

Discuss on Ibibio Folksongs in Contemporary Choral Music Composition

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Abstract

Folksongs in Ibibio land, like any other African Countries appeals to a group of people who share the same language, culture and traditions. This group of people have their own types and styles of music that is only special to them. Making music is part of their ways of life as it cuts across their traditional norms and believes. But then, folksongs sometimes change due to the various verbal processes of transmission, usually from one generation to another. This changes have brought about loss of interest to an average Ibibio thereby allowing nearby cultural influence. The paper intends to, as a way of revival, transcribe and translate some Ibibio folksongs in order to preserve Ibibio folksongs in Nigeria. The method employed was qualitative in nature as folksongs was collected verbally and through recording. At the end of this research, the researcher was able to translate and transliterate selected Ibibio folksongs, as a way of documentation for the purpose of contributing to the contemporary Ibibio musical work repertoire. It has also serve a guide to non-Ibibio composers who may be interested in composing in Ibibio language. It also made some recommendations.

Keywords: Ibibio, Folksongs, Contemporary, Choral, Composition, Language.

Introduction

Folk music is the music with which a people of a particular community or ethnic group most specifically identify themselves. It consists of traditional songs that are learnt by hearing and taught orally rather than notational system (that is written musical notes), these traditional songs are known as folksongs. The original composers of folksongs are anonymous or forgotten. Folk music is monophonic and consists of a single unaccompanied melody that varies so greatly in the way it is passed down. It is generally simpler and much more compact and distinct in style compared to classical or art music. It is so because it exists in different forms and under a variety of social and cultural conditions. Folksongs have continued to change due to the various approaches, method of transmission, and social context. But then, the problem became more advanced especially in the cities where Ibibio parents do not even acquaint their wards with Ibibio language and traditional cultures (norms and values) or teach them their folksongs. Instead, popular music has become the other of the day and it is also eating deep into the people (old and young) of the rural areas where folksongs supposedly, evolved. This is so because from the field work, the researcher discovered that the average Ibibio child in the village has been influenced by the popular music of the day. Despite this reality, very little or nothing is being done to salvage the situation. Akpabot, a recognized musicologist and composer, in an attempt to salvage the situation composed several Ibibio instrumental works. Though, most of his works were fusion of both African and Western. Examples are: *Ofala* (1963), combining wind orchestra and five African instruments. *Cynthia's Lament* (1965), wind orchestra and six African instruments. In all of these works, Akpabot emphasized Ibibio musical elements. Janheinz (1968) correctly observed:

Western scholars continued to collect African poetry but
did not investigate it as poetry looking for its stylistic rule.

It has remained a treasure trove of manners and customs, a storehouse of vocabulary, a reservoir of archetypes, an inexhaustible source of the historian, a training ground for the Phoenician, a quarry for the anthropologist, a paradise for myth collectors. But as literature, like poetry, has remained an unexplored territory.

Owing to this, it would become difficult researching on even some of the folksongs that were passed on orally for documentation. Although, folksongs are part of human culture and society, it is sometimes difficult to know how they emanated due to the fact that most of the keepers of traditions are have passed on. Sometimes, folksongs change beyond recognition as a result of transmission and exist in many forms; as a result, new text may have been attached or adapted to a different or same set of lyrics. This problem is also evident in other African ethnic groups, like the music of the Igbos. Nwamara (2006) submits that, the continuous decline in the interest of the Igbo, especially the youths, in Igbo music appreciation, composition and practice, and the craze for its western counterpart, is obvious. This has adversely affected so many areas of the life of the Igbo. In the church, the story is the same as church musicians and composers have followed the trend in composing and performing what can be best described as western-music-influenced Igbo music.

Meaning of Folksong

Folksongs, also known as traditional songs are songs that have been passed down orally from one generation to another. It is a song associated with culture that originated by and is part of the tradition of a people of a particular ethnic group. These definitions suggest that literarily that the term 'folk music and folksong' can be used interchangeably as they are interwoven to mean almost, if not the same thing. Though the melody and words of a specific song may have had their origin in a single unknown individual, they are invariably cast in verse-repeating forms, in

which a single melody is used again and again as the setting for each of several stanzas of verses. There are different types of folksongs, each with a specific purpose with no standardized form but, its texts well as music, exist in more than one, and sometimes greatly many variants or in slightly different versions used in addressing several important occasions like work song, children's song, religious song, love song, war song, ceremonial song, coronation song, traditional song, wedding song, hunting song, abusive song, age group song, cult song, initiation song and so on. All cutting across the various age groups in a said community. It tends to change because it is passed on from generation to generation, and from singer to singer. According to Bruno (1990), some folksongs have no words but, only a tune; they sometimes change beyond recognition and exist in many forms. Also, new words may be attached or adopted to a different set of lyrics because many people participate in the shaping of a folksong. The process, Bruno said, is called - communal re-creation. Folk music also changes because it is affected by the art music of nearby cultural centres (e.g., cities, courts, towns, and so on); it is also most commonly the music of the people of social and economic lower class and especially, those of interior rural populations. Therefore, folk music varies in its composition and transmission that it sometimes takes the traits of folk culture.

Importance of Folksongs in Ibibio Land

Folksongs are also used as a means of communication; modern African literatures have been influenced to a remarkably degree by the continent's long tradition of oral artistry. Before the spread of literacy in the 20th century, texts were preserved in memory and performed or recited. These traditional texts served many of the same purposes that written text served in literate societies. Some of these empirical studies of the review of related literature emphasized the need to collect, revive, and transcribe Ibibio folksongs. They are as follows:

- In 1954 the International Folk Music Council defined folk music 'as a product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission. The factors that shape the tradition are (1) continuity which links the present with the past; (2) variation which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group; and (3) selection by the community which determines the form or forms in which the music survives.' it would be deduced that folksongs encompass every aspect of the life of a group of people, their religion, joys, and burdens, etc.

- Kim (1996) in collecting and transcribing folksong, concluded that it is a vast array of musical styles but is most commonly used to refer to a narrative song that uses traditional melodies to speak on particular topics, issues, and scenarios. This also confirms that folksongs also are means of communication.

- Cecil James Sharp (1859), observed that speakers of English (and other languages spoken in Britain and Ireland) ought to become acquainted with the patrimony of melodic expression that had grown up there. Hence, he began collecting folksongs in 1903; his works promoted English folksong dance, and tradition was carried on by the - Country Dance and Song Society (CDSS). This also means that in Ibibio music just like other African music, 'texts' is more important than 'tune' because the language is tone inflection in character, producing speech rhythm that have influenced their drumming and dancing style.

Folk Music in Ibibio Land

In Ibibio traditional cultures, symbols play a very important role as they relate to the process of adjusting the individual to the traditional social order in which one is born. Melodies are most commonly used; the melodies are either ritualistic or non-ritualistic. The former consists of praise to a particular ancestral god while, the latter is purely for entertainment. Folksongs are

also used as a means of communication. Before the spread of literacy in the 20th century, texts were preserved in memory and performed or recited. Many non-Ibibio composers have composed and also transcribed Ibibio folksongs without an understanding of Ibibio language (dialect), thereby committing what could be termed as taboo in Ibibio land. They fail to apply Ibibio folk materials in their compositional work to reflect Ibibio idioms and concepts; which promotes their customs as embedded in their tradition. All these of which are paramount and evident in Ibibio land.

Selected Ibibio Folksongs

These folksongs are analyzed contextually to help relate the historical and/or cultural background on which the selected folksongs are based. That is, the story and also reasons for these songs. Nketia (1962), observed that songs in African tradition are avenues of verbal communication, a medium of creating verbal expression that can reflect themes on matters and events of common interest. Such are the songs of the Ibibio. The people of Ibibio derive their themes from beliefs and norms that are embedded in their surroundings. All the songs discussed below are selections of the entire folksongs in Ibibio land; and they are all non-ritualistic.

1. Adiah'a Sukpong Ebot

It is a moonlight play usually done by children but guided by an aged woman as the story teller. They gather at the village square at night, seated in a semi-circle shape. A court is drawn and one of the children stands at the edge holding a stock leaf, while others go on rampage, struggling to bypass the person with the leaf stock. But anyone caught becomes a victim, and such will be beaten and also takes over. And like that, it goes round in turns until they decide to relax. The song sang is

related to a she goat (Ebot); *ikimis* the leaf stock, while *mmapis* the sound of the goat.

2. Edim

It is a story of some sailors and their encounter while on the high sea sailing. The tougher the wind rages and also threatens to drawn them, the harder and faster they paddled to get to the shore so as not to drawn.

3. Ek'aTitia

A song of a folktale. It is often sung among the women age group to any one in disguise who is noted to always act or think to know and capable of doing everything more than the others. In Ibibio land periwinkles are not fried, they are per-boiled to remove dirt. Hence, *ek'atiti'a frank nfi* which translate the teacher's mother frying periwinkle is not realistic. It is a mockery song used to mock the - 'I took know' women.

4. Nkpok eto

It is a song sung by young adults. Usually, they dance round the tree that most reflect the light race of the moonlight.

5. Ndo ndo

It is about a girl whose best friend was nick named - *Ndo ndo*. She had several other friends and together they will go to the stream to fetch some water, and also, to the bush to fetch some fire woods. One day they all set out to fetch firewoods, getting to the bush they splitted, and unknowing to her there was a plot against

her by the other friends to kill her best friend. And then, suddenly, scream in pretense not to know how her best friend *ndo ndo* died. There and then, she asked to be buried with her best friend in the same coffin and the same grave.

6. Nka'I ya suk'n nq

There was farming. Hence, tortoise and other animals in the bush came together to look for a solution so as not to die of hunger. After much thoughts and confusion, no one could suggest anything reasonable. Suddenly, Tortoise, being tricky suggested that they should kill and eat their aged parents in turns in order to survive. They all agreed not knowing tortoise had a hidden plan. Tortoise knowing that he had only one parent left quickly hid her on a very tall tree. He will always go to tree secretly with his own share to feed his mother and also keep some for reserve. He sings a particular song *nka'iyasuk'n no* as a signal to his mother to lower the plate tied with robe to receive the portion. The killing had gone round and the farming continued yet tortoise was looking fresh. This made the other animals to meet secretly and soon discovered tortoise secret, having kept watched on him unknowing to him. One day while he was gone, they all went to the tree one

7. Utin ami and 8. Nsio'n top

A young maid is engaged with unnecessary chores so as not to mingle with her friends by her parents while they were out for an engagement. As usual of

her she went with friends to the palm wine village, and because she was the most admired, her friends conspired against her and left her behind instructing the moon not to lead her back home. When she realized and it was time to leave the moon refused to lead her, and she started pleading, while she sings for she was blessed with a beautiful voice. And there she was for days pleading and pleading. Her parents having searched for her for so long, lost hope. Until one day a palm wine tapper, while on a tall palm tree. He hurriedly went for the parents, on getting there realized she was held back by the river mermaid. After much plea, the river mermaid decided to release her by throwing her over, *Nsio 'n top* while someone would catch her at the other side. Unfortunately, the more the river mermaid threw her she kept rolling back *ayen we re we re kim!* The *uwo, ahe, uh* and *ah* depicts the maiden's tears.

9. Ting'n koriko

Ting'n koriko is a nick name given to a monkey because of their extreme love for banana. Hence, it is used to relate to anyone who is discovered to be a glutton, as such is ever ready and also waiting to receive and eat anything regardless. The song is sung to such children so as to help them change from being a glutton. It is sung moving round the village square to a child by other children.

Transliteration and Translation of Selected Ibibio Folksongs

The selected existing Ibibio folksongs will be transliterated and translated. It should be noted that all unlined ‘o’ sound is pronounced as /ɔ:/ (that is letter ‘c’ turned the other way); also, the ‘n’ and ‘g’ attached to Ibibio words are pronounced as /ŋ/ when combined ‘ng’; when ‘o’ and ‘ng’ which is /ɔ/ and /ŋ/ is combined to a word, it sounds as ‘orng’ (ong), and pronounced as /ɔŋ/ as in mmong, atongetc, except for the ones not unlined. And also, some of the unlined words, idioms, phrases or sound could be referred to as onomatopoeic (that is nonsensical words or sound). NB: every Ibibio word that ends with the letter ‘t’ is pronounced as ‘d’ as also unlined.

Transliteration

1. Adiah’a sukpong ebot

Adiah’a sukpong ebot

Mmab!

uno’i kim asok uso

Mmab!

awo’u sung amen’a ta

Mmab!

eto kiet k’e sit ikot

Mmab!

me’n so k’e nye kere

Mmab!

akere n’ono’e to

Mmab!

ono’ifim ono’u kpa

Mmab!

ono’i kpakwok ukpa

Mmab!

ake kpe n’e kpe mum

huhu u.....

Translation

first daughter of a she goat

first daughter of a she goat

I gave you plantain to give to your father

you ate it on the way

one particular tree in the bush

what is even its name

its name is the gifting tree

it gives stool, it gives broom

it gives bundle of brooms

anyone who delays will be caught by the lion

A dia h'a , su kpong E bot o, m mab! u no'i kim a sok u so, m mab! a
 3 wo u sung a men a ta, m mab! e to kiet k'e sit i kot m mab!
 5 me'n so k'e nye , ke re, m mab! a ke re no no'e to m mab! o
 7 no'e t'o no n dem m mab! a no'i kpa kwuak u kpa m mab! a
 9 ke kpe n'e kpe mum uh

2. Edim

E sob ubok wad iyang

k'e dim k'edio

eheheheh

e sob ubok wad iyang

k'e dim k'edio

ahahahah.

awadiyang'adia'mkpo

atiek'ufok

akp'a biong

e sob ubok wad iyang

k'e dim k'edio

rain

hold firm and paddle on
 the rains are coming

hold firm and paddle on
 the rains are coming

a sailor has food to eat
 one who stays at home
 stays hungry

hold firm and paddle on
 the rains are coming

E sob u bok e wad i yang, e sob u bok e wad i yang

2 k'e dim k'e dio, eh e, e sob u bok e wad i yang

4 k'e dim k'e dio, e sob u bok e wad i yang e sob u bok e wad i yang k'e dim ke dio

6 ah a, e sob u bok e wad i yang k'e dim ke dio, a

8 wad i yang a dia'm kpo'a tie'u fok a kp'a biong, e sob u bok e wad i yang k'e dim ke dio

10

3. Ek'a titia

Ek'a titi'a

frang'n fi

ikang a ta'u

fok'n wed

ekamba titi'a

miang'n kanika

mbom anam afid owo

hu u

mother of Teacher

mother of Teacher

fried periwinkle

fire caught

the school

the head Teacher

rang the bell

pity gripped everyone

E ka ti tia frang'n fi i kang a ta'u fok'n wed, e

3 kam ba ti ti'a miang'n ka ni ka m bom a nam a fid o wo hu u.

4. Nkpok eto

Kpoho de'm kpo do

kpok!

mkpok eto

kpoho de'm kpo do

kpok!

mkpok eto

Ikid ake ka'n do'a

wan ima

awan im'a tim usung adan

kpoho de'm kpo do

trunk of a tree

loose that thing

loose!

Tree trunk

loose that thing

loose!

Tree trunk

tortoise went to the wedding of

awan ima

she pounded yam with oil

loose that thing



Kpo ho de'm kpo do kpok! m kpok e to kpo ho de'm kpo do kpok! m kpok e to

5

I kid a ke ka'n do'a wan i ma a wan i m'a tim u sung a dan Kpo ho de'm kpo do

5. Ndo ndo

Nke kop 'teka' ifia'n do

ndo di'n do ho'n do

'me ke ne'n ka'i fia'n do

ndo di'n do ho'n do

ayen'e fang ifi'a du ong'n do

ndo di'n do ho'n do

'me wa kakim'n du ong'n do

ndo di'n do ho'n do

nye kop 'te bong mkpo'n do

ndo di'n do ho'n do

mme behe'n ka iso'n do

nick name

I heard they were going to fetch fire wood

I went along to fetch fire wood

take your different spots

I turned to my own spot

I heard a scream

I hurriedly went ahead to see

ndo di'n do ho'n do

ndi ka ema'e wod ndoho'n do

getting there ndo has being killed

ndo di'n do ho'n do

eye bo k'a mi'n wodo'n do

they said I am the one that killed ndo

ndo di'n do ho'n do

ekong ekebe'n doakpo no'n do

nail the coffin, make it big

ndo di'n do ho'n do

edok udi'n ko'a kpo no'n do

dig the grave, make it big

ndo di'n do ho'n do

nye ke ne'n don yong'n do

I will also go along

N ke kop'n te ka'i fia' n do n do , di'n do' n do, m me ke ne'n ka'i fi a'n do

n do , di'n do' n do, a ye ne fang i fi'a du ong'n do n do , di'n do' n do

'me wa ka kim'n du ong'n do n do , di'n do' n do, n ye kop'n te bong'n kpo' n do

n do , di'n do' n do, m me be he'n ka'i so' n do n do , di'n do' n do, n

di ka e ma'e wod n do' n do n do , di'n do' n do, e ye bo k'a mi n wod o'n do

n do , di'n do' n do, e dok e ke be'n do a kpon' o'n do n do , di'n do' n do, e

duk u di'n do a kpon' o'n do n do , di'n do' n do, n ye ke ne'n do n yong o'n do

n do , di'n do' n do

6. Nka'i ya suk'n no

Nka'iya suk'n no suk'n no suk'n no
ekpe ikot awod eka
asio ubok asok ikid
inuen ikot awod eka
asio ubok asok ikid
unam ikot awod eka
asio ubok asok ikid
edi ikot awod eka
asio ubok asok ikid
adido'akemmi'n ye dotk'ukim
unau ben men k'u san
prang!

_____ lower for me

_____ lower for me, lower for me, lower for me
 the lion in the bush killed his mother
 brought the hand to the tortoise
 the birds in the bush killed his mother
 brought the hand to the tortoise
 the animals in the bush killed their mother
 brought their hands to the tortoise
 the pig in the bush killed her mother
 brought the hand to the tortoise
 when it is my turn, I will keep her hidden
 when you lower, pick it on a plate

The musical notation is written on five staves in a single system. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb), and the time signature is common time (C). The melody is primarily composed of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some quarter notes. The lyrics are written below the notes, aligned with the syllables. The lyrics are: N ka i ya suk'n no suk'n no suk'n no e kpe i kot a wod e ka a sio u bok a sok i kid, i nuen i kot a wod e ka a sio u bok a sok i kid, u nam i kot a wod e ka a sio u bok a sok i kid, e di i kot a wod e ka a sio u bok a sok i kid a di do a ke'm mi n ye , dot k'u kim u ma'u ben men k'u san prang!

7. Utin ami

Utin ami
nsuk ukpe kpe fien o
uti ami

this moon

this moon
 I am begging you
 this moon

<i>nsuk ubo bok fien o</i>	I am pleading with you
<i>nyin ikika 'm bobo 'n</i>	we went to the bank
<i>ben iyang o</i>	side of the ocean
<i>akwa' wo'n kod</i>	a great one called me
<i>a'n <u>no</u>'u <u>kod</u> o</i>	and gave me wine
<i>etok ayi'n kod</i>	a child called
<i>ami'm me bo'mmo</i>	me I have said to them
<i>edi <u>wong</u> <u>ukod</u></i>	come and drink wine
<i>mme bo</i>	I have said
<i>'me'mmo sin adi<u>wong</u> <u>ukod</u></i>	have they refused to drink wine
<i>eto kpe <u>to</u> diah'a <u>no</u>'e dem</i>	if a tree falls on the first daughter
<i>adum'a siaha</i>	thunder strikes
<i>ayin idion</i>	a responsible child
<i>akpa kpa'n ben iyang</i>	form the deepest side of the ocean
<i>kpon ukod</i>	be getting fat
<i>uyai ake to'i song</i>	beauty is from the soil
<i>it'o bod</i>	is not from mountain
<i>mbok'on'onem</i>	sugar cane is so sweet
<i>ikong'o k'e bang</i>	not hanging on the basin

U tin a mi n suk'u kpe kpe fien u tin a mi n suk'u bo bok fien
 nyin i ki k'a , bo bo'n ben i yang a kwa 'wo n kod a no'u kod,
 e tok a yin a'n kod a no'u kod, a mi'n me bo'm mo e di wong u kod
 'me'm mo e sin u kod a do e to kpe to 'dia h'a no'e dem a
 du ma a sai a dia h'a no'e dem a yin'i dion a kpa kpa'n dek i yang kpon
 u kod u yai a ke to'i song i to o bod m bo ko no nem
 i kong o k'e bang Ti ko ri ko k'e fou'n se mi,
 ti ko ri ko k'e fou'n se mi u ma'u k'a , do ko'u so'n yin
 u ma'u k'a , do ko'i ya'n yin a te'i ki ka m bo bon ben i yang

8. Nsio'n top

Nsio'n top

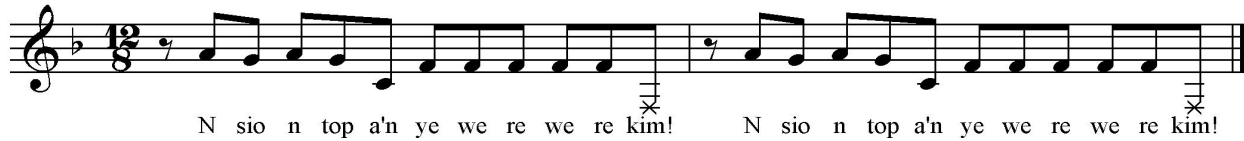
a'n ye we rewe re

kim!

I remove and throw

I remove and throw

it keeps rolling and rolling



9. Ting'nkoriko

.....

Ting'n koriko

come and take banana

aya dia'm boro

will you eat banana

hee'n

yes

ke ka'n tie tie'm bed

I was even expecting it



Categorization of Song Texts in the Selected Ibibio Folksongs

Akpabot (1998), highlighted 14 categories of song texts easily as recognizable in African music, and they are as follows:

Historical, Communication, Social, Insult, Obsessed, Praised, Children, Funeral, Work, War, Humorous, Women, Philosophical and Ritual.

All the above are grouped under 3 headings:

- Praise songs
- Songs of insult and
- Entertainment songs

But for the purpose of this paper, drawing from Akpabot's categorizations and groupings; the selected existing Ibibio folksongs are all grouped as Entertainment songs (as they are all non-ritualistic); yet can be categorized under the follows:

- **Game:**
Nkpok eto
- **Plea:**
Utin ami

- **Death:**
Ndo ndo
Nka'i ya suk'n no
- **Insult**
Ting'n koriko
Ek'a titia
- **Warning:**
Adiah'a sukpong ebot
Edim
Nsio'n top

Summary

In spite of all these, ethnic groups in Africa are still known and recognized by the type of music they play. The study has affirmed that folksongs of the Africans are ways of life of the people within a particular area which constitute their dialect, costumes, dance, drum beat pattern and their spoken language. From the discussions of Ibibio folk music as a unit of the entire African music, it can be concluded that Africans just like the westerners, also have some pre-conceptions of their music and styles in terms of speech, moods, character, song text, tonality, idioms and phrases, forms, harmonic structures, dynamics and a whole lot more.

Conclusion

Ibibio folksongs do not exist in vacuum, they provide an avenue where individuals or groups can express themselves. The writer hence, calls on all Ibibio music scholars in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria to document Ibibio folksongs for the purpose of creating new genres in Ibibio choral art music repertoire in other for it not to go extinct. This might help recapture the interest and attention of so many Ibibio people who have, because of external influence, neglected their folksongs especially those in towns and diaspora.

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Profile:

Precious Kufre Udoh has a PhD in Composition from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. He is a researcher, composer, and musicologist whose area is in African indigenous art music composition; with keen interest in Ibibio traditional works and accompaniment, aimed at continuous revival and documentation of Ibibio folksongs and music, using their folk materials. Udoh, P. K., a music enthusiast with several publications and compositions in Ibibio, Yoruba, Igbo and English languages, is a teacher who lectures at the Music Programme, at Bowen University, Iwo. Nigeria.