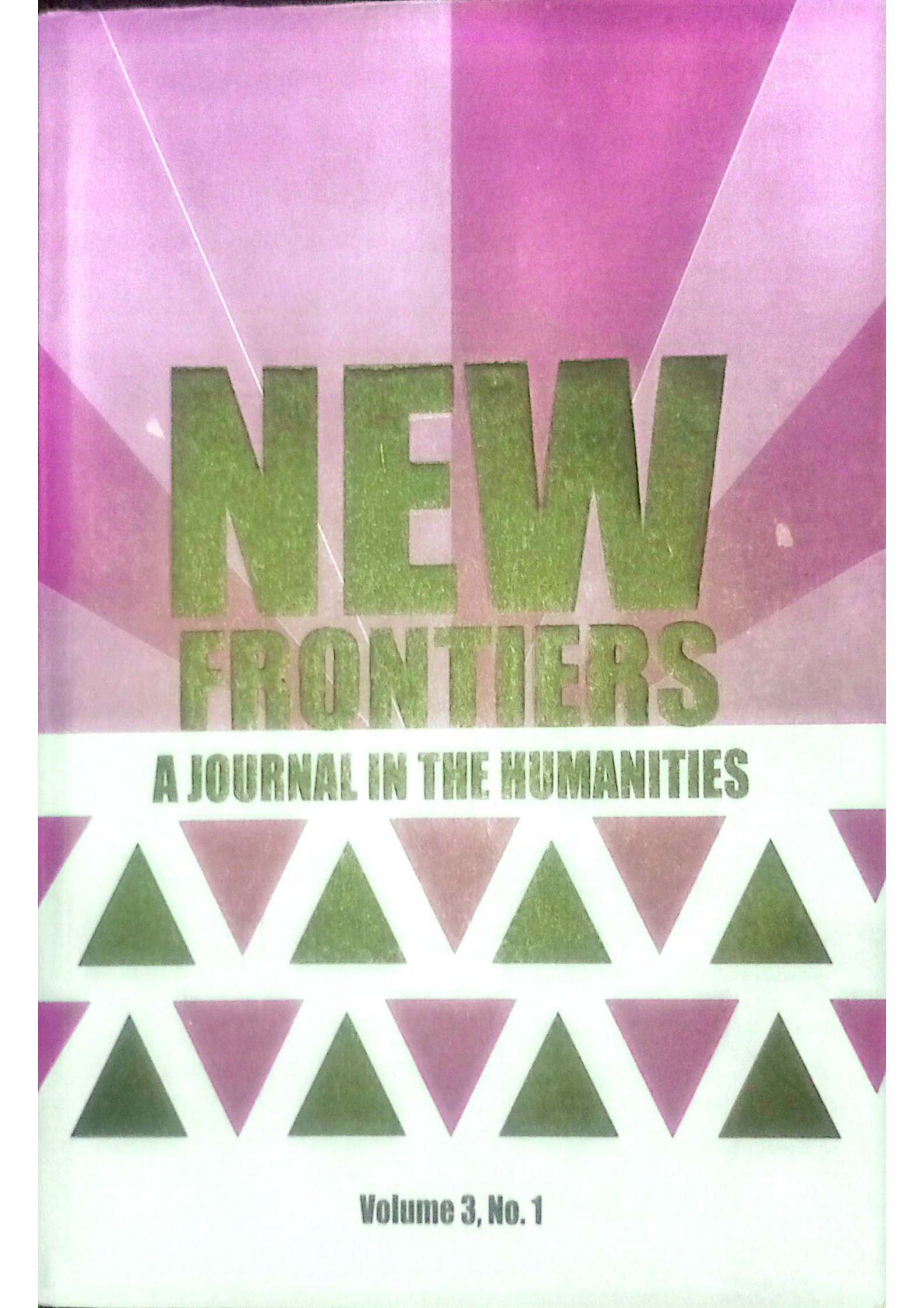


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Dr T.S. Adeola
~~Editor~~

NEW FRONTIERS JOURNAL

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Edited by

Olympus G. Ejue



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CONTEMPORARY FEATURES OF REBIRTH OF MUSIC IN AFRICAN CHURCHES

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Abstract

Music has played very crucial roles in the life of the African church since its emergence in the early nineteenth century and it is engaged to date in Christian worship to achieve several purposes of which mobilization and execution of the central assignment of the church which is missions is key. Although church music has gone through different phases of development and given different colorations, the progressive engagement of music in African Churches qualifies it as an indispensable vehicle of communication, invocation, supplication, and mobilization in the execution of the great commission. An examination of the African church's use of music in contemporary times reveals a rebirth of church music for mission mobilization evident in its Indigenization, Secularization, Instrumentation, and Acculturation. This paper, therefore, discourses the rebirth of church music in African Churches and its deployment in mobilization for missions. It gives a conceptualization of church music; African Churches; a historical overview of music in African churches; and the contemporary features of the rebirth of music in African churches. Drawing on historical materials and analytical methods of research, the paper concludes that music has been effective and remains an indispensable tool for mobilization for missions.

'Contemporary Features of Rebirth of Music in African Churches'

Keywords: Rebirth; Church Music; African Churches; Indigenization; Secularization.

Introduction

From the time of Old Testament Hebrew worship and throughout Church history, music has been one of the important influences in the work of God. When one considers the role of the New Testament Church in providing opportunities for worship, evangelism, edification and fellowship in today's society, one can readily realize that music is still one of the vital means available for the local assembly to achieve these God-given objectives. Regardless of one's particular field of endeavor in Christian service, music has a major role. (Osbeck, 1961, p.13) Music is a universal gift that God has put in the hands of mankind. There is no tribe, nor tongue, or nation is without music. God's most important institution, the Church, has always been filled with music and true followers of God are also filled with music. God has destined that people, music, language and culture all work together to form and define a people. People and their love of music cannot be separated (Janvier, 1995, p.3).

The above statements by Osbeck and Janvier are true of Music and what it can do when it is employed the way it is intended by God. It must be noted that Music is not exclusive to the church. The secular world also holds music as a very important weapon that can be used to capture people and has indeed been used as such. Hence there is a conflict between that which edifies and glorifies God which is expected to be found in the church and given back to society, and that which does not edify, popularized in the secular space; with a contention between entertainment and ministry; between honoring God and just having fun. The secular music is hostile to the message of the gospel that the sacred or church music seek to propagate, but at the same time, the styles of music and its rendition presents an attraction especially to the youths in the church to the point that they either go out of the church to look for this

secular styles or bring it into the church and that has great implications for the music in the church.

Consequently, music has played very crucial roles in the life of the African church since its emergence in the early nineteenth century and is still engaged till date in Christian worship to achieve several purposes of which mobilization and execution of the central assignment of the church can be strategic. Although church music has gone through different phases of development and given different colorations, the progressive engagement of music in African Churches qualifies it as an indispensable vehicle of communication, invocation, supplication, and mobilization in the execution of the great commission. An examination of the African church's use of music in contemporary times reveals a rebirth of church music for mission mobilization evident in its Indigenization, Secularization, Instrumentation, and Acculturation.

This paper, therefore, discusses the contemporary features of the rebirth of music in African Churches. It gives a conceptualization of church music; African Churches; a historical overview of music in African churches; and the contemporary features of the rebirth of music in African churches. Drawing on historical materials and analytical methods of research the paper concludes that music has been effective and remains an indispensable tool for mobilization for missions in African churches.

Conceptualization of Church Music

It is important to have a conceptual framework of what Church music is. There seems to be an interchangeable use of the terms 'Church music', 'Christian music' and 'Gospel music'. Emielu (2014, p.110) succinctly express this view thus:

The terms 'Church music' 'Christian music' and 'Gospel music' are often used interchangeably by many people (including this author) in a variety of contexts relating to music with Christian themes within and outside the church. Such inter-changeability and disregard for

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restrictive terminologies may be excused because the textual content of the three terms are essentially Christian; based on Christian doctrines and biblical themes.

It is, therefore, necessary to situate the African Church music in its proper context for the purpose of our paper. In fact, 'Christian music' is a generic term embracing all forms of music that developed or emerged from the musical practices of the Christian faith whether in the strict liturgy in the church or in the adaptive contexts outside of the church. It is the religious music of the Christian faith that gives expression to Christian doctrines. It is like an umbrella term for church music and gospel music the tree out of which other branches like the church music and other types of music shoot out.

Gospel music refers to the Christian branch of religious music employed to propagate the gospel of Christ to Christians and non-Christians and edify the believers through its performance in both strict religious context (in the church) and social/entertainment context (outside the church) which has been made popular by the electronic media, technology and its performance.

Samuel (2013, p.21) in his discussion of "Church Music in Nigeria: A Historical Trend" identifies gospel music as one of the new forms that emerged from the liturgical music of the church in Nigeria which has become the most popular with the general public out of the various musical forms practiced as church music in Nigeria today. In his view, gospel music is one of the most widely accepted musical genres in contemporary Nigeria and above all probably the most controversial, because of its popular status, and its highly variegated nature. The music according to him, has witnessed a lot of revolutionary changes especially in recent times. He suggests that the definition of Church music covers any music used as part of liturgical service. Church music includes hymns, psalms and canticles, special choir renditions in form of 'Native' and Western anthems, localized and imported gospel music as well as "Native airs" and

choruses. Also included in the definition of church music by Samuel is vocal and instrumental music used by Christian faithful or bands at socio-religious activities outside church divine services. He traced the origin of church music in Nigeria to the advent of Christian missionary activities of the second half of the nineteenth century. The music, which was initially strictly reserved for worship purposes later grew, developed, and became fluxing and variegated.

The inclusion of gospel music in Samuel's definition of church music is worthy of note. That gospel music is a branch of Christian music and an offshoot of church music is a fact that cannot be overlooked. We are however, of the opinion that having developed from church music, gospel music carves for itself a unique identity that distinguishes it from church music, especially in terms of its performance context and styles. Gospel music can therefore be regarded as church music only when it forms part of the liturgy in Christian worship. We consider church music to be more restrictive and confined to the four walls of the church and gospel music as a variation of the church music taken out of the restrictions of the church and employed in social functions and serving in some cases as entertainment music which the church music does not encourage. A distinguishing feature between church and gospel music is the sanctity and sacredness of church music because of its use in worship as part of the liturgy and the adaptive nature of gospel music to different contexts within and outside the church, and the liberty that the performers have in the employment of the music. Alluding to the sacredness of church music Robertson (1950, p.70) states as follows:

There was, indeed a marked antithesis between the secular music of the time (Time of the early church fathers) and the kind of music felt to be suitable for Christian worship: restraint, tranquility, nobility and solemnity were not qualities to be found in theatrical entertainment or at private parties, nor could such be said to express states of the soul.

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Adedeeji (2014, pp.103 -117) uses the term sacred music to describe church music defining it as the music of the Christian liturgies or music used for Christian worship. It is a sanctified, holy, revered music for the worship of God. Robertson had earlier given the meaning of liturgical music as 'the kind of music which spiritually, aesthetically, and practically consorts most closely with the sacred words of the Christian liturgies'. A progression of the growth or off-shoot of these three can be given as follows: Christian music giving rise to church music and church music producing gospel music.

For the purpose of this discourse, we shall adopt a definition of church music as music associated with Christian faith covering music engaged in strict liturgy within the four walls of the church including the hymns, psalms, choruses, choir anthems and the same music taken out of the church setting to the secular space for crusades, revivals, festivals, musical concerts and so on as well as gospel music which emerged since the 1960s as a distinct branch of Christian music.

Historical Overview of Music in African Churches: The Nigerian Example

The cultural awakening that began in the early nineteenth century with the returning slaves from Sierra Leone after the abolition of the slave trade with the promulgation of an act in 1807 by Britain making the trade in slaves illegal had its impact on the church and set the foundation for the development of church music in African churches. The church was the strongest challenge to European power since it was a place of convergence for western educated African elites in nineteenth-century Nigeria. There were agitations for African-friendly policies that countenanced the African customs, beliefs, and practices and this was instrumental to the emergence of Nigerian hymnody at the beginning of the century. According to Omojola (1995, p.9) the new indigenous church music constituted the most significant artistic symbol of nineteenth-century Nigerian challenge to European hegemony. Omojola observed further

that one of the most important issues which engaged the attention of the early leaders of the churches was the extent to which European elements should be retained in the new churches, especially regarding hymn, liturgy and dogma. Traditional music had been banned in the Orthodox churches since it was said to carry paganized connotations. The leadership in the new African churches therefore was deliberate in deemphasizing the European, to promote the African elements in their worship. Worthy of mention is the leader of the Native Baptist Church, Mr Mojola Agbebi who strongly advocated for the use of hymns based on or derived from traditional African music. He actually instructed members of his church in Ekiti land not to use European Hymns in the church for seven years to allow traditional music to take its rightful place in Ekiti churches. Agbebi's efforts were complemented by those of A.K. Ajisafe, an outstanding hymnologist, who pioneered the use of native airs in his church, the United African Methodist, Eleja in 1917. In addition, drums were introduced by the Ethiopian and Brotherhood churches, two missions established in 1918.

The cultural awakening in the African churches became inevitable in the orthodox churches whose leadership initially was reluctant to use African music in their churches because African songs were termed paganistic and offensive hence not worthy of Holy worship. However, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, African songs were allowed in the Anglican churches because the Orthodox churches were losing converts to the new African churches in increasing numbers as music became the chief means of propaganda among the churches. Churches like St Judes Anglican Church, Lagos had musicians like Emmanuel Sowande the leading Nigerian composer of African modern art music and J.J. Ransome-Kuti one of Nigeria's most popular musicians who began to introduce traditional songs set to Christian texts for use in the church. Alaja-Brown (1981) observed that by the year 1902, church musicians had begun to compose indigenous hymns whose melodies were based on local song styles, thus marking the

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establishment of the Native air tradition. A good example of such song is "E t'olorun lawa o se o" (We shall do the will of God) derived from a Yoruba folksong "Epo nbe, Ewa nbe o" (There is palm oil, there is beans) usually sung by parents of twins. Songs in this style and at this stage in the new African churches is described by Abayomi Bello (2014,p.316) as products of experimental works of the pioneering organists, Catechists, and choirmasters among whom were Rev Canon J.J. Ransom-Kuti, Ekundayo Phillips, Revd T.A. Olude, Akin George and Emmanuel Sowande.

The use of music and its practice in African churches continues to have different dynamics with different phases, flavours and expressions at different periods with the emergence of different churches and denominations in Africa. Music in the African instituted churches like the Aladura and the western-influenced Pentecostal churches as well as the mainline churches all present different features in their engagement of music in worship and deployment of same for other Christian activities. Pentecostalism remains a strong influence on Christianity and this in turn has influenced the types, forms, styles and content of music in African churches today. However, since the concern of this paper is about the rebirth of church music in African churches for mission mobilization we shall now focus on what we consider as some general features of the rebirth of church music in the African churches.

Contemporary Features of Rebirth of Music in African Churches

Rebirth in its general usage implies renaissance or renewal, hence we use rebirth here to mean the new phase and dynamics of music in the African churches; the new way in which church music is been packaged in African churches today for the purpose of mobilization for mission. Rebirth of Music in African churches presents some general features common to all denominations; we shall discuss the features and how they are engaged in mobilization for missions.

i. Indigenization

As earlier stated, the cultural awakening that began in nineteenth-century Nigerian church began a process of indigenization of worship characterized by the deployment of local elements such as music. Starting with the direct translation of the western hymns to indigenous languages with the original western tunes, it moved to composing native airs which adapted the existing folk songs to Christian texts and later to original compositions conceived and executed in the indigenous cultures with their peculiarities. The indigenous musical instruments which had been rejected and banned by the missionaries as evil and paganistic found their way back into the church and have continued to be used to date. Indigenization of music in the African churches reflects in the language, musical instruments, scale structures, melodic directions, and performance modes. Indigenous churches especially the Aladura (Spiritual) churches began to spring up more aligned to African cultural identity and cultural nationalism. Some clergymen composed native airs and native anthems for church use, for example, Reverend J.J. Ransome-Kuti collected fifty-seven Yoruba sacred songs written in indigenous poetic and musical idioms based on the pentatonic scale characteristic of the African tuning system. This was the situation until the seventies when the Pentecostal movement emerged and gave rise to the growth, development, and spread of gospel music (Samuel, 2006, p 19). This means that indigenous gospel music became an integral component and framework of religious activities in African churches.

Indigenization of church music in African churches was and is still an effective means of mobilization for missions. At the early stage it attracted and retained the Africans in the African churches because of the vibrancy and dynamic activities that the African music contains which was evidently lacking in the western hymns and mode of worship. The Africans were able to relate with the visual and communicative essence of their musical instruments when engaged in worship. For example, the drum language which an average indigenous person understands and the use of their local language communicate to them in

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worship, thereby making the message of the gospel get across to them in a language they can relate to easily. Indigenization of church music is thus a feature of the rebirth of music in the African churches and has remained constant as a tool in mobilization for mission.

ii. *Secularization*

Secularization is used here to imply the process of taking music from within the four walls of the church where it was used in strict liturgical settings to the public or secular space for the purpose of socialization and evangelism. It started with the activities of the new breed of musicians classified as "church musicians" in the first six decades of the twentieth century. These activities culminated into the production of 'native airs' and 'musical entertainment' within the Christian communities in different parts of the country and development of several hybrid forms with ethnic flavours. According to Vidal (2017, p.30), the efforts of these musicians in developing church music in the six decades of the twentieth century was signaled in the grand interdenominational open-air service that featured mass choirs from all churches, held on Sunday, October 2, 1960, at the Lagos Course (Now Tafawa Balewa Square). The service was held as part of the activities marking Nigerian Independence. It featured exclusively "native airs" in many Nigerian languages.

This process of secularization of church music is what brought about the emergence and development of what is now known as Nigerian gospel music. Omibiyi-Obidike (1994) and Ojo (1998) both trace the origin of gospel music in Nigeria to the church. According to Omibiyi-Obidike (1994), gospel music originally was used in the church and was performed at special festivals such as harvest, thanksgiving and so forth. However, with the electronic technology and the need for the youth to have the type of music that caters to their social interest, gospel music was taken out of the church. Ojo (1998, p.215) expresses the same views as Omibiyi-Obidike when he states that it soon became apparent that a different kind of Christian music was needed for festival occasions, for example, harvest rituals,

funeral ceremonies, births and marriages. Initially, church choirs had provided music at such occasions.

In the submissions of Omibiyi and Ojo, the need to cater to the musical needs of the members at social gatherings set the stage for the development of Nigerian gospel music. We agree with these two submissions that gospel music developed from the adaptation of church music to meet the social needs of the church members. As Omojola (2014, p.35) submitted, Yoruba Church music being the first Western-influenced musical tradition in Yoruba land provides the major plank for the development of new musical genres and practices and this certainly includes gospel music which later developed as an extension of church music.

Secularization of church music manifesting in a new genre of music now known as Nigerian gospel music engage in the use of popular and secular styles. Nigerian gospel musicians use various musical styles in their performances. The use of traditional and contemporary popular styles like Waka, Senwele, Apala, Ijala, Fuji, Hip Hop, Rock, Afrobeat and so on generates attraction, especially to the youths and entertainment at social functions. The use of traditional musical instruments and the performance of such styles is exactly the way it is done in the secular but for the text usually generates dance steps, movements, and entertaining interactions.

Popular and secular styles have become an identity in music performances in Nigerian churches through the activities of gospel musicians. It has been observed that the 1980s mark the emergence of the use of popular styles in Nigeria's gospel music because of the influence of popular culture on the one hand and the desire to commercialize gospel music on the other hand. This, in Emielu's (2006) opinion is a product of the steady cross-current of musical ideas and cultural exchanges between Africa and the Diaspora which is very evident in popular and gospel music.

An examination of the current trends in the performance of Nigerian gospel music reveals that while some gospel musicians

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are known for using specific popular styles as occasional spices for their performances, others have come to be known and identified with the use of specific popular styles while some employ a blend of several styles in their performances.

For example, Frank Edward is one of the Nigerian gospel musicians that is known for his hip-hop style, Adekunle Oloyede Michael Olalekan popularly known as Dekunle Fuji performs using Fuji and a trio that goes by the name 'bois Olorun' meaning God's boys are known for the gospel Apala style. Bois Olorun comprises of three young men Feranmi, Kayode and Kolade who since 2007 formed Apala music group, using the method of 'scripturising' everyday language, slangs, and indigenous comedy blended into their music to communicate the gospel, while other musicians like Bukola Akinade, Tope Alabi, and Kenny Kore are known for the use of multiple styles in their performances. Evangelist Rachael Bukola Akinade popularly called 'Senwele Jesu' carved an identity for herself in the Nigerian gospel music scene through her use of Waka and Senwele musical styles. Examining her music recordings reveals that she mainly employs the popular highlife, Waka, and Senwele genres in her performance. Tope Alabi is another household name in the Nigerian gospel music scene that spices up her performances with "Maccosa".

Taking music to the public place by the church through the gospel musicians who are often engaged in gospel crusades, mission campaigns, musical concerts have also strengthened mobilization for missions. The use of music and popular or celebrated gospel musicians is a strategy that is used by the church and has been found to be effective in mobilizing for missions and evangelizing.

iii. Instrumentation

Another contemporary feature of the rebirth of church music in the African churches is in the aspect of instrumentation. Elaborate use of musical instruments features prominently in the African churches. A blend of the western with the traditional musical instruments especially the percussions is also a feature.

The submission by Omojola (2014) that Christian churches across Yoruba land now commonly feature dundun drummers, both during worship services and at Christian social gatherings outside the church is quite true and evident in African church music. Some musical instruments such as the western keyboard, guitars, drum set, saxophones, trumpets, congas and the traditional talking drums - *Gangan, Bata, Sekere, Agogo*, seem to be generally employed by the Nigerian gospel musicians and in the churches. The number of each of the musical instruments also vary from one church to another and in the case of gospel musicians it varies from one to another depending on how large the band is and the style of performance but the basic combination of the instrument in the small band is at least one each of the keyboard, bass guitar, drum set and talking drum. The use of multiples of each of the musical instruments and the dominant instrument whether western or traditional is also a function of the style of the musician.



Plate 1: Picture showing Shola Allison using a blend of Western Keyboard, Guitar and traditional drums. Picture taken in a live performance at the Stella Obasanjo Hall in Ilorin on Sunday 27th December, 2015.

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Plate 2: Picture showing the percussion section of Bois Olorun using multiple talking drums in a musical concert. Picture taken on Sunday 27th December, 2015 at the Stella Obasanjo Hall, Ilorin.

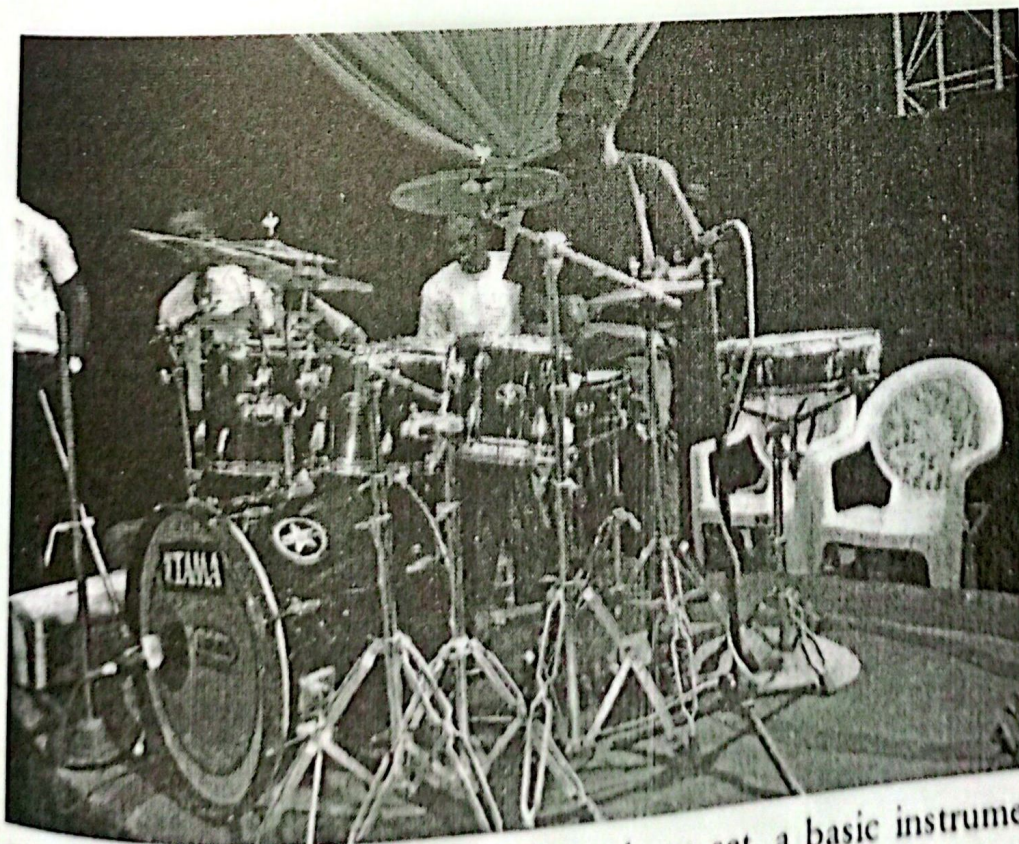


Plate 3: Picture showing the western drum set, a basic instrument employed by most gospel musicians being played by the drummer. Picture taken on December 2015 at Stella Obasanjo hall, Ilorin.

The use of musical instruments in church services and Christian gatherings such as open air crusades and revivals is a powerful drive and a force of attraction of people to the church. It has been observed that one of the major attractions to Christian gatherings is good music driven by good musical instruments manned by skillful musicians.

iv. Acculturation

Whereas indigenization was a feature of the rebirth of music in African churches, acculturation was also a dynamic that found expression in the engagement of music in the African churches. The Western culture that was resisted and deliberately deemphasized at some point in the African church later became amplified and fused with the African culture. The fusion of the new with the old gradually emerged as a feature of music in African churches, as they began to blend African and Western elements together in their music; this is a process described by Axelsson (1974, p.89) as *acculturation*. In his words:

As the people of Africa have accepted cultural traits and ideologies of Western origin, but changed them in meaning and content to suit their own environments, they must also be allowed to accept European musical idioms and change them according to their own concepts without the superimposition of neo-colonial attitudes. Therefore I have called the present-day church music activities an acculturation process.

Tunji Vidal (2017) in his classification of the various musical expressions in Nigeria identifies a category of musical expression in Nigeria as the 'Western and Africanized church music'; this according to him is the result of the importation of European Christian religious institutions into the Nigerian society and the subsequent process of acculturation, adaptation, and assimilation. He observed further that the earliest practice of this category of music can be traced to the missionary activities of the Wesleyan (Now Methodist) missionaries and Church Missionary Society (Now Anglican) that both landed in Badagry

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in 1841 and 1843 respectively. More recently, with the advent of Pentecostalism is the elevation of Western concepts and models and its reintroduction into African worship especially in its music. The blend of different African cultures for the purpose of appeal and communicating to the various cultural groups or people of different ethnic backgrounds also became a feature. This brought about a case of assimilation and utilization of other people's language, tunes and performance styles in church music. Churches in cosmopolitan settlements engage in music that will reflect their setting and benefit the membership. It is now a common feature to hear songs of different Nigerian and other African languages intentionally performed in a service, especially during the praise sessions reflecting the cross-cultural demography of the congregations. This usually generates a sense of belonging in all congregants and facilitates inclusive participation in worship and thereby mobilizing the worshipers.

Conclusion

In discussing the rebirth of music in African churches for mission mobilization, we have given a conceptual frame of church music as music associated with Christian faith covering music engaged in strict liturgy within the four walls of the church including the hymns, psalms, choruses, choir anthems and the same music taken out of the church setting to the secular space for crusades, revivals, festivals, musical concerts and so on as well as gospel music which emerged since the 1960s as a distinct branch of Christian music. We have also given a historical overview of the emergence and development of music in African churches using Nigeria as an example and tracing its origin from the wave of the cultural awakening of the early nineteenth century which also affected the church. The phases of development of music in the African churches spanned the stage of embracing the Western hymns imposed by the missionaries to the phase of setting Western tunes to African texts, to the stage of adapting existing folk tunes to Christian texts and

arriving at the final stage of original compositions reflecting Africa in text and melody.

We have also identified four contemporary features of the rebirth of music in African churches for mission mobilization as indigenization, secularization, instrumentation and acculturation. All of these four have featured in the phases of the rebirth of music in African churches and have been effectively engaged in mission mobilization at the various stages of music rebirth in the African churches.

Music in African churches continues to experience changes at various stages because it is not immune to societal realities. The context of the existence of the church in the larger society has been a great factor of influence of the rebirth of music in the church. As an element of culture, music connects people among whom it evolves. Agbo and Keke (2013, p.259) also submitted that to say that music influences the religion of Africa or vice versa is merely an isomorphic statement because religion and music are two indivisible superstructures that constitute the culture of the Africans. Music derives strength from the culture that regulates its emergence, performance, patronage, and continuity. This is so because, according to Blacking (1973, p. 60), music is a product of human behavior.

Music remains one of the strong and effective tools for mission mobilization both on the part of the missionaries and the evangelized. It has incontrovertibly remained an age-long instrument for the conveyance of the gospel message when properly handled but in recent times have also been mishandled especially in its secularization and instrumentation. There is therefore the need to strike a balance between gospel and entertainment; musicality and spirituality as well as ministration and performance. It becomes equally necessary that; whereas ministration can be performative and entertaining, music for mission mobilization must be essentially sacred, spiritual and Christ centered. It must be biblical in all its intent because it is meant

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for drawing souls into the kingdom as well as to edify those who are already saved. The intersection of the music of the church with popular culture must not be allowed to remove the gospel coloration from church music.

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