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A Comparative Study of Ogu Mase Music of Akarakumo and Lagon-Thogli in Badagry

ABSTRACT

This is a comparative study of *Mase* music in two Ogu communities; *Akarakumo* and *Lagon-Thogli* in Badagry, Lagos State, Nigeria. Issues relating to the origin, relevance, structure, form, and development of *Mase* music in both communities were investigated for documentation and archival purposes. Data is drawn from oral interviews, participant observation and available literature. Respondents were selected among leaders and members of the visited *Mase* groups. Selected samples of *Mase* songs were transcribed into staff notation and analysed for documentation. The study revealed that *Mase* music and its variants were created by Yedenou Adjahoui from the Republic of Benin. The instrumental ensemble of *Mase* music includes *Apotin*, *Aze*, *Alekle-daho*, *Alekle-pevi*, *Apesin-daho*, *Apesin-pevi*, *Ogan*, *Aya* and hand clapping.

KEYWORDS

Badagry

Mase

Ogu social music

Alekle

Ogu indigene

Introduction

Musical practices and traditions in Africa are associated with various life cycle activities. Omojola (2014) stressed that musical practices, like other forms of artistic expressions, represent an integral part of culture. Furthermore, he suggested that musical performances, in addition to their aesthetic values, are conceived as a form of human activity and viewed in terms of their significance within the total cultural fabric of a society. Music does not only function as an accompaniment to various activities, but it is also used for entertainment, politics, occupation, life cycle activities, religious worship, installation of kings, and rites of passage, including the initiation ceremonies of professional associations. This claim is corroborated by Omibiyi-Obidike cited in Udoh (2016: 2), that “music speaks the mind of the people and finds its place in all social activities like work, games, dances and religious ceremonies.”

Music is a ubiquitous part of people’s everyday life activities, given the socio-cultural and communal nature of Badagry, a town which lies on the South-West coast of Nigeria, about thirty-five miles west of metropolitan Lagos. Sorensen-Gilmore (1995) observed that Badagry is a small, peripheral town along the road to the border between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. Badagry Local Government Area, with extensions to Age-Mowo, Ikoga, Idale, Iworo-Ajido and Agbara appears to be the major habitat of Badagry-Ogu people in Lagos State, Nigeria. In addition to these, there are other smaller Ogu settlements in other parts of Lagos state which include Makoko in Yaba area of Lagos, the displaced Maroko community and other smaller Ogu settlements in Lagos State.

Sorensen-Gilmore (1995) observed that the role of religious ceremonies, festivals, and rituals is to maintain a sense of unity and identity amongst the diverse groups of Badagry people.

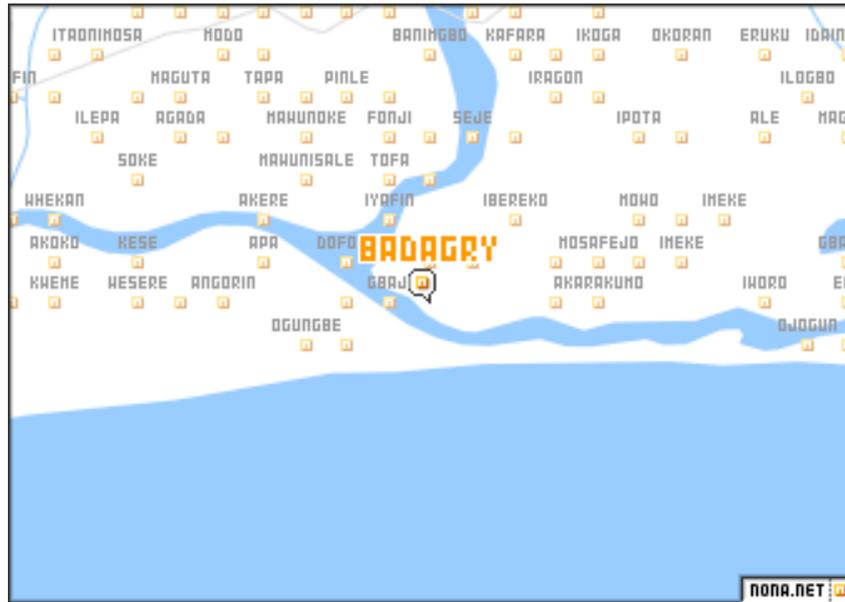


Figure 1: Map of Badagry showing major towns and villages. Source: <https://nona.net/features/map/placedetail.2238098/Badagry/>

Mesewaku and Adeyemi (2000) opined those festivals are occasions for the worship of the gods, spirits, and ancestors, and that these festivals are also used to celebrate life events. Festivals that are celebrated among Badagry Ogu people include *Sato*, *Zangbeto*, *Igunnuko*, *Egungun*, *Ajahungbo*, *Avohunwe*, *Hevioso*, and *Zunmevodun*, among others. Mesewaku et.al (2000) further explained that some of these festivals are sacred or cultic, while others are social and ceremonial. These festivals and ceremonies are accompanied by music and other social activities like dancing, drumming, chanting, magical, artistic and other acrobatic displays.

In line with the functional and traditional character of music in Badagry, Ogu-*Mase* music is used exclusively for entertainment, social and socio-religious functions (Comlan Avitin, personal communication, October 15, 2020). These functions include coronation, marriage, naming and burial ceremonies, housewarmings, birthday celebrations. Although, research has been carried out on *Mase* music by Kunnuji (2016), there are evident omissions regarding the origin, types, and stylistic elements of *Mase* music across various locales in Badagry. Even though the music is generally classified and referred to as *Mase* in Badagry, there is a myriad of differences across various localities in Badagry. These differences include nomenclature, instrumentation, performance style, drum ensemble, vocal ensemble, and sitting arrangement.

Theoretical Framework

The contextual strategies of inquiry and systematisation by Nketia (1990) were used as the theoretical basis for this study. The theory according to Nketia was built and developed from the musicological task theory by Seeger (1977). Nketia, cited in Olusoji (2009), observed that context and contextualisation fall within the musicological task. Context is the physical, ecological, social, and cultural setting or environment, in which an entity or unit of experience is viewed in order to define its identity or characteristics, as well as its relationship, in comparison with other entities or units of experience. Thus, contextualisation is the process of viewing such entities in the context of internal and external relations and their relevance for analytical and evaluative purpose.

In applying the theory to this study, we examined the relationship between performance environment and musical content, contextual factors responsible for the choice of modes or scales and instruments, relationship between Ogu culture, *Mase* music and other intrinsic factors. In addition, we examined and discussed musical similarities and differences of both performances at their various locations.

Methodology

This study adopted an ethnomusicological research design. Omibiyi-Obidike (1999), prescribed three stages as viable procedures for carrying out ethnomusicological research. These are pre-field, field work, and post-field stages. These stages were used to investigate and seek answers to questions about *Ogu-Mase* music's performance practice, genesis, and development. A thorough search of the library and the internet for available and relevant resources on the origin of *Ogu-Mase* music was also conducted, in addition to the knowledge of existing and related literature from various bibliographic sources. These provided background information on the history and stylistic patterns of *Ogu-Mase* music.

We carried out a five-week ethnomusicological field study (from September 22 to October 29, 2020) in Akarakumo (<https://goo.gl/maps/gAKwrK5FtQnZgrBD8>) and Lagon-Thogli (<https://goo.gl/maps/nwjsQyi6aAyVwpcfQA>)— two villages located in Badagry, Lagos State. During the fieldwork, video recordings of several *Ogu-Mase* performances were made with a portable camera as well as the researchers' phone cameras. Oral and one-on-one interviews with leaders and members of the *Ogu-Mase*

ensemble were also conducted. The performances were recorded in their natural and cultural contexts and environments. This makes it a unique set of data for ethnomusicological research, but also an important cultural document of Ogu-*Mase* music. Monetary gifts were prepared as incentive and appreciation to encourage the assistance of the respondents.

Ogu-Mase Music

Mase is a popular, socio-cultural, and secular genre of Ogu music. The genre, according to Kunnuji (2016), is played for social occasions and is the most popular variant today among other popular indigenous Ogu musics. It features praise singing and communal dancing. The author revealed that *Mase* is characterised by a compound-quadruple time signature (12/8) with varying topical lyrics and melodies played at diverse tempos. The originator of *Mase* music, Adjahoui Yedenou hailed from the Avrankou village Wheme, in the Republic of Benin (Solomon Thasi, personal communication, October 13, 2020). Oral sources reveal that Adjahoui was the only person to have successfully played all the different Ogu drums and also performed all the Ogu music genres before his death in 1995. He established three genres of *Mase* music, namely *Mase Gohoun*, *Ake*, and *Eyo*. The various *Mase* genres could be differentiated by varying rhythmic patterns of either the gong, one of the drums, or the mode of drum combination (Comlan Avitin, personal communication, October 27, 2020).

As pointed out, *Mase* music is a functional socio-cultural music used for entertainments at social events and life celebrations such as weddings, birthdays, house-warmings, coronations, graduations, and naming ceremonies. It is characterized by a medley of various topical songs which starts with an introductory section called *Avale*, which literally means 'Homage'. It is customary for *Mase* bands to pay homage to the deities and elders of the land at the beginning of a music performance.



Figure 2: An *Ogu-Mase* ensemble at Akarakumo in Badagry: Rehearsal session. Individual archive.

Instrumentation

Indigenous musical instruments used in *Mase* music are categorised as membranophones and idiophones. Ekwueme (2008) defined membranophones as drums made of a hollow round or square frame with an animal skin membrane stretched tightly at one or both ends. Membranophones are either played by hitting it with both hands or with sticks. The membranophones used in *Mase* music include *Alekle-daho*, *Alekle-pevi*, *Apesin-daho*, *Apesin-pevi* and *Aze* (sometimes called *Aje*). On the other hand, idiophones are instruments that produce sounds from their own bodies (Agordoh, 1994). He further explained that they are made of natural, sonorous materials that do not require any additional tension, unlike membranophones (Agordoh, 1994). Idiophones used in *Mase* music include *Mase-Apotin* (wooden box), *Ogan* (gong), *Aya* (beaded rattle) and hand clapping.

Mase Ake music uses the *Apesin-daho* (Big clay/pot drum) while *Mase Gohoun* uses the *Apesin-pevi* (small clay/pot drum). The *Mase-Apotin* (wooden box) plays a lead role in the ensemble. It plays extemporised and danceable rhythms at the high point of a particular song, to which the audience responds by dancing. In addition, it also observes silence (rest) for a number of measures before it resumes playing with the ensemble. The *Apotin*

regularly plays melo-rhythmic patterns, which imitate the tonal inflections and linguistic features inherent to the Ogu language to either complement a section of the song or communicate with audience members.



Figure 3: Alekle Pevi & Alekle Daho. Individual archive



Figure 4: Mase-Apotin. Individual archive.

Although *Mase* music performance is male-dominated, women are occasionally employed as background singers and dancers. These women are referred to as '*iya egbe*' (*Yoruba*, meaning chairlady) and operate as a side attraction during a performance to attract audience attention and get them to show their appreciation of the band, by either spraying money or joining the dancers to dance on the stage.



Figure 5: Aze



Figure 6: Apesin daho. Individual archive



Figure 7: A section of *Mase* ensemble showing the *Alekle pevi*, *Alekle daho*, *Ogan* and *Apesin daho* players. Individual archive



Figure 8: A section of *Mase* ensemble showing the *Aze*, *Aya* and *Alekle pevi* players. Individual archive

Comparative Analysis

In this section, we engaged in comparative analysis of musical elements (scale, melody, intervallic range, harmony, rhythm, and form), in addition to performance practice found in *Mase* music from the live performances witness in the field and recordings. Aided by computer software (Finale), sample analytical summaries of the songs are transcribed and presented in Western notation system (staff notation), representing what happened melodically and harmonically during the performance. In analysing the melodic and harmonic musical elements of the *Mase* music in the present study, we are not interested in the determination of the tuning system. Although various keys are presented as a premise for analysis, the key signatures are meant for transcription purposes only, and the notes of the scale are not employed in the western classical idiom of absolute pitch or equal temperament tuning.

Melodic and Harmonic Structure

Mase music composers and musicians employ common harmonic and melodic elements and concepts that feature in most indigenous Ogu music, as well as other music indigenous to Africa. Some of these features, according to Agu (1999), Udoh (2016), and Olusoji (2009) are speech tone, imitation, and the use of excessive improvisation.

Melodic Structure of Mase music

Melodic patterns in *Mase* music are constructed from the notes of the pentatonic scale.



Figure 9: Pentatonic scale

The pentatonic scale presented in figure 9 above is found in *Mase* melodies of both Akarakumo and Lagon-Thogli presented in figures 10 and 11. Ogu melodies usually follow the contours and melodic curves dictated by the spoken words, and the melodic progression employed by *Mase* bands of Akarakumo and Lagon-Thogli utilises the pentatonic scale, which incorporates speech tones that are inherent in Ogu language.

Moderato

Mipa ma wu e zin a ge le we tho Je su e zin gopao

Mipa ma wu e zin a ge le we tho Je su e zin gopao

Figure 10: Melody of Avale from Lagon-Thogli

Adagio

A ma jo go tin Klu no Ji whe ye we gbe che dua lo che me

Expression

o kogbetonponlon va to lua vo chelua o jehona a don te londonlon a jo tin ku lu

ni Ji wheyewhegbe chedua lo chemo o kogbeton o po lo fua to gi go na

Figure 11: Melody of Avale from Akarakumo

In the melodic examples of both communities in figures 10 and 11, the composers exploited the pentatonic scale. The melodies are traditional or rustic in nature and were found to be narrow in range within an octave. This is partly because the melodies are word-born and logogenic in nature. Most of *Mase* melodies do not exceed the interval of an octave. The melodic curves and contours from melodic analysis are dictated by the spoken words in the Ogu language.



Figure 12: An octave

Repetition of motifs is a common feature, although the melodic shapes are not rigid as a result of the improvisatory nature of the melodies. The melodies are sometimes embellished with ornaments.

The intervallic range in *Mase* music of Lagon-Thogli is a perfect fourth (see figure 10) while that of Akarakumo spanned a minor sixth (see figure 11). The melodic intervals that are evident in *Mase* music as observed in both communities are unison, major seconds, major and minor thirds, perfect fourth, perfect fifth, and minor sixth. No form of modulation was observed. The melody of *Mase* performance in Akarakumo is observed to have the supertonic note only at the cadential points.



Figure 13: Perfect Fourth



Figure 14: Minor Sixth

Harmonic Structure of *Mase* music

Based on our observations, the harmonic structure employed in the vocal section of *Mase* music in both communities is the unison. This was done in both solo-responsorial and through-composed forms.

Rhythmic Structure of Mase music

Mase music commonly utilises the compound quadruple time signature (12/8). This is well expressed in the rhythms employed both in vocals and instrumentation. However, there are concurrences of many rhythmic patterns played by the accompanying instruments producing cross and interlocking rhythms.

Allegro

The musical score consists of eight staves, each representing a different instrument or vocal part. The time signature for all staves is 12/8. The tempo is marked as **Allegro**. The staves are labeled as follows:

- Alekle kpevi:** Features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, indicating a specific rhythmic motif.
- Alekle Daho:** Features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, similar to Alekle kpevi but with a different phrasing.
- Ogan:** Features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a slur over the first four notes of each measure, indicating an ostinato.
- Aya:** Features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, serving as the time-keeping role.
- Aze:** Features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, providing the pulse.
- Akpesin:** Features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, providing a different rhythmic layer.
- Hand Clap:** Features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, providing a percussive element.
- Akpotin:** Features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with the word "improvised" written below the staff.

Figure 15: Instrumental Rhythms from Ogu mase of Lagon-Thogli

Figure 15 above presents the instrumental rhythms of *Mase* from Lagon-Thogli. The *Aya* plays the time-keeping role, the *Aze* provides the pulse, while the *ogan* gives the ostinatos.

Figure 16: Instrumental Rhythms from *Ogu mase* of Akarakumo

The rhythmic patterns played by the *Ogu-Mase* instruments from Akarakumo are presented in figure 16 above. The *Alekle-pevi* and *Alekle-Daho* jointly produce a rhythm that functions as the time-liner. This role is also imitated by the *Aya*. The *Apesin* acts as the ostinato while the *Aze* provides the pulse.

Form in Ogu-Mase music of Akarakumo

The form or structure of *Mase* music in Akarakumo follows the solo-responsorial pattern. The solos led by the lead vocalist are lengthier than the response by the chorus. The solos are largely improvised and are found to be through-composed.

Form in Mase music of Lagon-Thogli

Mase music performance from Lagon-Thogli is characterised by a call and response. It is also found to be both strophic and solo-responsorial in nature. The improvisations of the lead vocalist follow a particular melodic pattern with variations in the lyrical content. It employs the chain song (medley) technique with continuous variation of the theme.

Performance Practice

Mase is an entertainment music that is used at social functions. The performance of *Mase* music usually starts with an introductory section called *Avale*. It normally starts slowly and gathers momentum into faster sections that involve active participation of all the group members. At the peak of their performance, the audience 'sprays' money notes and dances in patronage to the band's performance. At this point, the band sings eulogies and praises of identified patrons among the dancing audience, particularly those who danced and 'sprayed' them with money as a form of appreciating their performance.

In Akarakumo, the *Mase* ensemble is made up of the following:

- Singers: 1 male lead vocalist and 8 male back-up singers
- Instrumentalists: All men in the group played one instrument or another.

In addition to singing, each back-up singer also played a percussive instrument. The lead vocalist doubled as the *Ogan* player, one of the musicians played a combination of *Alekle-Daho* and *Alekle-pevi* simultaneously. *Akpotin*, *Aze*, *Aya* and *Apesin-Daho* were played by different musicians in the ensemble. Other ensemble members clapped in unison at different points in the songs.



Figure 17: Mase ensemble of Akarakumo. Individual archive

The Ogu-Mase ensemble of Lagon-Thogli is made of

- **Singers:** 1 male lead vocalist and 4 female back-up singers
- **Instrumentalists:** 5 instrumentalists in all.

One instrumentalist each plays on the Mase Apotin, Aze, Alekle-pevi, Ogan and Aya. Another instrumentalist simultaneously played a combination of both the Alekle-Daho and Apesin-pevi.



Figure 18: Mase ensemble of Lagon-Thogli. Individual archive



Figure 19: Mase ensemble of Lagon-Thogli (showing the singers). Source: Individual archive

Conclusion

This work is a comparative study on Ogu *Mase* music in Akarakumo and Lagon-Thogli villages located in Badagry, a coastal city located in Lagos, Southwest Nigeria. *Mase* music like the music genre of other minority ethnic groups is characterised by paucity of information and documentation. Beyond the regular discussion of indigenous practices facing extinction as a result of globally widespread shift in lifestyle, the study noted that Ogu *Mase* music featured prominently in the social activities of Ogu people in Badagry and its environs. The music is characterised by unique musical elements. Other socio-cultural features found within the ambit of its performance practices include *Avale* (introductory section), audience participation, and 'spraying of money' as a form of appreciation during performance.

The differences in the musical properties for the two *Mase* groups were observed to be remarkably few. This is overt in the tonal organisation, use of scales, pattern of melodies, intervallic range, harmony, and in the number of instruments that provides strong polyrhythmic instrumental background, which are maintained for the complete duration of a song. The two *Mase* performances recorded in Akarakumo and Lagon-Thogli were also not identical in their musical improvisations.

It is obvious from this work that indigenous musical expressions display relatively high communicative competence. The various audience responses show that *Mase* music performance is an integral part of the traditional values of the *Ogu* people. Given the global yearnings for cultural development, indigenous music should be encouraged and preserved for posterity, rather than the current dominant position of popular music in Nigeria and Africa at large. This study has contributed to musical scholarship through transcription of some *Mase* songs into staff notation and the ensued structural analysis. Therefore, it prepares ground for further studies.

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