

Elsie Ezinnwa Nwoko: An Art Music Composer and Music Education Practitioner

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Abstract

An art music composer as the term imply refers to a person or persons who were academically or formally trained in the art and techniques involved in music composition. These categories of composers are broadly divided into two – those whose compositional styles reflect that of western classical music and those whose creative styles seek to leave imprints of Africanness on their works. On the other hand, a music education practitioner is one who had had formal training in the field of music education conceptually, theoretically and practically – who in turn trains and or transmit musical knowledge to learners. In other words, a music education practitioner could be called a music educator. In Nigeria today abounds art music composers and music education practitioners. Examples are professor J.H.K, Nketia, T.K.E, Philips, professor Omibiyi-Obidike, Ephraim Amu, professor W.W.C, Echezona, Fela Sowande, professor Richard Okafor to mention a few. This paper focuses on Elsie E. Nwoko as one of the founding fathers of African musical arts education in Nigeria. The topic shall be examined under the following headings: Elsie Nwoko's biographical data, Elsie Nwoko as an art music composer and music educator, her works and contributions to African musical arts education and conclusion. In order to achieve the objective of this paper, related materials were perused and reviewed. Oral interview and random sampling methods were also employed.

Introduction

Who is an art musician cum composer? These are personnel trained as an academia in music that composes music that is written and documented on lines and spaces using various compositional techniques. Art music compositions refer to the music composed by formally trained musicians (Akpakpan, 2010:46). From Akin Euba's perspective, art music composition is music composed for performance by a body of trained musicians, usually in an auditorium specially designed for the purpose, before a clearly defined audience which by mutual understanding, is excluded from joining the performance (Euba, 1977). Nwamara (2009:145) quoted Lobamijoko (2001:70) that 'art music are those musical compositions which trained musicians produce under the influence of western music training'. He added that those that create this kind of music are known as composers. Art music exists in various guises which include instrumental or choral music that can be in form of solos, duets, trios, choruses and anthems. These may be sacred or secular.

On a broader perspective, a composer may be referred to as one who puts down sound systematically to produce music. According to Hurd (1968:9), the composer is a man who can express himself in terms of music. To him it is a language with rules of its own and its own inner logic. It is not however, the kind of language that can express ordinary every day matters. Is a composer a music educator? Idamoyibo (2007:112) succinctly revealed that the composer is a very resourceful music educator. He is a creative source through whom instructional materials like music scores are made available. His creative impulse leads him into the worlds of the unknown, to delve deeply in search of new knowledge or idioms, elements or styles, structures or forms, texture or counterpoint that may be simple or complex, implicit or explicit, impressive or expressive. He/she through experiment evolves first hand materials and resources that become useful, both to performance and teaching-learning situations. The composer's activities and contributions do not end with the product of his creativity, the compositional scores; but get into other levels of resourcefulness as a performer and educator.

Johnson Akpakpan (2010: 47) noted that any discussion on art music composition would be bare if mention is not being made of pioneering fathers, and their subsequent followers. It has been recorded that T.K.E, Philips started composing in the 1920s while Fela Sowande who is incidentally, regarded as the progenitor of Contemporary Art Music started composing in the 1940s. Other Nigerian Art Music composers include: Samuel Ekpe Akpabot, Ayo Bankole, Akin Euba, Lazarus Ekwueme, Meki Nzewi, Okechkwu Ndubuisi, Adam Fiberesima and Joshua Uzoigwe. Elsie Ezinnwa Nwoko would be added as an addendum to Johnson Akpakpan's list.

Biographical Data of Elsie Ezinnwa Nwoko



Elsie Ezinnwa Nwoko popularly called ‘mummy’ or Mrs. Nwoko, was born on September 17th 1943 at Issele-Uku, Delta State, Nigeria. She hailed from Idumuju-Ugboko in Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta. She had her formal education in the following institutions of learning. She attended so many primary schools because of her father’s frequent transfer but finished her primary school education finally at Government School Ogwuashi-uku in 1954. Her secondary education started from 1955 to 1959 - she attended Baptist Girls High School, Alihame, Agbor all in Delta State, Nigeria. Later she gained admission at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka where she ran a Diploma Programme in Music/Education from 1970 to 1973, and obtained a Certificate in Dip/Mus/Ed. She left the shore of Nigeria in order to further her education. Thus, from 1973 to 1974 she attended the University of Alberta, Edmonton – Canada where she obtained Bachelor in Education/Music (B.Ed/Music), and from 1976 to 1980 she studied at the State University of New York – Buffalo, U.S.A, she obtained her Masters in Education (M.Ed).

Elsie Nwoko had taught in Comprehensive Secondary School Awo-Omamma, Imo State (as a teacher) from 1975 to 1977; Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri (as a lecturer) from 1977 to 1981, and Delta State University from 1992-1993 (as a visiting lecturer) before coming to College of Education, Agbor, Delta State 1981 to where she taught and served in other capacities until her retirement in 2005. Through these interactions, she affected so many lives in capacity building.

As a lecturer in the Department of Music, College of Education, Agbor, her name is written in gold as one of the pioneer academic staff of the College. Amongst the then academic staff from various departments in the College namely; Education, Applied Science, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Biology, Home Economics, Economics, Geography, History, English, Secretarial Studies, French, Religions Education, Music and Fine Arts, Elsie Nwoko and one Mr. J. E. Opuje were included. Also a statement made by Chief Dr. Emmanuel Awatete Tetsola reveals Elsie Nwoko as one of the commended staff of the College of Education, Agbor. The statement runs thus;

‘A close look at the current staff disposition you find many staff who labored with us at the onset of the College. They deserve special mention and commendation. The following old brigades are still on the College saddle: (...) Mrs. E. E. Nwoko, Mr. M. O. Ehiwario, E. O. Egede, Mr. C. E. Olueh, Mrs. Okei, Miss O. J. Nwabinele and Mr. Fruice O. Abamba – we recognize and highly appreciate all of them’ (Tetsola,2005:6,7).

Work Experiences

Elsie Nwoko served in the following capacities; as Head of Department (H.O.D) Music from 1982 to 1992 a period of ten years. Dean of School of Vocational Studies, College of Education Agbor from 1985 to 1987 a period of three years, she served as Deputy Provost in the College from 1987 to 1992, and 1998 to 2003. Director Academic Affairs from 1992 to 1998, Acting Provost January 1988 and acted at other times as provost between 1990 to 1996, External Examiner (Music) to College of Education Abraka Bendel State in 1985 and College of Education Ekiadolor, Benin City in the year 2000 respectively.

Other capacities where she served include the following;

S/N	POSITION	OFFICE HELD	ORGANI-ZATION	TENURE
1.	Chairman	Admissions Committee	C.O.E, Agbor	1986-1990
2.	Member	School of Arts Appraisal Committee	(A.I.C.E. Owerri),	1978-1979
3.	Staff representative	Senior Staff Appointments and Productions Committee, sub-committee of the Governing Council	C.O.E, Agbor	1984-1986
4.	External Examiner,	TC II Music Examinations	Imo State	998-1999
5.	Item writer/moderator;	JAMB Music Examinations	JAMB	1990-2005
5.	Resource Person,	Resource Person	Nigerian Society for Education Through Arts (NSEA)	1986-1988
6.	Resource Person	Resource Person	Bendel Arts Council, Benin City	1988
7.	Chairman,	Academic Committee	C.O.E, Agbor	1987-2005
8.	Member	Member	National Commission for Colleges of Education (N.C.C.E) Accreditation Team	1993-1994 and 1996
9.	Member	Member	National Commission for Colleges of Education (N.C.C.E) held in Zaria Curriculum Planning Committee	(990)
10.	Member	Member	College of Education, Agbor Governing Council,	1987-2003
11.	National president	National president	B.G.H.S. Old Girls Association	2001
12.	President, Professional	Women in Colleges of Education, Agbor Chapter,	College of Education, Agbor	2001-2005
13.	Consultant	Consultant in music	Delta State Polytechnic Ogwashi- Uku	2008

Elsie Nwoko as an art music composer and music educator

Elsie Nwoko as a Nigerian art music composer was vividly described by Ogisi (2007:136) who said that ‘Nigerian art music composer therefore is a literary creative musician who is not only Nigerian by nationality but grew up and practices his art within the cultural milieu haven received formal training in music. Onwuekwe (2007:31) noted that by a composer’s calling, he is a music educator. The reason being that every composition has a target audience (in other words, a composer is also an educator). Idamoyibo (2007:115) opines that ‘apparently, in teaching, observation on the progress of students, as a continuous process, is made by the educator. These observations, which bother on the issues of strength and weakness of the students, materials and methods, consequently inform new creations and new approaches. In with the above, Onwuekwe (2007:27) pointed out that the role of the composer in music education cannot be overemphasized. Throughout the ages, the composer had been in the forefront of music education as evidenced in the educational system of ancient Greece (...) the music master taught him how to play the lyre, knowledge which was fundamental for the study of lyric poems which he had to set to music. By so doing music education and composition go hand in hand, for the music that must be taught to the child or adult must first be composed. There is no music that is not composed. Even if the music was handed over from one generation to the other, it was at one time composed.

For instance, in her composition titled *Ife Nne Gwalumm* meaning ‘what my mother told me’ was an advice from a mother to her child telling her that patience is golden. Hastiness without proper consideration

would lead to a fall.

The excerpt of the lyric goes thus:

Example 1

<i>Nne mo Gwalumo</i>	-	my mother told me
<i>Nne mo gwalumo Osi</i>	-	my mother told me, she said
<i>Gidi gidi so a da</i>	-	hastiness goes before a fall
<i>Nne mo gwamokwu</i>	-	my mother told me some words
<i>Si ma nu kpo kwa na</i>	-	told me not to be in too much haste
<i>O sim a nu kpo kwa na nuzu</i>	-	she told me not to
<i>N ne mu qwam'o kwo ka mu</i>	-	my mother told me when I was
<i>Je nai yo</i>		coming
<i>Si m'a nu kpo kwa nan cha nu</i>	-	she said I should not be in haste
<i>nuzu</i>		because
<i>N'i je now ma ta ka nije nwo</i>	-	the cow walks majestically like a
<i>Ma ta k'e fi eje</i>		responsible gentle man
<i>O si ma nu kpo kwa nan cha</i>	-	she said I should not rush at all

The College Anthem Elsie Nwoko composed in 1982 for the College of Education Agbor, is still being used today to teach students during induction and orientation programmes and matriculation ceremony held for year 1 students of the College. Mbanefo (2001:147) stated that education is the necessary tool that may enable every individual function effectively in his environment. Music education is seen as a field of study associated with the teaching and learning of music (Okonkwo, 2009:49). Music education is an art. As an art it is the act of imparting knowledge to individuals in a learning environment. And arts expression according to Addo et al (2005:236) in Ukeme Udoh (2011), are deeply rooted in culture, thus lending themselves to interdisciplinary connections. This is particularly true in Africa, where the arts are expressed in multiple ways and combinations across and within its culture. This aspect of integration in African arts education is essential to ensure legitimate reflection of its nature in the classroom.

Idolor (2001:135-139), reported that African Art Music Education is a literary approach to the study of contemplative music which contains features of African traditional music. Considering the approach to its study, the educational system is seen to be a dominant determinant of its advancement. Art music education in Nigeria generally started in the primary and secondary schools in the mid 19th century. The African touch in art music became more evident with the eventual music curriculum of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka which adopted Mantle Hood's coinage of 'Bi-musical' approach to musical studies (...) at the moment; twenty-four institutions of higher learning in Nigeria have music as a course of study. Of the above mentioned institution of higher learning in Nigeria, College of Education Agbor was mentioned.

Knowing that music as a subject has the potential for enhancing the human personality through complete involvement in inquiry and creative approaches to learning; that music contributes to the all-round development of the individual and that music education is a comprehensive education system geared towards a functional and artistic career in the society, Elsie Nwoko was a disciplinarian who inculcated and impressed on her students the value for hard work. She wrote several compositions and contributions to book of readings and journals.

Her Works

Elsie Nwoko composed many works reflecting various aspects of the society. Many of her compositions have been performed live and on Radio/Television houses, for examples on N.T.A. Channels 6 – Aba, 8 – Enugu, 7 – Benin City and Bendel Television, at Enugu and Owerri at Command performances during President Shehu Shagari's visits to Anambra and Imo States respectively, and also in Benin City during Commodore Ebitu Ukaiwe's official visit to Bendel State. Below is a list of some of her works with dates.

1. College of Education Agbor, Anthem, 1982
2. Amen In C, 1988
3. *Onu Eli Azu Ana*, 1982
4. "*Tata*" *Mary*, 1980
5. *Nwata Di Nso*, 1979
6. *Asiko la'ye*, 1990 (*Asiko la'ye* and *Ife Nnem Gwalum* were commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Education Lagos, Nigeria).
7. *Ife Nnem Gwalum*, 1990
8. *Inene Okore Guoko*, 1985
9. Hark It is Christmas, 1982
10. *Okpa Akwa* (for Mixed Voices, Piano and African Instruments), 1978
11. *Osa Na Awa Nku*, 1979

12. *Otubo Holu, 1979*
13. *Di, Odogwu Nwe Ofia, 1979*
14. *Ogbom Gene, 1978*
15. *Ugbo Nganga, 1987*
16. *OGWOMA Chiye, 1978*
17. *Ada Eze, 1978*
18. *Ambassador Club 82 Anthem, 1987 (commissioned).*
19. *Christ Army Anthem, 1985*
20. *Nwogoli Cheiyo, 1988*
21. *Nwannunu Fei, 1977*
22. *Udala Oma, 1978*
23. *Mili Di Nma, 1978*
24. *Okpa Akwa (for Mixed Voices, Mini Orchestra and Traditional Instruments), 1978*
25. *Asani Onye Egwu, 1980*
26. *“Igirigi” Hermon, 1999*
27. *St. Matthew’s Centenary Anthem, 2002*
28. *Piano for the Young (Theme from Utu Chalacha), 1974*
29. *Jingle, 2006*
30. *Dance I, 2007*
31. *Dance II, 2007 and*
32. *Ogwashi Poly Anthem 1980.*

Contributions to African Arts Musical Education

Elsie Nwoko’s contributions to African Arts Musical Education would be discussed as follows;

Human Capacity Building

In terms of human capacity building, many students passed through her watchful eye. Among the pioneer students of Music Department, College of Education Agbor is Mr. Joshua Ofunne, Mrs. Beatrice Okwechime, late Mr. Christopher Oweani, and Miss. Ngozi Ukala. Others worthy of note are Dr. Ovaborene Idamoyibo, Mrs Everista Efedu, Mrs. Dora Okunbor, Mrs Maureen Uche, Mr. Kasim Oghiator, Mrs. Jane Olomu, and a host of others. These furthered their education – many as students of University of Nigeria, Nsukka while others to various Universities of their choices and even beyond the border of Nigeria. Many of these students are now lecturers in the University and College of Education Agbor respectively serving in various capacities to the growth of African Arts Education. We would not forget to appreciate other staff that was also instrumental to the colossal achievements of Mrs Nwoko as she is popularly called – they are Mr. Afari, Mr. S.V.O Lattey, Miss Ngozi Onnoka, Mr. Luckson Amachi, Miss Uchenna Nwoko, Miss Chinwe Ikaraocha, Dr. Ade Adeogun and Professor Emurobome G. Idolor to mention a few.

As a prolific writer, Elsie Nwoko contributed immensely to African arts musical education and to knowledge through her paper presentations. Examples are: *The Role of creative Arts in the Overall Development of the Nigerian Child (from musical perspective)*; *Music Teaching in Nigeria*; *The Teaching of Music in Junior and Senior Secondary Schools*; *Art, the Bed-Rock for Social and Technical Development (from musical perspective)*; *Music and its contributions to World peace and understanding*; and *Teaching Singing in Schools*. She advocated for and advised that music teachers should be creative and practical. They should be innovative and hard working. That, Music teachers should be masters and or have in-depth knowledge of content to be taught theoretically and practically and that they should be sound and competent in handling of their various instruments (in terms of playing and teaching).

Selected Compositions

Music as an organized movement of sounds through a continuum of time plays a role in all societies and it exists in large number of styles – each characteristic of a geographical region (Olorunsogo & Olorunsogo, 2009:114). Music is a fundamental phenomenon in every culture. In the African setting, music is known as a good facilitator and a potent tool used for transferring knowledge from one generation to the other. The uses of music in Africa cannot be overemphasized as it is woven around every activity in a social culture and or society. Africa is a continent where a rich and diverse cultural heritage exists. One of these cultural heritages is the music of the people of Africa. Agu (1999) stated that, ‘the life of an African is one with sounds of music swirling round him from the cradle to the grave’ (Agu, 1999: v). Invariably, in Africa, music plays important roles in the lives of the people.

Music composition is an art that is inherent in many Igbo composers... (Onwuekwe, 2006:166). This statement could be said of Elsie Nwoko – she harnessed and adapted the music in her geographical region and

cultural milieu. A perusal through two of her works titled ‘*Osa Na Awa Nku*’, and ‘*Otobo Holu Di*’, revealed Agu’s (1999:1) and Adegbite’s (2006:48) respective assertions, that ‘the important features which give musical tradition its intrinsic character are the broad principles of tonality, and the relationship of people’s music to other aspects of their culture and social life.

When we examine the basic sound materials used in vocal music, the creative process looks a little different, for it appears that many African societies are separated more by their singing styles rather than by their instrumental styles. The norms, which are followed, are culturally defined (Adegbite, 2006:48).

In the second example *Osa Na Awa Nku*’ teaches reward/reinforcement for hard work. *Osa* connotes a small animal known as the squirrel. Naturally, *Osa* (the squirrel) can never break a firewood. The philosophy behind the vocal creation was that in a situation where nobody is able to solve a particular problem after several attempts, a younger person comes and says he will solve the problem, and then the elders said – well let us see how he is going to solve it. On the story plot she commented further that the scene painted/created was that three young girls learnt that *Osa* (the squirrel can break firewood, so they decided to appeal to *Osa* the squirrel, to break their firewood. Because *Osa* the squirrel was not paying attention to them, they decided to promise him a ripe bunch of palm nut fruits (*Osa*, the squirrel loves palm nuts), and promised to also dance for *Osa* the squirrel. After these promises, *Osa* the squirrel agreed to break their firewood. Immediately *osa* took his axe to break the firewood, the girls ran and invited their friends to come and watch *osa* breaking their firewood. In return, they started praising him, calling him names like *Osa Nwa omata*, (the son of a very reputable man), *Osa lele Okolobia oma* (very handsome young man), *Ngwoli* (see how flexible he is) – this is a type of reinforcement for the work he was doing. This of course, tally with the rationale that there is a common observation that the musical arts of Africa are philosophical in nature; from melodic crafting to lyrical concoction, rhythmic fragmentation to polyphonic configuration, symbolic representation in the use of poetic elements and features to the construction of meaning in human societies, etc. Below is an excerpt of the lyrics.

Example 2

Osa ima awa nku? Osa le le.....	Osa can you split firewood?
Osa, iga awalum nku e...Osa le le...	Osa will you split the firewood for me-e...
Osa le le, sa le le, sa le, sa le le le, osa	Osa, see see, ‘sa see see, ‘sa see
Osa, imalu awa nku osa le le, sa le	Osa do you know how to split firewood?
Gwamo mobu imala’ wanku	Tell me if you know how to split firewood
Osa lele sa le, wa lumu nku mo – sa l--	Please split my firewood for me
Osa wa lumu nku doh, doh, biko wa’	Osa, split my firewood for me please, please, split my firewood

Osa Na Awa Nku Elsie Nwoko 1979



O sa i ma 'wan' ku----- o sa le le-----

o sa i ga 'walumun ku e----- o sa le le o-----

In *Otobo Holu Di* the story goes that *Otobo* was a very beautiful and arrogant lady who rejected as many suitors who sought her hand in marriage. The sad story was that she ended marrying a python who took her to the hole he was staying. Below is an excerpt of the lyrics.

Example 3

<i>Oko go o o oko go o oko go okoo-----</i>	calling of maiden to come (an expression)
<i>Holu dio</i>	choose your husband
<i>Nyig holu dio</i>	let her choose her husband
<i>Onyega kpom-gba yo-o</i>	who will choose her husband
<i>kpom-gba yo-o</i>	call your husband
<i>Kpo dio ga nu mgbayo-oma</i>	call the handsome husband she will marry

Otubo Holu Di Elsie Nwoko 1979



From the vocal texts above, it could be seen that the technique of repetition, rests, parallel sixths, unison, and mostly thirds major/minor, were immensely employed.

Conclusion

This paper x-rayed Elsie E. Nwoko by outlining her biographical data, and examining her as an art music composer and music practitioner/educator. Her musical compositions and contributions to African arts musical education were also mentioned.

Okafor, (2005:318) observed that ‘those from the institutions have still a very academic and intellectual eye of music. They seem to think of music in terms of the theories and qualities and properties rather than the communications it conveys to the masses, the message it conveys to the human minds and the way the music can be used to make people better. Olorunso (2011) seem to agree with Okafor (2005) when he stated that ‘Much as many educated musicians had evolved through Nigerian music education programme, not many of them are vast at composing or performing music that is a reflection of the cultural milieu of Nigeria (Olurunsogo, 2011:65b).

Using the above statements as a parameter to weigh and or make a case for Elsie E. Nwoko, one would make bold to say that Elsie Nwoko do not belong to those categories of Nigerian composers. Like (Handel, Bach, Climenti, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahm, Debussy, Tchaikosky, Suzuki, Kodally, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky etc) who rose up from their cultural milieu to give a synthesis and impetus to ideals present in the music concepts of their contemporary society. Elsie’s compositions are a reflection of the Nigerian cultural milieu; messages conveyed in her compositions are very vivid and simple. Put in the words of Idamoyibo (2007:114), the music composer-educator’s resourcefulness is a blessing to the music industry. His/her impartation to the students would enable them perform proficiently in places of employment that require compositional skills and experience.

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osa - 001G [Group 1].MUS

Osa Na Awa Nku

Elsie Nwoko 1979

1



O sa i ma 'wan' ku----- o sa le le-----

4



o sa i ga 'walumun' ku e----- o sa le le o-----

Otubo Holu Di

Elsie Nwoko 1979



Piano 1

O ko go o o ko go o ko o ----- O ko go o ko o -----

Piano 2

Pno. 1

ho lu di o ----- Anyi ga'holu di o -----

Pno. 2

Pno. 1

o tu bo ho lu di o -----

Pno. 2

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