

SOCIO-STYLISTIC APPROACH TO TEACHING AFRICAN DRUMS - GBEDU ENSEMBLE.

OLUWASEYI KEHINDE (A.K.A Sheyi Kehnnny)
INSTITUTION AFFILIATION: University of Lagos
E-MAIL: sheyikehnnny@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Black Africa possesses an infinite variety of musical instruments that is paralleled in world music history. These instruments come in various shapes and sizes. Others are made with consummate skills. African musical instruments and their extra musical functions in the society make the procedure of teaching them unique. In most schools emphasis have been laid on performance without having a systematic approach to the study of African instruments. Arguably, the organizational skills in teaching and learning procedure of Western musical instruments have made it much more comfortable for students in schools to prefer studying them to African instruments. Consequently this paper advocates the guidelines to teaching and learning of Gbedu ensemble which will serve as manual to investigating the language, structure and functionality of the instruments as historical devices and linguistic evidences. Ultimately, this paper provides a stylistic discourse on teaching methods that encompasses the application of instruments in contemporary African setting.

Hence, the cynosure of this study is based on the following guidelines:

1. Historical and Sociological Traits
2. Identification of Instruments in the Ensemble
3. Significance of Gbedu drum to the society.
4. Technological Make-up of Gbedu Drums
5. Techniques of Playing each instrument in the Ensemble.
6. Maintenance of the Instruments
7. Presentation in Steps
8. Evaluation
9. Pre-performance/ Pre-concert
10. Concert.

KEYWORDS: Contemporary music, Gbedu, Ensemble, Stylistics, Identity.

Sociological and Historical Traits of Gbedu Drum.

The teacher is expected to begin his teaching with the origin of the ensemble chronologically, laying emphasis on the main instrument - Gbedu as thus:

Gbedu drum is said to have been brought to the Lagos area in the seventeenth century by Edo diplomats, symbolizing the hegemony of the Benin Empire. Among the Yoruba, the Gbedu drum signifies royalty. Being the largest of the Yoruba drums, it was played only in the king's service. In ceremonies such the rite of *Isagun*, the king might dance to the music of the drum. The set of instruments is an ensemble that is peculiar to the Owu people of Abeokuta in Ogun state. The Gbedu instrumental ensemble is performed exclusively in the palace of the Olowu of Owu. Owu which is situated in Abeokuta, Ogun state has natives that belong to the Yoruba race from Nigeria. The history of the Owus was documented following their first settlement in Ibadan before 1820. It is believed from oral history tradition that the owus occupied an area directly along and below Niger River in the present day of Nigeria. The name "olowu" is a derivative of the savannah crop called "owu" (cotton), this is a pointer to the fact that the original homestead of the *Owu* people was in the savannah and not in the southern forest region.

It is recorded that during the last days of the Oyo Empire, when the Fulani had captured Ilorin and become masters of Oyo, Sita, king of Ilorin required the Oyo king Oluewu to visit him and pay homage. *Oluewu* had the *Gbedu* drum beaten before him as he travelled. When Sita asked about the drum and was told it was played only in the presence of a king, he became angry, saying that there could only be one king, himself, and ordered the *Gbedu* drum to be taken away

The southward migration of the *Owus* was a direct result of both tribal and ethnic conflicts. Unlike previous settlements, the *Owus* did not attempt to fight against the army of Ibadan but instead settled there peacefully, this was because the rulers of Ibadan had sent peaceful emissaries to the *Owus* after getting intelligence report of the *Owu*'s supposedly imminent attack on their town. The rulers of Ibadan offered land to the *Owus* to settle on, spreading from *Ita Lisa* to *Owu Ipole* near *Ikire*.

In 1821-1826, the armies of Ijebu Ife attacked and devastated *Owu Ipole*. The *Owus* abandoned their heavily fortified city and escaped southwestward in groups toward Ibadan in about 1826. From these outskirts, they marched on and across *Ogun* river and finally arrived at *Oke Ata* near Abeokuta where *Sodeke* and other *Egba* authoritative leaders persuaded the gallant *Owus* to settle in Abeokuta about 1834. It is important to state that the present *Owu* is the same place as *Owu Ipole* where the *Owus* from Iwo and other places resettled in the early 20th century.

The *Owus* fought side by side with the *Egbas* in the *Makun*, *Ado Odo* and *Dahomey* (Amazon) wars in 1842-1845. The *Owu* army fought and routed *Awori* at *Itori*, *Yobo*, *Ifo*, *Atan*, *Ota* and also occupied those places till today. Notably, the *Owu* army executed the 1842-1845 war against *Ota* and *Ado* after *Sodeke* (the *Egba* leader) devised a way for the *Egba* army led by *Ayikindu* to desert the Warfront.

In 1935 *sodeke*, an *Awori Ota* King stated that the war of *Ado Odo/Ota* against the *Owus* was led and won by *Akindele Gbalefa*, the *Owu* General and his army. The conquered area was called *Gbalefa Peninsular*, named after *Adisa Akindele Gbalefa*.

IDENTIFICATION OF GBEDU INSTRUMENTAL ENSEMBLE

Students must be enlightened about the instruments that make up the ensemble as thus:

There are four kinds of *Gbedu* drums and they vary in sizes. The biggest of the drums is called “*iya ilu*”, followed by the “*Omele-ako*”, “*Omele- abo*”, and the *Gbedu* itself. The teacher should make sure that the students see these drums and they know them in terms of their differences in sizes.

Other instruments that may be included in the *Gbedu* instrumental ensemble include the *Sekere* and the *Agogo*. The teacher should instruct the students on the classification of each instrument in the ensemble in accordance to the four basic classifications of traditional musical instruments such as idiophone membranophone, chordophone and aerophone. The justification for the classification of each instrument must be emphasized as it is based on the playing technique and medium of transmission.

Each instrument must be discussed under its respective category for clarity sake with accentuation on the membranophonic instruments that form the nucleus of the ensemble. In this regards, aerophone and chordophone will not be mentioned, as there are no instruments in the ensemble that can be categorized as such.

Membranophones: are instruments that are made with animal skin and wood. The transmission medium is the animal skin whereby the body serves as contribution to the timbre of the instrument. The *Gbedu* drums fall under this classification of instrument.

Idiophones: are musical instruments that produce musical sound by the shaking and beating of such instrument. Such instrument has to be beaten or shaken for them to produce sound. Examples of these instruments are: rattles, which are being shaken. The *Agogo* and the *Sekere* of the *Gbedu* instrumental ensemble belong to the Idiophone group. They are beaten or shaken in order to produce sounds. The sub-classified as struck and shaken idiophones respectively.

TECHNOLOGICAL MAKE UP OF THE INSTRUMENTS IN GBEDU INSTRUMENTAL ENSEMBLE

Technological make up of instruments refers to the materials that are used in making these instruments - transmission medium and resonators inclusive, what these instruments are made from, their features, and make up generally. This is a very important part of the lesson for the teacher to impart to the students.

Gbedu drum is a single headed fixed- pitch membranophone that has been dedicated to the King and some features in kingship ritual.

Gbedu drums are made of cow skin that has been skinned of its hair, this skin is now coupled to an already cast wood with an hollow bottom so as to enhance vibration and resonance. The skin is bound to the already cast wood and the wood serves as both a stand for the skin and resonance and contributes to the timbre of the instrument. The animal

skin of the Gbedu drums make it easier for the hands to play the instruments, but the Gbedu drums are usually played with sticks. They are shaped like an hour-glass and have an hollowed end, that enhances the sound production of these instruments.

SIGNIFICANCE OF GBEDU DRUMS TO THE SOCIETY

The teacher has to make it known to students, the significance of Gbedu drums to the society. The function of Gbedu drums among the Yorubas is symbolic. Gbedu drum serves as a historical source to an African child. Once the children acquire the knowledge of Gbedu instruments, they recognise the instruments as their heritage and strive so hard to uphold it by studying everything about its existence and participating actively in it.

The Gbedu drums are instruments exclusively used in the Palace among the Yoruba. The Gbedu refers both to the royal drums of kings as well as the music played on these drums.

Gbedu drums are not meant to be taken out of the palace.

The iya ilu is seldom brought out, and normally, three of the drums are regularly played in the palace because it is a royal instrumental ensemble. Another major significance of the Gbedu drums in the society is that they provide a source of entertainment to the people and even to the musicians playing them. They also serve as aesthetic monument when outsiders(Non- Africans) come in contact with them, by so doing our cultural heritage is being sustained and preserved for the generation of people and posterity.

PLAYING TECHNIQUES OF GBEDU ENSEMBLE

Introduction

Playing the instruments of the Gbedu instrumental ensemble requires a gradual approach to training student on how to play. which is followed by taking a close look at:

1. Different Pitches Produced by the Instruments.
2. Different Positions of the Player/Instrumentalist
3. Holding of Sticks
4. Right-hand and Left-hand Techniques
5. Sight-Reading.
6. Varying Rhythmic Patterns at Different Tempo and Time Signatures
7. Embellishments

Different Pitches Produced by the Instruments

Varying sizes of the instruments will produce varying pitches, which help in complimentary rhythms. It must therefore be explained to the students, the connection between the varying sizes and the varying pitches. The smaller the size of any of the instruments in the ensemble the higher the pitch, be it membranophone or idiophone as the case may be in the Gbedu ensemble.

Different Positions of the Player

The best possible posture that are convenient for performance must be shown and demonstrated to the students. Nonetheless, it will depend on if the student in question is left-handed or right-handed. Gbedu drums are mostly played while standing with the two legs sometimes slightly opened apart because of the size of the instrument. The omele ako and omelet ago are played while sitting down because of the techniques of playing them, which requires placing the membranophonic instruments on one of the laps depending on the particular student who may be left or right handed. The players of Agogo and sekere have the option of standing up or sitting down. Howbeit, discretion will be made by the instructor based on his or her level of knowledge and experience in stage and performance ethics.

Holding of Sticks

Virtually all the instruments in the Gbedu ensemble require handling of sticks and all of them have the same method of handling basically. However, this may be altered or adjusted depending on rhythmic manipulations that may be required for varying embellishments and patterns.

Right-hand and Left-hand Techniques

Right-hand and left-hand techniques should be taught separately. And this must be explained with respect to use of fingers, palms and arms as the case may be in the Gbedu ensemble. For instance, fingers, tip of the fingers and palms are used in altering the tones of the membranophonic by dampening, muting and using the left thumb finger to push or stretch the fixed membrane of the drum back and forth.

Generally, Iya-ilu and the Gbedu drums are struck with two straight sticks while the omele-ako and omele-abo are struck with one stick. The Gbedu backing drums are each played by a drummer using both his or her open palm and a stick.

SIGHT-READING

This aspect has been so long neglected and rendered inconsequential in our day-to-day learning of African musical instruments in Africa as a whole. Sight-reading has to be stressed in imparting the knowledge of instrumental ensemble so as to promote inter-cultural values, creativity, conceptualisation and analytical aesthetics. And this must be approached stage by stage depending on the background or average age of the students in a class or age of a student in the case of private teaching. The following stages are recommended;

- * Identification of musical note values by clapping hands
- * Recognition of staff (treble or bass staff) - as the case may be
- * Recognition of Time signature
- * Accentuation
- * Representation of musical notes on the staff, which must be dependent on the varying pitches of the instruments.
- * Recognition and application of dead notes.
- * Varying rhythmic Patterns Exercises; some of these patterns include hemiola, hocket, ostinato, melo-rhythm, etc.

The above stated guidelines for sight-reading will however, depend on the level or standard of music education of the class to be instructed.

All instruments in the ensemble play varying rhythms to embellish one another. Consequently, the teacher inculcates the idea and manner of playing complementary rhythms for coherence sake. One instrument shouldn't overshadow the other. Also students have to be taught how to be disciplined in keeping dynamics such as tempo, loudness and softness for interpretational and expressive purposes. Placements of notes starting with 4/4 are being taught together with time and key signature.

MAINTENANCE OF INSTRUMENTS

Teachers must make it a point of duty to instill proper maintenance of the instruments of and on the stage, during and after rehearsal or lessons. The Gbedu drums' nuts, pegs or otherwise that are used to fasten or tighten the membrane must be loosened after each play so as to avoid damaging or inelasticity of the skin, due to tension of being left tightened for a period of time. Drums must be kept in a warm and dry environment for best tone color (timbre) in performance. Drums should be hit with precision by hitting the right side of the drum with stick so as to prevent the membrane from being damaged or torn.

The teacher should explain to the students that weather changes affect the resonators and the fixed membrane and thereby affecting its tone quality which may then alter the overall texture of the instrumentation.

When the Gbedu drums are tuned, the music student tightens the tuning pegs by hitting them at the edge of the drums in a tight-loose manner that it not too soft and not too hard, because the tighter the membrane, the higher the pitch and voice-overs

PRESENTATION IN STEPS

- * Get the class to clap master the rhythmic patterns.
- * Divide the class into five groups and assign a pattern to each group. Let them clap and memorize the rhythm.
- * Bring them together and let ten clap together harmoniously.
- * Ensure that they keep to steady beat or metronome.
- * Repetition of the part tern several times until the master the rhythm and keep to the beat.

- * Get them to select appropriate instruments that can play their parts. Let them perform it and rehearse for about five minutes.
- * Let them take turns to conduct the ensemble.
- * Record the music into a tape the class library.

EVALUATION AND ETHICS

Teachers should base their assessment on the level of what have been taught and not arbitrarily. The evaluation should on each student and his or her instrument he or she has been trained with. However he or she must be assessed based on his or her group blending, overall musicianship and sense of embellishments. This can be achieved by giving the students assignments regularly. In all, evaluation must be based on what to be expected from him or her as a prospective musician. If all these procedure are taken into consideration as a professional instructor, success in giving the students very solid and well-grounded information on how to play the African instruments in the Gbedu instrumental ensemble is inevitable.

PRE-PERFORMANCE / PRE-CONCERT

Putting all the procedure into consideration, teacher will be ready to engage the students in the reality of performance which ultimately prepares them for future - main performance / concert. This is done in a way whereby the students are put under intense condition of real performance or concert by preparing and perfecting all the pieces for the main concert.

CONCERT / PERFORMANCE

The instructor must organize musical concert, which must be staged periodically. Thereafter, the students put into practice what they have learnt and mastered in the presence of the audience. This performance may however be for school activities (within or outside) like the end of school year party, excision time, presentation and a lot more. The guideline given will not only overcome the problem of irregularity in our school curriculum and inadequacy in our approach to teaching African instrumental ensemble but will help in preserving and sustaining African culture. Furthermore, the organizational skill adopted in structuring this procedure directly or indirectly helps in disseminating the concepts in African music culture without ambiguity. This manual will also serve as lesson plan for schools.

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