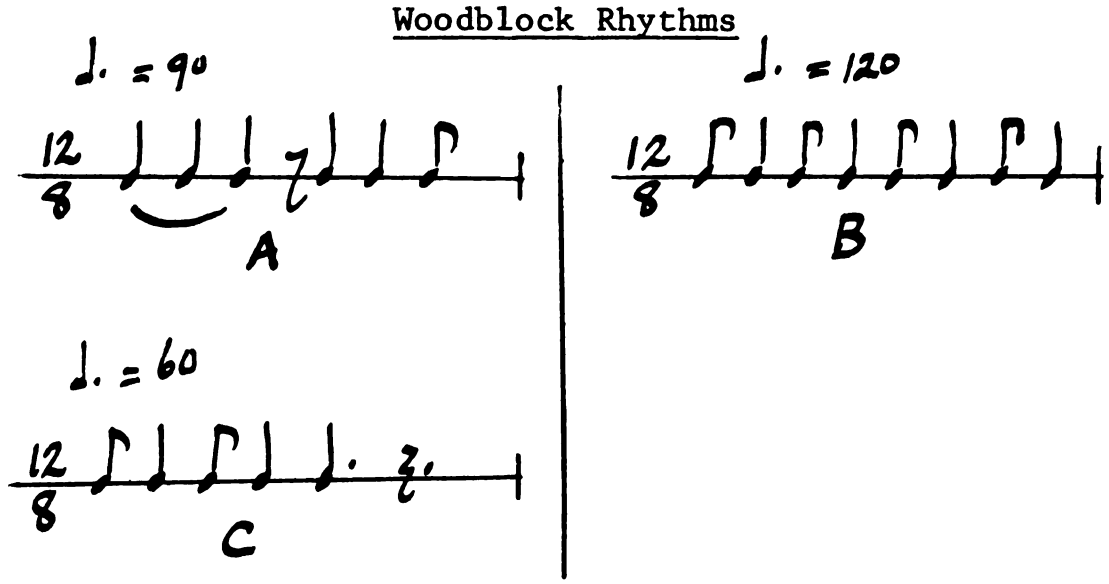


Figure 16.

The standard woodblock rhythm is that of Figure 16A which is the bell rhythm already mentioned as being common throughout Africa. In any given orchestral ensemble the chances are that this rhythm will be the one used. The rhythms in Figures 16B and 16C are found very rarely and mostly in cases where two woodblocks are used instead of one--a large woodblock and a small one. A comparision of this standard rhythm with that of the rattle will show that the rattle rhythm is really a variant of the woodblock rhythm which combines three Greek rhythmic modes most commonly found in

African music: the <u>iambic</u>—short, long; the <u>trochaic</u>—long, short; and the <u>spondee</u>—long, long.

<u>Wooden Drum Rhythms</u>

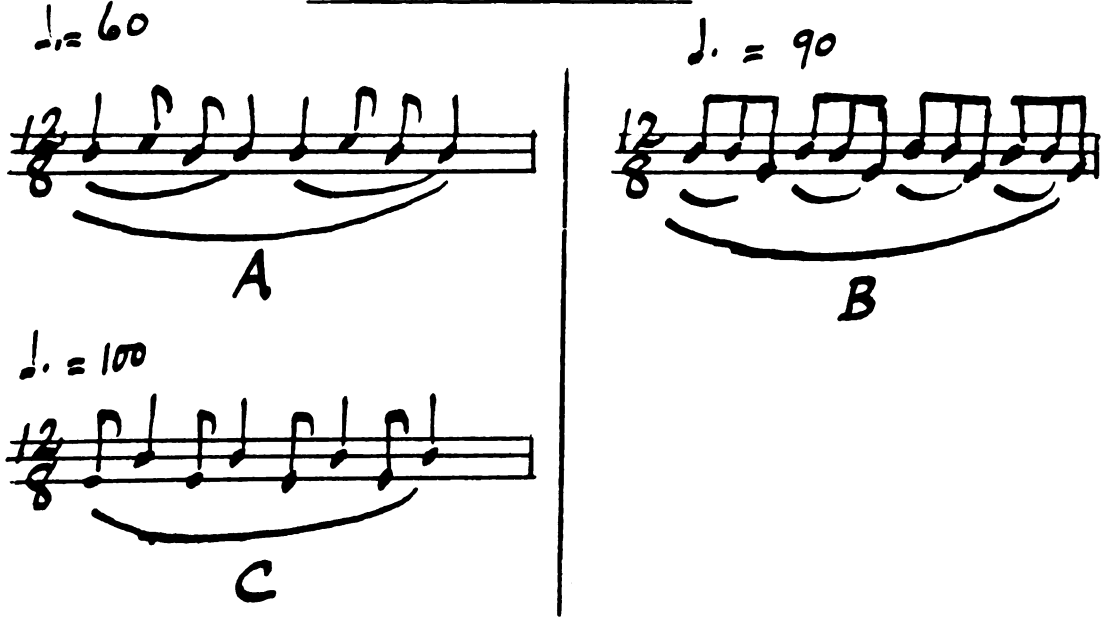


Figure 17.

Since the wooden drum has two tones, the transcriptions have been notated in such a way as to reflect these tones—the most commonly found of its three intervals being the second above and the third below. Figure 17C is the <u>Ibibio standard rhythm</u>. Wooden drum rhythms as well as large drum rhythms are generally conceived in 12/8 time in Ibibio music; small drum rhythms are mostly in 4/4 time. In most ensembles, the player uses two wooden drums chosen in such a way as to make one of the tones common to both drums; in this way a skillful player is able to produce an exciting resultant rhythm with these two instruments. Where three wooden drums are used, which is possible but rare,

the third drum chosen is that a fifth above the common tone. If this tone is say C, then the three drums will be tuned to (a) C-D; (b) A-C; and (c) C-G which gives the master drummer plenty of material to work with. The name of the wooden drum, Obodom is not unconnected with the two tones it produces:

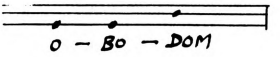


Figure 18.

The standard wooden drum rhythm is that notated in Figure 17B.

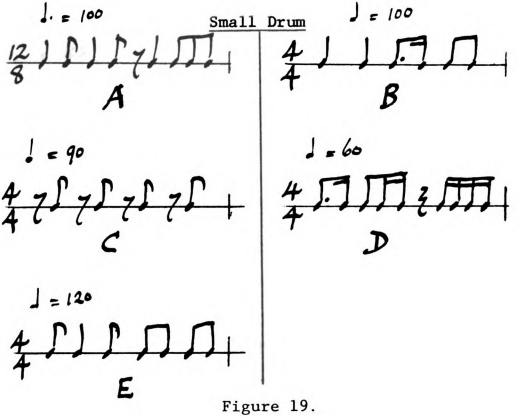


Figure 19.

Skin drums are either large (primary drums) or small (secondary drums); the larger a drum is the more it talks. Small drum rhythms are mostly in 4/4 time and the large drum rhythms, like the wooden drum rhythms, in 12/8 time. Figure 19A is a variant of the gong bell rhythm and Figure 19C suggests the Ibibio standard rhythm. Figure 19E is yet another example of syncopation which Hornbostel concluded did not exist in the music of the African people. It is the standard small drum rhythm.

Large Drum

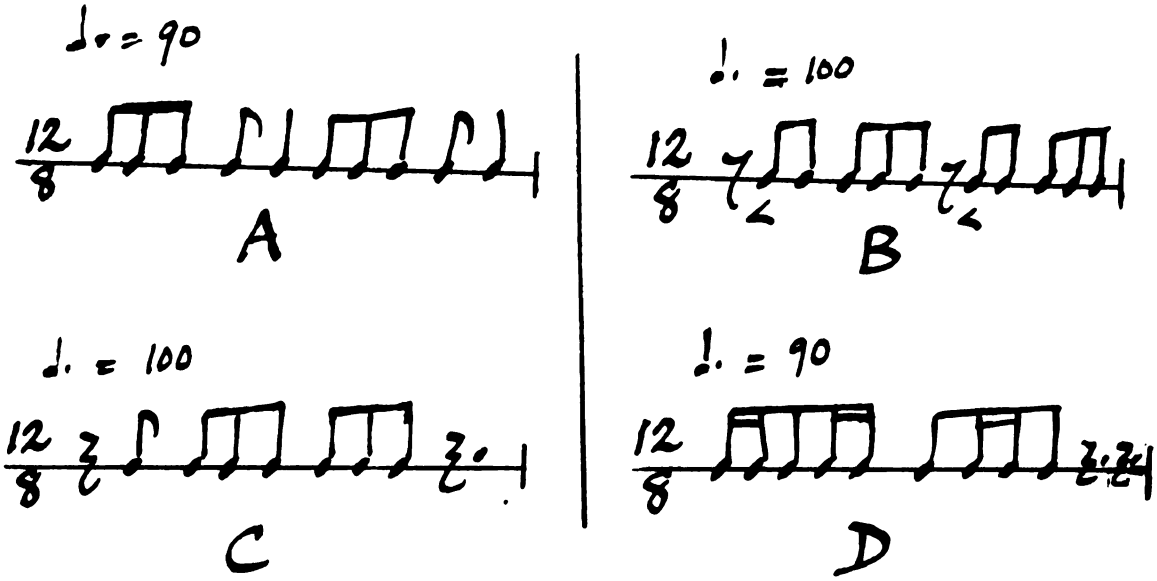


Figure 20.

The large drums give instrumental music of the Ibibios its character and uniqueness; and one can always tell whether a piece of drumming is from the Ibibio area or not by listening for the iambic rhythm so dominant in the large drum figurations. Twin drums or two-tone drums are usually small drums, and when

used the pulse beats are alternated between both hands. What western ethnomusicologists often refer to as the talking drum when discussing African music is usually the large drum, because it is this drum that provides the solo in an all-drum ensemble. The soloist is usually a musician who has mastered all the drum rhythms notated in these pages and is able to manipulate them in such a way as to create excitement and interest.

A good way of imagining what an improvised drum solo sounds like in an all-drum ensemble is to imagine the soloist playing all the twelve wooden-drum, small-drum and large-drum rhythms transcribed in this study against a regular pulse beat in 4/4 time with a short break between each rhythm. The effect will be that of an improvised rhythm; but in fact it is made up of many rhythms which the master drummer has come across in different performances, put together to form a whole. This is not suggesting that these rhythms are played mechanically; for within the concepts of previously learned rhythms, there is always room for individual expression. The standard large drum rhythm is at Figure 20A.

The two muffled tones of the pot drum are produced by hitting the large open end of the pot with the palm of one hand and the small hole at the side with the palm of the other hand or a flat instrument. In the examples in Figure 21, the marking (i) denotes the large hole and (ii) the small hole. The sound produced by hitting the

Pot Drum Rhythms

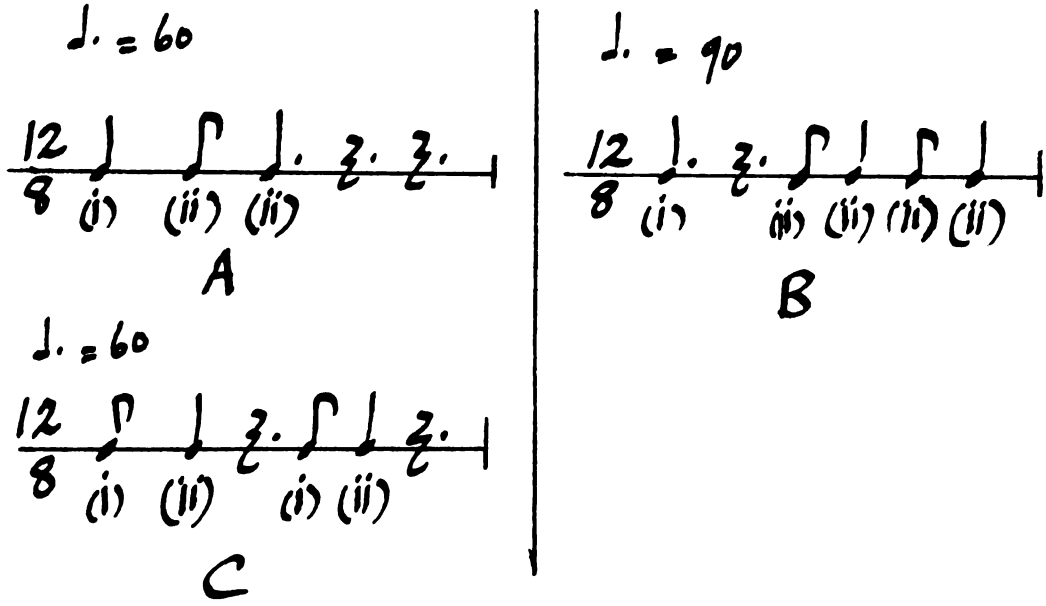


Figure 21.

smaller hole. Notice the dominant iambic rhythms in all the transcriptions.

The pot drum is seldom used for music with a fast tempo as this obscures its effects. Since it is not a loud-sounding instrument, the musicians usually use more than one drum in an ensemble. In the Ibibio area only women play this instrument in an orchestra where there can be as many as six or more pot drums. The drums are tuned to different pitches and come in different sizes; and the sound of six pot drums with different pitches playing different rhythmic figurations are accompaniement to a group of women singing, is perhaps one of the most delightful sounds in the whole of Ibibio music. The pot drum is

also used extensively by the Ibos and the Kalabari people of the Rivers State of Nigeria where it is played by both men and women. Figure 21A represents the standard pot drum rhythm which like other rhythms used in playing this instrument, is generally in iambic meter.

Summary

1. The iambic rhythm of short-long, permeates the whole structure of Ibibio instrumental rhythmic patterns. It is usually in 12/8 time.
2. Standard rhythms exist for the gong, rattle, woodblock, wooden drum, pot drum and large skin drum. These rhythms are easily identifiable in any instrumental ensemble.
3. The bell rhythm so common throughout Africa is played in Ibibio music by the woodblock.
4. The iambic rhythm that permeates Ibibio music is generally played by the large drums.
5. All instrumental rhythms are conceived either in duple or quadruple time or in compound quadruple time.
6. The term talking drum for any particular drum is wrong since all drums talk in African music, some more eloquently than others.
7. In all Ibibio rhythmic patterns there is always

a "metronome sense" [2] which keeps the musicians together regardless of whatever complex rhythms each musician is playing.

---

[2]See Richard A. Waterman, "African Influence on the Music of the Americas" in Acculturation in the Americas, ed. Sol Tax. "Proceedings of the Twenty-ninth International Congress of Americanists" Vol. 11,(University of Chicago Press, 1952) pp. 211-212. Waterman describes "metronome sense" as "conceiving any music structured along a theoretical framework of beats regularly spaced in time and cooperating with the pulses of this metric pattern whether or not the beats are expressed in actual melodic or percussion tones."

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

From the available data in our study, it is now possible to list the characteristics of Ibibio music as follows:

1. Melodies usually very short.
2. Dominance of iambic rhythm in vocal and instrumental music.
3. Use of pentatonic and heptatonic scales.
4. Two-tone instruments usually tuned to intervals of a major second, a minor third and a perfect fifth.
5. Absence of any kind of flute.
6. Vocal harmony in two parts predominantly in fourths and fifths.
7. Use of polymetric rhythm in clapping patterns.
8. Evidence of four-part instrumental harmony spanning the range of a tenth.
9. Praise songs and songs of scandal most commonly used.
10. Four-part instrumental homophonic movement with contrasting rhythms.
11. A capella two-part introduction precedes all choral music.

12. Number symbolism in instrumentation.

13. Use of drone in vocal music.

14. Evidence of two-part counterpoint in vocal music.

15. Role of individual instruments very prominent.

These fifteen characteristics have come out of the analysis of the musical practices of the people. Looking at these from a socio-musical angle, four more characteristics evolve:

1. Pre-occupation with the supernatural.

2. Concern for good morals.

3. Rebellion against injustice.

4. Belief in strong family system.

If it is agreed, as this author does, that music influences behavior, then these four socio-musical characteristics viewed together with the evidence of the music practices should furnish us with the character of the Ibibio people and open avenues for further research into their origins. All the musical and socio-musical characteristics can be grouped under five broad headings: (a) melody, (b) rhythm, (c) instruments and symbols, (d) song style and texts and (e) instrumentation.

Melody

Sachs sees all melodies as being of three types: logogenic (word-born); pathogenic(emotion-born) and melogenic (music-born).[1] Melodies in Ibibio music are word-born,

---

[1]See Curt Sachs, World History of the Dance. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1937),pp. 181-203.

which means that they evolve from the rise and fall of the words in a sentence producing speech melody. According to Sachs, melodies of this type have a narrow range, small intervals and corresponding narrow dance steps in dance patterns. Let us examine the range of all the melodies transcribed in this study:

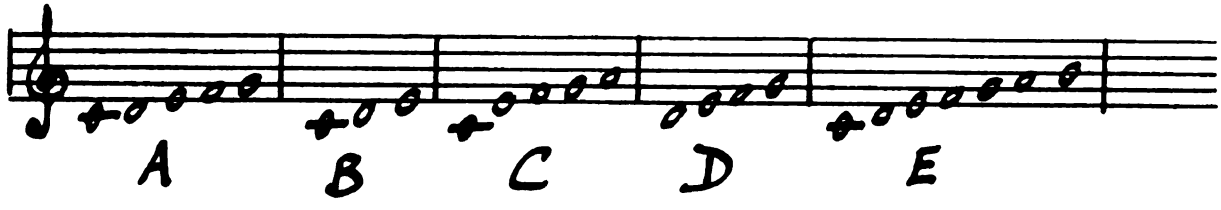


Figure 22.

They are melodies of three, four, five and seven notes. The author did not come across any melodies with six notes during his research; although, as in most research into African music, it would be dogmatic to state that there are no melodies in Ibibio music using six notes. The scale of the melody at Figure 22E we can easily place as heptatonic; but the two melodies at Figures 22A and 22C cannot be called pentatonic as they do not fall into the common definition of that term. If we take the resultant of these two scales, then we have a six-note scale pattern running C, D, E, F, G, A. Does this mean that this scale exists in Ibibio music? Purely on the evidence the chances are that it exists; if the people can sing C, D, E, F, G; and also C, E, F, G, A; then what stops them singing

C, D, E, F, G, A, since all these notes exist in their minds? Jones believes that the African scale is a series of conjunct fourths with each of the groups a different scale because each has a different emphasis note.[2] Using this as a yardstick, the melodies under discussion would be arranged thus:

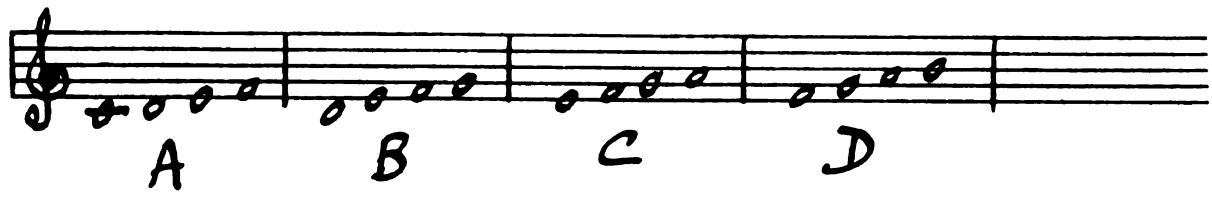


Figure 23.

Jones is careful, however, to point out that the last word has not been said on the subject.

Another thing that is striking about these melodies is the nature of their melodic movement which had this pattern in two of the examples:

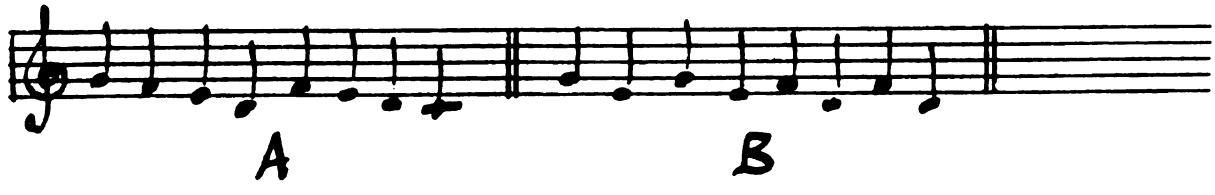


Figure 24.

---

[2]See A. M. Jones, "African Music in Northern Rhodesia and Some other Places." Rhodesia-Livingstone Museum, Occasional Papers No. 4, (1949), p. 10.

Discussing African melodies Jones feels that "the tendency is for the tune to start high and gradually to work downwards. . .there is a distinct feeling in these tunes of hovering over and around a central note or notes round which the melody seems to be built or towards which it works."[3] The author agrees with Jones in so far as Ibibio music is concerned. A close examination of the melodies transcribed in Figures 7, 9 and 11 will reveal this pattern:

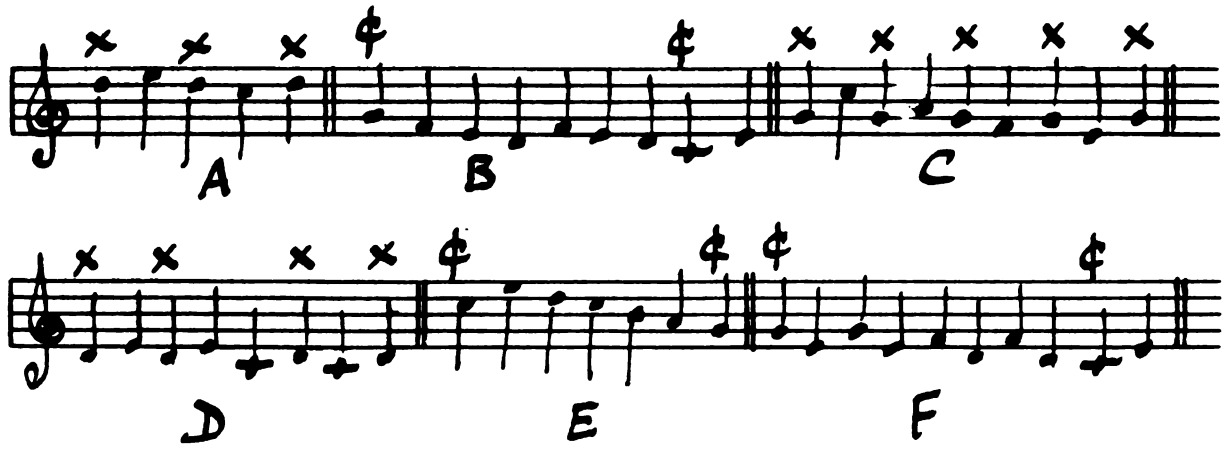


Figure 25.

All the melodies start high and gradually work downwards except the children's song in Figure 25A. At Figure 25B the music moves progressively downwards and at Figure 25F we have interlocked thirds. At the points marked (x) in each example we have the central note around which the melody hovers.

---

[3]A. M. Jones, "African Music in Northern Rhodesia", p. 11.

Hornbostel also had a point about African melodies when he spoke of them as being "a structure consisting of two halves, the first one resting on the upper fifth and the second one built analogously on the tonic."[4] At Figure 25, B, E and F, we find this thesis validated at places marked (♩). As in the question of African scales, the last word has not been said on this subject; but it is hoped that the discussion on these pages will open the way for further research and comments.

How do all these musical characteristics influence the behavioral pattern of life of the Ibibio people? Sachs says that short melodies produce narrow dance steps; and this can be validated by watching the dance of the women of the Ebre society, which not only employs iambic rhythms but very narrow dance steps with a lot of movement of the hips. It might be necessary in passing to mention that the early missionaries of the Qua Iboe Church, who first set foot in Ibibioland, considered the Ebre dance to be immoral and the musical instruments used to accompany the dance devil-inspired and forbade any of their converts to take part in the activities of the society.

Since music affects behavior, can this also be the

---

[4]E. M. von Hornbostel, op. cit., p. 18.

reason why Ibibio women are such good lovers? Or is the point far-fetched?

The tightness of the dance steps and melodic range also expresses the tightness and cautiousness of the Ibibio people—giving nothing away and never venturing beyond a small area where they have everything under perfect control. It is indeed not surprising that Major Leonard was quoted in our introductory discussion as describing them as a people from whom it was impossible to collect any information. There is among the Ibibios a distrust of the stranger which the author feels is influenced by their tight melodic patterns; and even within the same community, a man offering another a glass of wine has to taste the wine first to assure his guest that no poison has been put into it.

The premises of this study do not extend to social anthropology; but the effect of music on behavior cannot be overstated. The flamboyant approach to life of the Yorubas of the West; the Pythagorean outlook of the Hausas of the North; the adventurous spirit of the Ibos of the East and the carefree attitude of life of the Kalabaris of the Rivers State are all influenced by their music. While it is true that the Ibibios influenced their neighbors like the Ibos, there is not much evidence to show that they were themselves influenced to any great extent. The tightness and cautiousness of their outlook made it possible for them to live by themselves and prevent the severe

acculturation which other ethnic groups in the country suffered.

The extent to which words influence melodies in Ibibio music can be seen from these transcriptions of the melodic rise and fall in the names of three Ibibio musical instruments:

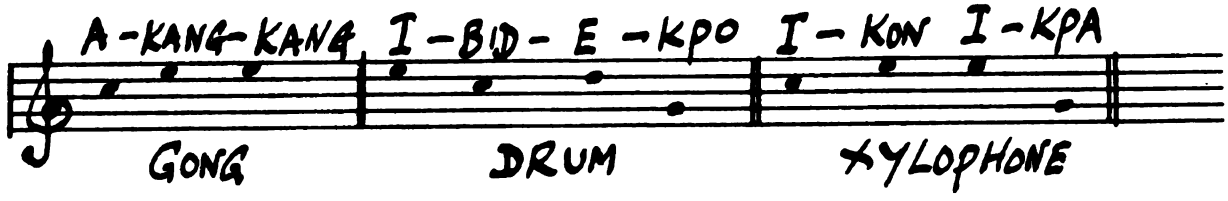


Figure 26.

Rhythm

Dalcroze tells us that "rhythm depends on intuition."[5] This may be true to a certain extent; but in our study of Ibibio rhythmic patterns, we have seen how a master drummer has first to learn the different standard rhythms of the various instruments of the orchestra to get to an eminent position. The vision that some Europeans have of the members of an African drum group drumming away intuitively is a wrong one. If we agree with Stravinsky that music is order, then from our transcriptions of rhythmic patterns in this study we must agree that there is a consistency and orderly organization in them.

---

[5]Emile Jaques Dalcroze, Rhythm, Music and Education. (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1921), p. 311.

There is such consistency in the recurrent iambic rhythm that one is tempted to ask, why this particular rhythm? Where did the people get it from? A definition that embraces all aspects of Ibibio rhythm is perhaps that of Ingham who defines rhythm as "regularly recurring series of accented sounds, unaccented sounds and rests expressed in rhythmic gymnastics by movements and inhibitions of movements."[6] The instrumental rhythms of an Ibibio ensemble are regular while those that accompany a cantor's recitative in ritual music are intuitive and irregular. One of the things that gives Ibibio rhythm its unique character is the way certain standard rhythms have been switched round.

The bell rhythm is played throughout Nigeria and other parts of Africa by the gong; but the Ibibios have given this rhythm to the woodblock. Why? This is rather like a European musical community that tunes its instruments to C instead of the traditional A. This action would certainly be a pointer to the musical practices in the area. The fact that rhythm in 4/4 time is conceived by the Ibibios in 12/8 time with a backbeat may seem of minor importance but is actually of great relevance. There is a similarity between the way the Yorubas and the Hausas conceive their standard rhythms and the way the Kalabari and Ibo people stress their main pulse beats. Here are some examples:

---

[6]Percy B. Ingham, "The Method: Growth and Practice," The Eurythmics of Jaques-Dalcroze, ed. M. E. Sadler, (Boston, Small Maynard and Co., 1913), p. 42.

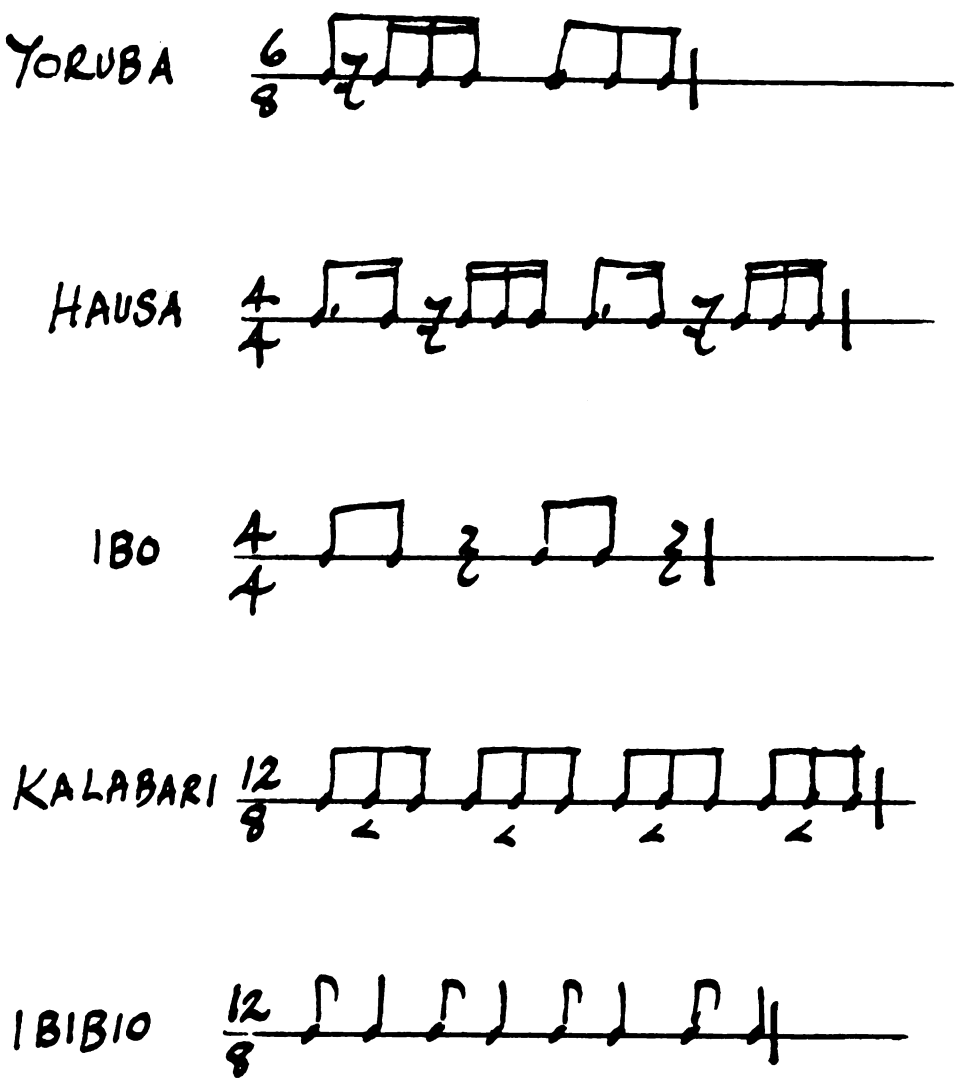


Figure 27.

These various ethnic groups must have brought these rhythms to Nigeria from their original origins of migration; and with the years they have become symbolic of the character and customs of the people. It could be that Turner is right when, writing of symbols, he says that "their internal consistency and symmetry may be related to traditions of

continuous residence and farming in a single habitat."[7] Rhythm can also be a great culture indicator if viewed from the right perspective, as it is in many instances incorporated into a ritual form. It can also influence dance patterns, as a comparison of the dance steps of the Ibos, Yorubas, Hausas, Kalabaris and Ibibios shows. The similarities between Kalabari and Ibibio dance steps can be traced to Ibibio origins.[8] Once the musical patterns have established these characteristics, it is the responsibility of the anthropologist to take it from there and establish historical origins.

Musical Instruments and Symbols

Nowhere in the whole of Nigeria do musical instruments play such a vital part in the lives of the people as among the Ibibios. Broadly speaking all African musical instruments are functional, and many of them are used symbolically for ritual worship; but in Nigeria, the Ibibios seem to have such a fear of the supernatural that almost every instrument is seen as having something to contribute to the well-being of the spirits. The masquerades of the Ibibios which

---

[7]Victor M. Turner, "Symbols in African Ritual," Science, Vol. 179, (March, 1973), p. 1104.

[8]For a discussion on Nigerian drum patterns, see Samuel Akpabot, "Standard Drum Patterns in Nigeria," African Music, Vol. V, (1971), pp. 37-39.

operate in secret societies are not to be confused with the worship of the gods of water, iron, thunder, fertility that obtains in many parts of Africa. The Ibibios worship only one god and believe that the spirits of their ancestors return to earth in another form.

Messenger sheds some light on this:

> "The central theme of Annang (Ibibio) religion is the worship of an all-powerful deity (Abassi) who rules over the universe. . .in the task of controlling the universe and regulating human conduct he is aided by a multitude of spirits (ndem). . .they perform specific tasks for the deity and inhabit shrines (idem). . . The tasks performed by the spirits can be classified as predominantly economic, political, social or religious. . .A person is thought to possess two souls; one inhabits the body (ekpo) and is immortal while the other one is called "bush soul". . .the souls of the ancestors living in the underworld are capable of giving aid to their relatives above and thus are worshipped at shrines. . .They must however have the permission of the deity to furnish power. . .Abassi stands with the ancestors in aiding lineage."[9]

Ekpo has already been described in the chapter on masquerades; it has also been pointed out that all masquerades come under the title of Mbre Idem (Idem music); what Messenger's thesis helps to prove is that since the concept of spirits in Ibibio culture is different from that of other parts of Africa, then it follows that musical instruments used as

---

[9]John C. Messenger, "Religious Acculturation Among the Annang Ibibio," in Continuity and Change in African Culture, ed. Bascom and Herskovits, (University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 280-281.

symbols perform slightly different functions in Ibibio society. They are not objects to be worshipped as such but rather a means of communicating the message of the spirits to the community. Thus, when you hear an Ekpo drum you do not think of the drum but what it's sound signifies, which is that there is a message from the Chief of the village to be delivered by the player. When you hear a bell ring, you expect to see an Ekpe masquerade; when you hear Uta horns playing, you know that a prominent old woman has died; when you hear the frightening tones of the Nsing Obon drum you know that a prominent member of the Ekpe society has died. The music of the Ikon (xylophone) ensemble indicates an Mbopo ceremony nearby; and the sound of an Akua Oduk (elephant tusk horn) is a sign that royalty is approaching.

All this is in contrast to a certain part of East Africa where a xylophone is hung on a tree when a boy is circumcized and taken down when he recovers. There, the musical instrument by itself is a symbol; but in Ibibio music, the musical instrument, the music it plays and the performer are all symbolic. The members of a community see and hear certain musical instruments so regularly, that a sound in itself has become a symbol together with the sight of the musical instrument which produces it and the status of the performer.

It is perhaps because the Ibibios had their own supreme being as opposed to idols that the early missionaries who came to the area found it difficult trying to interest them in yet another supreme being. In other parts of Nigeria, it was easier to convert the people by asking them to renounce their idols and follow a living supreme being. Turner puts it all together when he asserts that "ritual symbolism can only flourish where there is a thriving corporate life. The symbols are related to the process of adjusting the individual to the traditional social order in which he was born."[10] Thus, when young boys of eight and above join the Ekong Ekpo masquerade and through that association learn the songs, dances and musical instruments of the community, they are not, as early missionaries would have them believe, indulging in pagan rites but in their own way praising Abasi[11] the supreme being in the social order in which they were born—with gongs, drums and rattles instead of with "timbrels and cymbals" as demanded in the Bible.

Song Styles and Text

In African music there are many song categories—work songs, praise songs, funeral songs, songs of social control,

---

[10] V. W. Turner, The Drums of Affliction (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 22.

[11] Abasi is spelled with one s not two.

nonsense songs, songs of derision and songs of scandal, among others. But in our study of Ibibio music, two song categories seem to predominate: praise songs and song of scandal; and the reason is not hard to find. There is in Ibibio society a strong concern for good morals, purity and justice which dominates most of their music. Whereas it is possible to use obscenities and deride someone in song, it would be thought improper if the words were spoken instead of sung.

In ritual and nonritual ceremonies, singing plays a very important part. The unaccompanied recitative in a singing-speaking voice enables the cantor to explore all the parameters of pathos and bathos. When he wants to appeal to the supreme deity he sings, and when making ordinary statements he speaks. Wissler believes that "singing and dancing are consciously used in ceremonial procedures, the idea being that the greatest magical power resides in song."[12] The author will like to change the words magical power to power of appeal. The use of loud and soft tones; the ability to stress syllables and use throwaway lines; to cry in anguish or murmur in supplication; to change the tempo from fast to slow and vice versa--these are all the possibilities which the human voice possesses and which can be used to great effect in singing.

---

[12]Clark Wissler, An Introduction to Social Anthropology. (New York: Henry Holt Co., 1929), p. 278.

In masquerade music, music of social control and orchestras with special functions, songs constitute the backbone of the ceremony; and they not only tell stores, but also give an insight into the background of the ceremonies. When the women of the Ebre society meet once a year, as they do, they are not only gathering to sing and dance but are rebelling against the predominant social order of the Ibibios which places the women far below the men. The women cannot tell their menfolk what they think of them to their faces, as this would be against the social order, but they can scandalize them in song. The women of the Ndok Ufok Ebe society, use their meetings to dramatize the injustices they suffer at the hands of their husbands by scandalizing them in songs. When an Mbopo walks to the market naked, announcing her presence with music from little bells tied to her waist and rattles on her ankles, the women walk in front of her singing songs in praise of her beauty and purity; the ceremony would certainly be incomplete without these musical interludes.

One of the songs used during this ceremony by Ebre women is of particular interest because they sing about smoking a pipe:

Hand me my pipe
And let me smoke
On my way to the market.

Why a pipe? and why do they want to smoke it at that particular time? In Ibibio society, when the day's work is done,

the old women and men settle down to smoke their pipes[13] over a calabash of palm wine and review the day's events. The pipe in Ibibio society is a symbol of contentment. When the Ebre women ask for their pipes to be handed to them, they are in effect saying that the supreme deity is in heaven and all is well with the world. We are also informed through this song that women smoke pipes in Ibibio society. According to Turner, "each type of ritual . . .represents a storehouse of traditional knowledge. To obtain this knowledge one has to examine the ritual in close detail and from several standpoints."[14] When for instance, an Ekong masquerader goes to the fattening room to check on an Mbopo and finds that she has not responded to the fattening treatment as well as was expected, he rubs her with charcoal as a symbol of impurity and saunters into the village singing songs of derision about the girl. If he finds her fat and well fed, he smears her with a whitish chalk to signify purity; but if it happens that an Mbopo becomes pregnant during the period of her confinement, she is expelled from the place and the women of the village scandalize her in song.

The situation is different during a ritual ceremony when almost all the songs are those of praise and thanksgiving for the protection the ancestral spirits have given

---

[13]The pipes are usually very short and the people use dried tobacco, but never opium or any intoxicant.

[14]Victor Turner, op. cit., p. 2.

them during the year. The same situation is true of a nonritual ceremony like marriage, house-warming, birth, or someone assuming a high title. In all these instances, praise songs are used. The whole Mbopo ceremony is also a culture-indicator because it enable the observer to know what constitutes the people's ideas of a beautiful woman. In their praise songs, the women emphasize these points. She must have nice breasts, a plump body and broad pelvis for easy child bearing. Height is not important but she must have nice legs and plenty of pubic hair. This is particularly emphasized during the outing ceremony of an Mbopo when people present special gifts to her mother if she has plenty of pubic hair, which is considered a sign of beauty among the Ibibios. It is rather interesting to note that whereas height is not important in assessing the beauty of an Ibibio woman, it is one of the ways in which a handsome man is recognized in the village. The people talk of a tall man when they wish to describe a handsome man. Also when a baby is born, it is considered a mark of great beauty if it is very light in complexion rather than black. Black, like the color of charcoal is not considered complimentary.

Instrumentation

From the instrumentation of orchestral ensembles and the names given to masquerades we are able to know what the Ibibio people think of the family. Four instruments

comprise the Uta musical family named after a mother Uta and her three sons, signifying the masculine role of the music played by these instruments. The Ekpo masquerade is named after a mother Ekpo, father, brother and sister—another family of four but with a female in the group, which is a pointer to the fact that women can be admitted into the Ekpo society since there is a female ancestral spirit working with the supreme deity. To make sure that the children in the family are not left out of the social structure of the society, one branch of the Ekpo society, the Ekong Ekpo is permitted to initiate boys from the age of eight into the group. This "togetherness" of Ibibio families is perhaps best illustrated by the Uta ensemble, where all the instruments move homophonically rather than contrapuntally. The only instrument permitted to embellish the rhythmic progression is the mother Uta which from time to time during a performance plays some extra notes to fill a gap between one chord and another. This style of performance is in sharp contrast to a quartet of horns used in the music of the Ibos. There, the four horns with exactly the same system of tuning procedure play their notes in such a way as to produce melodic rhythm as shown in Figure 28.

When we look back at the five questions we asked at the start of this study, it is the author's view that we have been able to find out (a) why Ibibio music is shaped the way it is; (b) how it relates to society; (c)

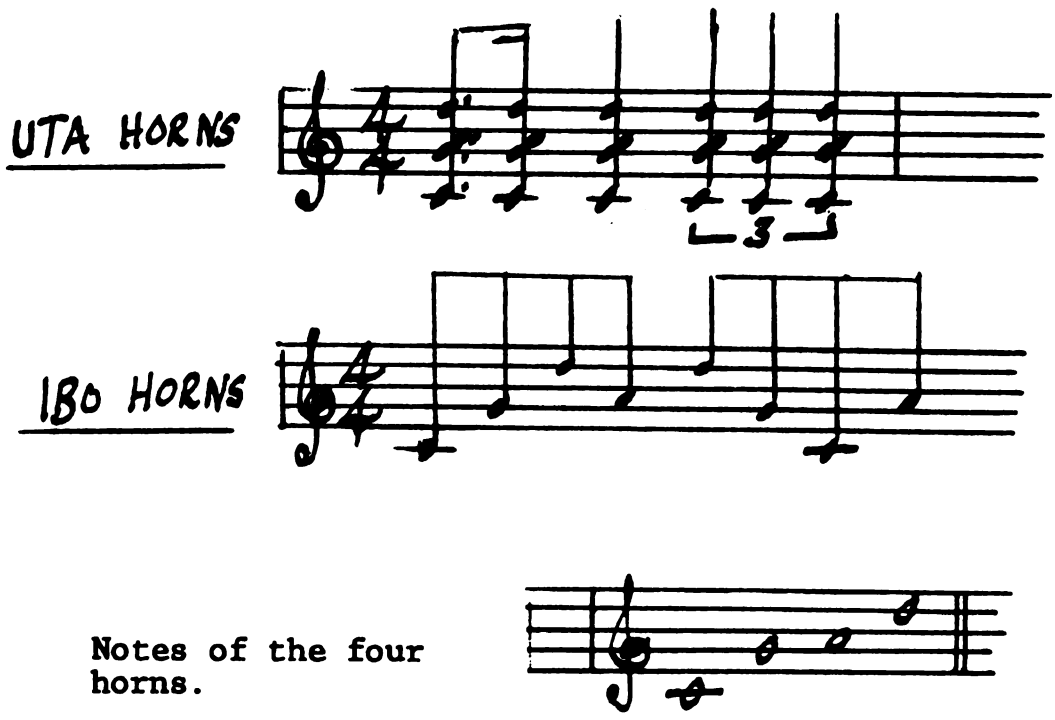


Figure 28.

what effects it has on behavioral patterns; (d) what part singing and dancing play in ritual ceremonies; and (e) how musical instruments, individually and collectively, relate to the daily life of the people. We have not been able to trace the origin of the Ibibios but have seen how musical instruments, rhythmic patterns, dancing styles, religious beliefs and organization, melodic range and musical symbols can help to distinguish culture areas and in their way help in the location of origin and migrations. We have also seen that the Ibibios of Nigeria have many cultural differences from the other ethnic groups, as is evidenced by their musical practices. The question is, where did these divergencies come from? It does seem to

the author that we have to look outside the country for the answers.

Listening to some music of the Bushmen recently, the author was struck by its similarity to Ibibio music. They yodel like the Ibibios, even though in a much more artistic way; they are of short stature like the Ibibios. One is tempted to ask whether the two peoples have any common origin. Did the Ibibios migrate from the South of Africa to their present home in the South East of Nigeria? All these questions present areas for further research.

In Herskovit's identification of culture areas of Africa,[15] the West Coast where the Ibibios live shares a boundary with the Bushmen and Hottentots. Can there be any significance in the assumption that they could have crossed that boundary and settled in Nigeria?

One thing is clear from this study—the music of Nigeria is incomplete without special attention to the functional music of the Ibibio people.

---

[15]See Melville J. Herskovits, "A Preliminary Consideration of the Culture Areas of Africa," American Anthropologist XXV1, (1924), pp. 50-60.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Bascom, William R and Herskovits, Melville J. ed. Continuity and Change in African Cultures. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959.

Bowra, C. M. Primitive Song. New York: The World Publishing Co., 1962.

Carrington, John. Talking Drums of Africa. London: Kingslake Press, 1949.

Dalcroze, Emile Jacques. Rhythm, Music and Education. New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1921.

Ingham, Percy B. "The Method: Growth and Practice," The Eurythmics of Jacques-Dalcroze; Sadler, M.E., ed. Boston, Small Maynard and Co., 1913.

Jones. A. M. Studies in African Music. London: Oxford University Press, 1956, 2 Vols.

Jones, G. I. The Trading States of the Oil Rivers. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

_____ and Forde, Daryll. The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking People of South-Eastern Nigeria. London: Oxford University Press, 1950.

McAllester, David P. Enemy Way Music. Cambridge: Peabody Museum, Harvard University, 1954.

Kunst, Jaap. Some Sociological Aspects of Music. Washington: The Library of Congress, 1958.

Merriam, Alan P. The Anthropology of Music. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966.

Nettl, Bruno. Music in Primitive Culture. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956.

Ottenberg, Simon and Phoebe, ed. Cultures and Societies in Africa. New York: Henry Holt Co., 1929.

Sachs, Curt. World History of the Dance. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1937.

_____. The History of Musical Instruments. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1940.

Stravinski, Igor. Poetics of Music. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947.

Talbot, D. Amaury. Woman's Mysteries of a Primitive People: The Ibibios of Southern Nigeria. London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1915.

_____. Tribes of the Niger Delta--Their Origins and Customs. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1967.

Talbot, P. Amaury. People of Southern Nigeria. London: Oxford University Press, 1926, 4 Vols.

_____. Life in Southern Nigeria--The Magic, Beliefs and Customs of the Ibibio Tribe. London: MacMillan and Co., 1923.

Turner, Victor W. The Drums of Affliction. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.

Wallaschek, Richard. Primitive Music. London: Longmans, Green, 1893.

Wissler, Clark. An Introduction to Social Anthropology. New York: Henry Holt, Co., 1929.

Periodicals

Afigbo, A. E. "Ibibio Origin and Migrations: A Critique of Methodology," Nigeria Magazine, (December-August, 1971.) pp. 62-69.

Akpabot, Samuel. "Standard Drum Patterns in Nigeria," African Music, V, (1971), pp. 37-39.

_____. "Theories in African Music," African Arts, (Autumn, 1972), pp. 59-62.

Ekere, C. A. "Ibibio Indigeneous Judicial System," West African Students Union Study Group Lecture, West Africa, 28, (February 1944).

Goines, Leonard. "Musics of Africa South of the Sahara," Music Educators Journal, Vol. 59, (October 1972), pp. 46-51.

Herskovits, Melville J. "A Preliminary Consideration of the Culture Areas of Africa," American Anthropologist, XXV1,(1924),pp. 50-60.

Herzog, George, "Speech-Melody and Primitive Music," Musical Quarterly, 20,(1934),pp. 452-466.

_____. "Drum Signalling in a West African Tribe," Word, Vol. 1,(1945),pp. 217-238.

Hornbostel, E. M. von. "African Negro Music," Africa, Vol. 1,(1928),pp. 31-62.

Jeffreys, M. D. W. "The Nyama Society of the Ibibio Women," African Studies, Vol. 15, No. 1,(1956),pp. 15-28.

King, Anthony. "Nigerian Traditional Dances and Music," African Notes, University of Ibadan,(January 1964), pp. 15-19.

Messenger, John C. "Ibibio Drama," Africa, Vol. XL1, (July, 1971),pp. 208-222.

_____. "Religious Acculturation Among the Annang Ibibio," Continuity and Change in African Cultures, pp. 279-299.

Nicklin, Keith. "The Ibibio Musical Pot," African Arts, Vol. V11,(Autumn, 1973),pp. 50-55.

Nketia, J. H. "African Gods and Music," Universitas, Vol. 1V, No. 1,(1959),pp. 3-7.

_____. "The Problem of Meaning in African Music," Ethnomusicology, Vol. 1, No. 1,(January 1962), pp. 1-7.

Simmons, D. C. "Ibibio Topical Ballads," Man,(April, 1960), pp. 58-59.

_____. "Ibibio Tone Riddles," Nigerian Field,(July 1960),pp. 132-134.

Turner, Victor W. "Symbols in African Ritual," Science, Vol. 179,(March, 1973),pp. 1100-1105.

Udo-Ema, A. J. "The Ekpe Society," Nigeria Magazine, 16, (1938),pp. 314-316.

Ward, W. E. "Music in the Gold Coast," Gold Coast Review, 111,(July-December, 1927) pp. 199-223.

Waterman, Richard A. "African Influence in the Music of the Americas," Acculturation in the Americas. Proceedings of the twenty-ninth International Congress of Americanists, Vol. 11. ed. Sol Tax. (University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 329-339.

Unpublished

Akpabot, Samuel. "Instrumentation in African Music." Unpublished Fellowship Thesis, Trinity College of Music, London, 1967.

Echezona, William Wilberforce Chukudina. "Ibo Musical Instruments in Ibo Culture." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1963.

Jeffreys, M. D. W. "Notes on the Ibibio." Unpublished Diploma Thesis n.d., Enugu Archives, Nigeria. E.P. 7266, CSE 1/85/3831.

Nwabuoku, Emele. "Benin Court Music: Proposals for Future Research." Unpublished Master's Thesis, Columbia University, 1974.

Smith, E. M. "Music in West Africa." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia Teacher's College, Columbia University, 1961.