

## Music In Developmental Theatre As Social Responsibility

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### Abstract

Beyond the boundaries of human memory, art has served as a vehicle for the transmission of information and consequently of behaviour modification. This is entrenched in the effects that such art have on any mind: the nebulous stressed mind of the psychopath, the simpleton thought process of the retarded, the lusty disposition of the socialite, the moralistic upper chin of the religious zealot, and the elegant logic of the academic. Music and theatre have found a niche from where they nibble on the mind, surreptitiously depositing images and symbols embedded in the lyric by the music that cloaks them, the action that embellishes them, and the atmosphere that masks their barbed ideas which, in direct appeal, might have suffered neglect. This ability to permeate the mind unobtrusively translates into information that can make music and theatre efficient change agents. Music and drama therefore are useful in driving the theatre-for-development initiative as developing countries strive to leapfrog into better times, particularly in human enlightenment. This paper explores the compelling influence of music-drama as change agents in the practice of developmental theatre to win this war on backwardness, ignorance and helplessness. But victory leans on the careful management of the lyrics, the dedicated use of rhythm, the infusion of weighted action, and an appreciation of the limits of these media.

**Keywords:** Music, Theatre-for development, social responsibility, human enlightenment, electrophony

### 1. Introduction

Music is an art form whose medium is sound (*Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*). Music, can also be described as “artful arrangement of sounds across time” (David Butler, np). This definition is very broad, but again, a narrower one would exclude too much. Music is arguably in every culture but the manifestation varies widely in style and structure. By and large, it is in the application of music that its appreciation finds expression. In other words, the height of its manifestation and thus relevance lies in its varied perception. For instance, adds Butler (nd) some philosophers argue that music can exist in silence as a “mental image and that the physical aspects of sound are simply by-products of this image” (np). This means that a musical experience can be achieved by imagining the sound of a piece of music; music without sound. Often you see people nodding to a tune that no one else hears. But most musical experiences involve producing or listening to physical characteristics of sound such as pitch and *timbre*. On the other hand, some sound group or collection like speech may become what I refer to as ‘discovered music; not intended to please but pleasant all the same. Hence you hear some speech said to be “music to the ear.” Some speech patterns are musical, but are not music; they merely possess some intrinsic qualities of music. We can therefore safely say that there is music in all of us. Indeed, some scholars posit that music is simply an “evolved primitive grunt... an innately magical, spiritual force:”

- Accompanied by clapping, a congregation sings praises to her God. A man stares into space thoughtfully humming a favourite song. Farmers at work sing as they make mounds of earth for the yams. Somewhere, a native doctor chants to some invisible force during a religious ritual.
- Elsewhere, a producer, engaged in preparing a jingle through electronic instruments, or electrophone, heaves a sigh that the precursor of information on a product sounds right; or the movie soundtrack would generate fear in the audience. These are a few manifestations of that delectably mercurial nature art called music.

According to Schalk, (1988:35), the first group above are “natural” music; the deliberately composed ones are “artistic.” Extending from the foregoing, music has been called “a reaching out to the ultimate realities by means of ordered sound” (Williams, 1976:3). It has also been called “the organization of sound toward beauty” (Spaeth, 1963: 85). It follows, then, that music, at its very nature, struggles to reveal loveliness — to become itself a thing of love.

Theatre, on the other hand is much readily described, particularly when it is living its life in performance. Four basic features identify it: action, story, person, and the place of the action. Like music, no one knows how it began, but the

urge to create theatre by “acting out or re-living an experience or expectation is universal. According to Duruaku

There is evidence that in every culture and every historical period, people have used elements of theatre to communicate, to educate, and to entertain. Archaeological and other evidence also demonstrate that theatre is part of man today as it was in ‘primitive’ times, everywhere in the world, and this is largely typified in magic and religious rites. Indeed, records show that whenever theatre lost its ‘attraction’, as in Europe towards the last days of the Roman Empire, it had been resuscitated through religious rites as was the case in the Medieval England. (2007:1)

In spite of the more defined boundaries of theatre, it shares its functions with some other arts including music as the following will show. In this regard, a brief discussion of the role music has played and is playing in human experience will help to align the argument that would follow.

Generally speaking, art has served mankind over the millennia as a means of advising self worth and of communicating ideas to one another or of being at peace with oneself through the satisfaction of self expression. This self expression comes from whole or fragments of experience even if some art appear to lack any links to what is in the sphere of the experience. The performing arts of which music is one, is perhaps much more direct and impactful on the audience, even if flittingly. One reason for this is the nature of the art. It is in motion because it progressively engenders a continual flow of images. Being flexible therefore, it remains open to endless personal interpretation and varied impact as it makes a statement about life. This gives the performing arts, nay music, a certain expansiveness that makes it a useful tool for propaganda and mobilization. Little wonder that music has manifested in electrophony as jingles, call signs, soundtrack, and other sound-dependent media.

## **2. Two Parts of the Music Art**

Music in free realisation has two basic parts, the sound produced and managed through the elements of rhythm, tempo, harmony, etc and the language-based lyrics, or “set of words that make up a song, either by speaking or singing...” (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyrics). These words convey the meaning that is captured in the theme of the work as it drives the melody, “the part of the music that we can sing.” (<http://classicalmusic.lifetips.com/cat/57534/elements-of-music/index.html>).

Therefore rhythm and its sister elements are the capsule for the lyrics which bear the theme, critical to the cognitive meaning of a work of art; for theme cannot be found in mere sound which rhythm and harmony dominate. Simply put, therefore, meaning is found in the lyrics of the music, and enhanced by the sound properties. The sound that is organized and produced, stimulates the emotive senses, where the lyrics agitate the intellect. In the conveyance of information therefore for maximum impact, it is important to merge the two into a whole. It is therefore understandable that in most human endeavour, music is adopted either wholly or partly to drive the acceptability and impact of that experience and communication.

Music appeals to the mind in a number of ways. This is why it is so very difficult to define. It appears to defy a clear expression of what it is because of this diverse and often flitting nature of how it manifests. Of more ease to realise in the effect it has. Like love, music is soul-tied and operates on the nebulous hallways of the abstract experience. This is a rather affective plain but there is the cognitive plain where music acquires concrete meaning through lyrics. In this regard, it uses the rhythm and other more familiar elements of music to prosecute the meaning of words, at once offering meaning and conveying thought and information whilst at the same time offering opportunity for the mind to “be at rest” and in repose; relaxed and relaxing as well as serene; the serenity that comes from the mood it creates through the use of the sound-based elements, including timbre, the musical colour emanating from each instrument...”(<http://classicalmusic.lifetips.com/cat/57534/elements-of-music/index.html>). But music can agitate the mind as is the case with protest music.

## **3. Relationship of the Arts**

The unity of the arts is evident, not only in the elements common to them all, but in the way they can be combined

into composite arts, more complex in appeal. Much of the optimum effectiveness of the performing arts is enhanced by the deliberate use of the sister arts of music and dance. Interestingly, all the arts give sensuous pleasure: in sculpture and painting this is through the physical vision; in music, by the sense of hearing; poetry appeals to both imaginative sight and hearing. The acted drama is a still more composite art. Poetry is present in its lines spoken, painting in the scenic background, while sculpture is carried into living action in the poses and movements of the actors. Music is embodied in its complete aesthetic. The result is a most absorbing complex appeal. This is perhaps why Wagner strove to develop what may be considered “the most remarkable of all composite arts -music drama— where he presents all the arts

combined in the drama, with music in addition, making the most powerful appeal of all. Thus sculpture, painting, poetry, dramatic action, orchestric dancing and music all unite in this complex art in one manifold appeal to the whole spirit of man. (“Unity of the arts.” <http://www.oldandsold.com/articles28/art-philosophy-15.shtml>).

Recall that one interesting thing about music is its paradox of at once being invaluable but often lacking the ability to transmit cognitive information. When therefore it is deployed in theatre, it largely serves as a compelling aesthetic that enhances meaning and atmosphere, while driving the message home to the percipients. The words spoken by the actor become the “lyrics” so to speak. This is why music is adopted quite readily in many forms of propaganda, dance, drama, etc. whether in accompaniment of instrument or not. The extent to which instrumentation enhances meaning and vice versa is not the subject of this paper but music in all its forms is a useful art form particularly in the theatre aesthetics of sound and mood typified in the electronic media, as jingles, signature tune, mood creators, sound animator, anticipating action, intro preset and concluding post set. Music here assists, particularly through instrumentation and/or song which in itself conveys the cognitive meaning of lyric or poetry.

The ability to relax and create mood entertainment makes music a very useful tool in the dissemination of information even in a setting as formal as the work place. Work place here does not necessarily mean a confined place where organized labour goes on. Rather it is a situation where some task is going on and music is used to diminish the tedium of the task to make it more enjoyable and less stressful. In other words, A work song is a piece of music closely connected to a specific form of work, either sung while conducting a task (often to coordinate timing) or a song linked to a task or trade which might be a connected narrative, description, or protest song. There are also prisoner songs and modern work songs, hunting and pastoral songs, Agricultural work songs which help pass time and reduce tedium. “Rhythms of work songs can serve to synchronize physical movement in a group or gang, as they are in parts of Africa with drums as accompaniment to coordinate sowing and hoeing.” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Work\\_song](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Work_song)) Work songs also help to create a feeling of familiarity and connection between the workers. Therefore workplace music, often in song, is used to release the feeling of boredom. It could come from a separated source or it may emanate from the percipient himself. This is one privilege music has over drama: the entertainer and the performer can be in one bucket. Consider the prison task of cutting grass to the accompaniment of music may in fact be produced to the rhythm of the swish sound produced by the cutting motion as the machetes make contact with the grass:

Onye gbuwe achara onye gbuwe;  
Onye akpola ibe ya onye ikoli...  
(Each person, cut the grass,  
Do not call the other a prisoner...)

Often the songs are voluntary and improvised but they could also be copied from the prevailing circumstances of the work or situation.

#### 4. Music, Theatre, and Performance

Richard Wagner, many years ago, in his book *Oper und Drama* (1850) advanced the “public expression of national human aspirations in symbolic form by enacting racial myths and using music for full expression of the dramatic action.” (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/399012/music-drama>).

Music for dance is inevitable but drama in its modern western form can exist merely as “talk”. But Wagner was only presenting an old expression in a new format, enjoying the new freedom engendered by naturalism and realism. Indeed. Ancient Egyptian ritual theatre, Japanese noh and kabuki, Greek theatre of exaltation, African total theatre etc. employed music. Even the poetry of Shakespeare and his contemporaries had music in mind, thus the extensive poetry of their diction. But the age of realism brought the “conversation” to this fore. Cohen (2005:494) offers that “music and sound effects have been in use in the theatre since ancient times.; Aristotle considered music an essential component of tragedy... (and theatre) increasingly employ electronic sounds and music...” Even long before then, in the 17th Century Italy, the team-up of music and drama according to Kamien, had been perfected in the opera form. This unique fusion of music, acting, poetry, dance, scenery, and costumes “offers a theatrical experience of overwhelming excitement and emotion.... Characters and plot are revealed through song rather than speech used in ordinary drama... Opera demands performers who can sing and act simultaneously...”(2002:109).

A look at the central roles of music and drama in our lives will be useful in determining the relationship they share.

#### 4.1 *Music as worship*

Even from the very beginning of recorded time, music has been part of man particularly in religious ritual, typified in chants and evocative ranting, often accompanied by instrumentation. Today, praises to God cannot be complete without music. He even enjoins the faithful in the Bible through the psalmist:

Praise Him with trumpet sound  
praise Him with lute and harp  
...Praise Him with strings and pipe  
Praise Him with sounding cymbals...  
Let everything that breathes praise the Lord  
(150:3-6)

The origin of theatre is embedded in religious ritual in Africa and elsewhere; and like an earlier example indicates, even when theatre was lost in Europe, the religious ceremonies invited it. The Egyptian, Greek and other recorded ancient theatres derived their impetus from worship. The most basic characteristic of theatre is mimesis, sympathetic magic and the effort by ancient man to establish appropriate environment for interaction with the world of the spirits.

#### 4.2 *The didactic role of music*

This refers to the utilitarian role of music. Music is deployed in satiric chants and songs, in criticism and in chastising the wrong-doer. Long before now, satiric songs were used in traditional Africa as a tool for correcting social misconduct. This role of music continues in various forms today. *Music is here* transformed “from being an art to being a craft, a craft being some artifact which is functional.” Aristotle said, “Music has the power to form character” and Luther said that music makes “fine, skillful people” (Schalk, 1988:34). As such, it may be used both to proselytize and teach.

According to Schalk, (1988:33). John Calvin recognized the power which music held when he wrote that:

There is hardly anything in the world with more power to turn or bend, this way and that, the morals of men.... It has a secret power to move our hearts in one way or another. Therefore we must be the more diligent in ruling it in such a manner that it may be useful to us and in no way pernicious.

Theatre is also used to make satiric comments for unacceptable behaviour and to correct. In traditional Africa, the night performing masquerade went round to dramatise such behavior right in front of the homestead where the erring community member resides. The main function of comedy in Black Africa says Traore (1972:67) is “to strengthen the group’s internal unity. By this fact alone, its impact exceeds that of mere entertainment, and it becomes the expression of public opinion...” Today, the poor behaviour of people in high and low places are satirized in comedies and the other more aggressive forms like the protest theatres.

#### 4.3 *Personal edification*

Music also can function as a mind purifier, bring a certain sense of peace and completeness that an enlightened mind can achieve; an ability that is the preserve of human beings . “We are morally and emotionally enfeebled if we live our lives without artistic nourishment...” said Tippett. Our sense of life is diminished” (1980).

Ted Sadler ( [http://www.ijot.com/papers/slater\\_music\\_ethics.pdf](http://www.ijot.com/papers/slater_music_ethics.pdf)) notes that Charles Darwin explained what happened to him as he lost interest in art such as music. He wrote:

...now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry.... I have also lost my taste for pictures and music.... My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts.... The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the normal character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.

Theatre satiates both the performer and the audience in a pattern of fulfilment that is difficult to appreciate without experiencing. This is a personal experience that is derived from group activity. The very fact of enlightenment and the concomitant sense of fulfilment rejuvenates the mind. Indeed music (and theatre) says Asigbo (2009) can be employed as a therapy to aid man either in celebration of life’s successes or lift up his spirit when he is depressed. (Kernodle, 1986: 329) extends this thought thus:

The therapeutic function of all the arts is fully recognized, first of all for the artist himself. We have had in the painter Vincent Van Gogh and the playwright Eugene O’Neill examples of artists, disturbed to the point of destruction, who nevertheless held off disaster for decades by relentlessly creating new artistic forms to give order to their feelings. And the paintings of Van Gogh and the plays of O’Neill have been of tremendous help to other people in meeting the disturbances of the modern age.

#### 4.4 *Entertainment*

Music, because of the dominant input of rhythm, is wrongly regarded by many as pure entertainment. But art pleases the senses. This leads to relaxation which creates a therapeutic opportunity to the mind which makes music a veritable tool for healing. Music does these, and this perhaps more than other capabilities of music tie it to other arts. But in the natural and artistic manifestation, music is a great source of recreation and emotional ministering. According to Congreve, music has charms to soothe the savage breast, to soften rocks or bend a knotted oak. But a study has added fresh dimension to the entertainment value of music. There appears to be significant differences between casual music listening, and listening by those who have had some musical training or are otherwise musically involved. According to Lewis, (2010:84) the latter “are more likely to listen (subconsciously) analytically, probably involving dual hemisphere processing, which thus increases the likelihood of peak emotional experiences. However, music may also trigger another variety of powerful emotion: the introspective, wistful, spiritual, and sad”. So where does entertainment begin? Clearly, what entertains one person may not, the other. Therein lies the interpretative lesion of music as entertainment. I prefer to separate commercial music from personal or private music. Unlike music however, theatre is deliberately construed and so is difficult to divorce from entertainment even as it entertains both the performer who executes the action and the audience that sees the story.

#### 4.5 *Self disclosure*

A final function of music is that of being an agent of self disclosure. Music enables the performer to express feelings which are difficult to express in other ways, and to express those feelings in a manner more emotionally charged than mere words. In this regard, music may be considered a window to the soul. Here, theatre explodes with self expression, perhaps even more aggressively. People express themselves through what they write. This is why the theatre artiste is a commentator and does this through his own eyes.

Johnson (2004) posits that especially in the African total theatre aesthetics, music is so vital in realizing theatricality.

In Africa, dance and music are inevitable twins because of the basic human expression of mood found in the more ancient theatre dominated by chants, ritual, festival and communal action. This communal action has reached from the past onto the present in the form of theatre deployed as a development tool, typified in the rampant theatrical form found in developing countries of the third world, Asia and particularly Africa, where artists have dipped into the pristine past to utilize basic home-grown art forms to express the state of their affairs, enlighten the mind, and mobilize the community to take positive action to better their lives.

## 5. Music in Developmental Theatre

Theatre for development is a relatively new form of enlightenment that deals on “drama associated primarily with postcolonial rural communities coping with problems of change” (Chambers:758). Therefore, Theatre for Development (TFD) is a learning strategy in which theatre is used to encourage communities to express their own concerns and think about the causes of their problems and possible solutions. (Epskamp and Kees Epskamp). This form manifests in most alternative theatre— avant-garde, community theatre, political theatre, street theatre, Boal’s legislative and forum theatres- which adopt the Brechtian utilitarian school methodologies, and brought into immediacy by the Brazilian formulator of theatre of the oppressed, Augusto Boal, through his forum theatre practice. In combination with Paulo Freire’s pedagogy, “Boal’s practice has shaped and given direction to Popular Theatre in Africa. Both Freire and Boal are concerned with liberation; both espouse participation in the process of liberation.” (Abah, 1994:88).

To properly capture interest and allow for an integration of the mind into the work based performance or improvised collective spontaneous reaction, the action of theatre, the rhythm of music and the visual appeal of dance combine to communicate meaning. In each case, music is central-

- Story executed in dance- Dance drama
- Story executed in music- Opera or musical drama
- Story executed in defined action- Drama

Because of the central role of music and its ability to appeal even in the improvised state, no matter how simple, it calls attention to the action, making it a good efficient tool for the otherwise improvised and earthy form of theatre development. By its nature, theatre for development can easily be drab especially if it is long. This is largely because it exists to pass a message and can easily become a “lecture”. So it needs a “softening“ to be easily appealing thereby serving as entertainment as well as a “lecture”; stimulating the body, the mind and the brain, engaging the three educative domains of the affective, cognitive and psychomotor.

Music in theatre-for-development is captured within the framework of the improvisational opus of the form because the plays are commonly about “self-help, enlightenment and development.” (Duruaku and Ugiri, 2008:34). So the themes of community theatre include the political, social, health, and welfare concerns of a deprived people. The rural nature of this kind of theatre recommends a homogeneous group which understands the local language and face similar corporate challenges. Inevitably, the nuances of their local idioms are familiar to the group. so when they sing, all join; when they dance, all join; when they act; all participate. Therein lies the homogeneity of the performance structure; the binding force of the performance that gives efficacy to the raison d’être of the performance.

## 6. Conclusion

In workaday situation, music and drama are deployed informally. Prisoners also act out the dehumanising condition in which they find themselves during their “rest” period. Using empty metal dishes and stamping their feet, they sing several songs in pidgin (rotten) English, one of which is:

Since morning  
I never chop o  
I never waki o  
Even penny to buy ciga

I never see am o

Here they complain of hunger and an inability to buy cigarettes to smoke.

They also enact their resistance to be arrested by the police after their crime:

Papa no dey o  
Mama no dey o  
If you wan kill me o  
Kill me make I die o  
But I no go follow you o  
To that station o.

There are others employed during work in the farm, where playmaking serves as interlude during the long hours of farm work. These recreational breaks remove the monotony of work and revitalise the spirit.

The improvisational and spontaneous nature of the foregoing are foundations for more elaborate and “discovered” or deliberate theatre for development. In these days of the war on HIV/ AIDS, the developmental theatre approach lends itself to mobilization and enlightenment. Social education of this sort has been extensively used with music playing a significant role, not only to assemble the people but to sustain the message through engaging the percipients in the choruses. I recall the Alvan Ikoku College of Education Theatre HIV/AIDS campaign of 2007 when they went round campuses with powerful songs that the audiences left the scene chanting. Those compelling tunes remained on the lips of many for days. One excerpt of a song in pidgin English is:

You don dey waka  
Dey shake body  
Shake Shake shake  
Dey show body  
Show show show  
But remember say  
Na sweet the kill; dey kill’ dey kill o  
So sister; Lock am up  
Brother zip am up...

During the Nigerian civil war, the Biafran side had a strong itinerant developmental theatre group that improvised plays. The passion generated at the performances were largely due to the music component of the play. For instance in one of the plays, a young man meets a little girl weeping, and asks her what the matter is in song:

Eh! nwannem o  
Gini k’ina ebe  
Gini k’ina akwa  
N’ebe eee n’akwa aaa.

(Eh! my sister  
Why are you crying  
Why are you wailing  
Crying and wailing)

She responds:  
Awusa gburu Papa m ooo  
Na Kano airport ooo  
Ei! efuo mu ooo  
Ariri erielam ooo

(Hausa people killed my father

at the Kano Airport  
Ei! I am lost  
I am abused) etc

It is reported that the audience often wept at this stage. Such is the power of the music.

Music and theatre have found a niche from where they nibble on the mind, surreptitiously depositing images and symbols embedded in the lyric by the music that cloaks them, the action that embellishes them, and the atmosphere that masks their barbed ideas which in direct appeal, might have suffered neglect. This ability to permeate the mind unobtrusively translates into information that can make music and theatre efficient change agents. Music and drama, therefore, are useful in driving the theatre-for-development initiative as developing countries strive to leapfrog into better times, particularly in human enlightenment. Be it for protest, mobilization, or occupation, music in theatre is an dependable companion. This, to my mind is a display of the social responsibility role of the relevant artiste.

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