

THE ROLE OF INDIGENEOUS MUSIC
IN AFRICAN EDUCATION

DR. MBABI-KATANA

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC, DANCE AND DRAMA

MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

KAMPALA.

INTRODUCTION

After presenting an investigation of the role of indigenous music in the traditional African education, and illustrating the influence of Music upon the African social economic and spiritual environment, this paper advances views supporting the significance of indigenous Music in the modern African formal education at school and University levels.

THE TRADITIONAL AFRICAN EDUCATION

"Uneducated" behavior is at times met with among Africans who have for years been under intensive modern formal education or have been under European influenced schools. On the other hand, many Africans who have never had contact with, or been influenced by modern formal education show such dignified and tactful behavior, and reveal so much refinement in their manners and speech that they well deserve to be called "educated." A system of education that could produce men and women of such calibre merits a thorough investigation; and, not only rightfully deserves to be incorporated into our modern formal education, but should have been its foundation.

In Africa, as well as in many lands, the strength of a family is reflected in that of the society to which it belongs. It has always been the family that has traditionally undertaken the entire burden of providing, with devotion, the education of the young.

In a society where family ties are more often thought of as categorical than individual, most terms of relationship are applied not to the individual but to a group of persons. Thus all members of the same generation within a clan or group of related clans may call each other as brothers and sisters.

In such a society, a child has to learn correct behaviour to his relatives and his superiors in age. Right from his tender years a child is made conscious of the fact that he is a member not only of his family but of a large group which in turn influences him to learn from his elders knowledge and attitudes to life.

The term "education", in one of the most prominent Bantu languages, may be referred to as "okugunjura" (1) a word whose literal equivalent in English is "upbrighing". Inherent in the meaning of the word is the act of preparing, training and transforming a young person into a mature responsible being

Under the traditional African system, education took the form of socialization and maturation of children, and of inducting them into the accumulated heritage of their predecessors. Mythologies, legends, genealogies, proverbs, oral history, Music, Dance, Nature of the Universe, codes of conduct and Speech were inculcated into the young. In some large kingdoms, training in leadership took the form of exposing sons of rulers to court manners. The young pages were thus trained in the arts of service and war. Modes of livelihood among the common class were sometimes inculcated by means of apprenticeship, at the end of which, apprentices were initiated into the trade.

(1) Runyoro word for education.

The main objective of the African traditional system of education was creation of a strong sense of community. This objective was always vigorously pursued, especially at initiation rites - at the period of transition from childhood to adult life and of admission to full membership of the society. The objective has always been and it remains to the present day a living force in Africa.

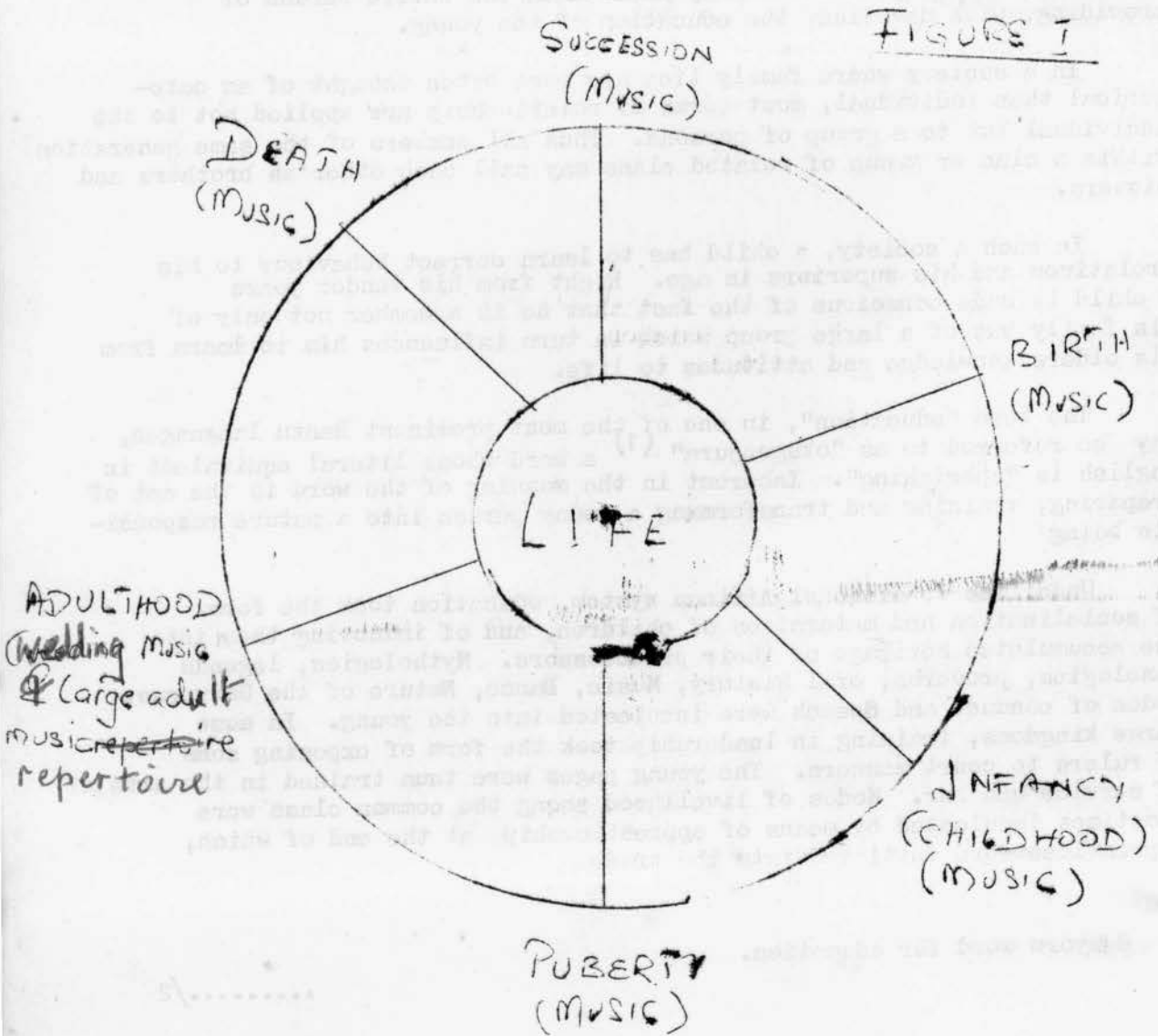
MUSIC IN THE AFRICAN TRADITIONS

A study of the art of Music in the traditional African setting would reveal that the art is not a luxury to an African, but that it is part of the whole process of living. It is a major source of the African's accumulated heritage.

Music is so firmly entrenched in the diversity of social functions found in Africa, that African traditions which surround rituals of all kinds are always expressed in Music. This has led to African Music being regarded entirely, Perhaps erroneously, as functional music by a number of Africanists.

A proper assessment of the role of Music in the African traditions must focus upon the characteristic African life cycle and the traditional African way of living.

Man's life, in the traditional African setting, could be dichotomized into birth, infancy, puberty, adulthood (marriage life), death and succession. Each of the dichotomies form important land marks in one's life with definite experiences characterized by music as is illustrated in Figure 1.



There is music for birth, music for puberty, music for adulthood and weddings, music for funerals and music for succession.

The traditions surrounding birth of a child, which begins before birth of a baby at the seeking of a diviner's message regarding safe delivery of the baby, consist of music and dance. Birth of twins is ensued by a rich ritual in which music and dance play a dominant role.

Musical traditions surrounding African childhood life consist of a wealth of songs such as dance songs, playsongs, story songs and musical games of all kinds. (i). Before the advent of modern schooling in Africa, children were mostly left to themselves to engage in their own pastime activities which had values in themselves and possessed their own creativeness.

Puberty is a momentous occasion marked by circumcision music and dance. Before the advent of modern schooling in Africa it was during the initiation rites at Puberty stage that an intense course of education was imparted to the young designed to facilitate their transition from childhood to adult life.

Singing and dancing mark marriage ceremonies. Some marriage rituals are in real essence operas of the most intense dramatic and musical content. Here under is a description of a Wahaya Wedding ritual and is being structured into typical operatic scenes for purposes of description.

First scene is a mother advising her daughter on how a lady ought to conduct herself in married life and how she should behave before her in laws. All this is done while the bride is being bathed, smeared with ointment, and dressed. The mother's advice is given in typical operatic style of recitatives interspersed with arias. The words of the arias praise the beauty of the bride, of her bride dress and of the institution of marriage in general.

Second scene is a procession of women conducting the bride to the home of the bridegroom. The entire procession is conducted in characteristic music.

Third scene reveals men singing wedding songs, normally love songs, at the home of the bridegroom as they wait for the arrival of the bride. As instrumental music is played, one notices the predominance of the bowlute at several traditional African weddings and the abundance of love themes that characterize the text of songs that are played on bowlutes.

The fourth scene is the arrival of the bride at the home of the bridegroom. The jubilant mood that mark the arrival of the bride at the home of her groom and the march like rhythm that precede the arrival form a characteristic operatic climax heightened by intense music and dancing.

The fifth scene is inside the home of the bridegroom after the bride has entered. The mood is restive and love poems are being recited with accompaniment of music played on a trough-zither.

Meanwhile in the courtyard, outside the home of the bridegroom, there is much playing of music, singing and dancing by different parties, some of them being representatives of cultural groupings

one commonly finds in African village communities, and other party being formed by visitors from the side of the bride who accompanied her to her new home. The music is characteristic wedding music and text of the song have either love theme or have themes relevant to marriage problems.

Music is indispensable for the African's and jubiliations at weddings and festivals, his pride and sophistication at court, his simplicity and humbleness at home by his fireplace, his bravery and courage at war, but it does most intensely express grief at funerals.

Succession ceremony among several African ethnic groups from a rich and joyful ritual marked by dignified music and dancing. The text of the songs are mostly contemplative on life.

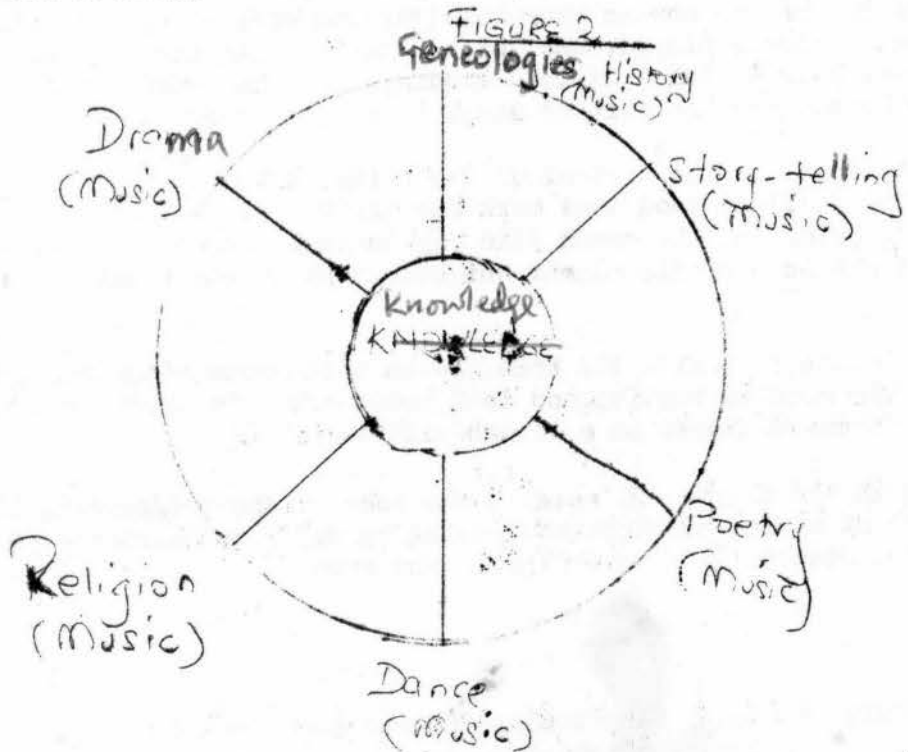
THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN THE TRADITIONAL AFRICAN EDUCATION

Indigenous Music in Africa pervades all social environment as well as spiritual life. Its spiritual role in African Religions is unique in that it provides a medium between the living and the dead and that through Music invocation of ancestral spirits is achieved.

Music is used by African verbal artists to accompany oral history story telling, speech making and various forms of poetic recitations. Geneologies, proverbs and legends are all portrayed through music, Traditional African Music is highly integrated into the sister arts of Art-masques, Dance and Drama. Musical therapy is an established traditional art in Africa.

Music in the traditional African educational setting acts as preserver and disseminator of knowledge. It is in music that arts such as drama, poetry, dance, oral history and folklore have been conceived and are bequeathed to posterity.

Figure 2 below is an attempt to illustrate the part played by music in both preserving and disseminating knowledge in the traditional African setting.



There is a Runyankole song which briefly depicts historical events that occurred in Central, East and South Africa at a period immediately following the 2nd World War (1). In this short song the artist is not only narrating the historical events but he is also delivering a moral lesson in the refrain: which literally translated means: "Beware of racial hatred".

Story-telling in recitative style marked by a refrain is a common African art (2).

Once upon a time war threatened the boundaries of the Empire of Kitara. All able-bodied males were called to join the imperial army. Two brothers referred to in this story picked their spears and shields and went to war.

On their way to the war front they encountered a fetish which prophesied their fate! It warned the brothers that both of them would be wounded! The brothers persisted and went to fight the war.

As soon as they joined the war the old brother, named Kikwangura, killed two enemy soldiers; and on attacking a third soldier, he was seriously wounded! The young brother also killed two enemy soldiers, but was wounded by a third soldier.

The young brother on seeing Kikwangura seriously wounded, assisted him and carried him away from the battle. Before Kikwangura died of his wounds, he had this to say to his young brother; -

"I am dying my young brother. When you return home give my love to my senior wife. I left her expecting. If she gives birth to a girl, name the baby 'Mbanabibi' (meaning: I see evil because that is what women see). If she gives birth to a boy, name the baby 'Mugenzi' (meaning: The traveller because all men travel).

Recitation of poetry with the aid of musical rhythms played on a solo instrument such as stringed instrument of a zither type is a common practice among several African ethnic groups.

Acholi Bwola Dance is a typical African example of a perfectly unified art in which music, dance and the performer's art dress complement each other. There are many examples of African dances such as war dances in which dancer wear paints or masques and other dresses which together with music and dance form complete and unique African art beauty.

(1.) MBABI-KATANA, Songs of East Africa Part 1
Macmillan & Co. Ltd.
London 1965
(Song No. 24 p.28)

(2.) MBABI-KATANA, Primary School Music course Book 1
Uganda Publishing House Kampala 1973.
(Song no. 32 p.106)

THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN THE TRADITIONAL AFRICAN OCCUPATIONS

The significance of Music in the life of an African is further illustrated by the role it plays in his traditional occupations and activities. Music is ever present at pastoral, agricultural and fishery occupations. Activities, leisured or otherwise, such as hunting, wrestling, rowing, dancing and any other work may be associated with music.

The significance of music in the traditional African agricultural life is being singled out for demonstration in this paper. The African agricultural life can be cast into the following dichotomies each of which is associated with music: clearing bush, ploughing, planting, weeding, harvesting and thrashing.

Figure 3 below, is illustrating the fact that there is music for clearing of bush, music for ploughing, music for planting, music for weeding, music for harvesting and music for thrashing in one or other of the multitudes of African cultural groups.

FIGURE 3

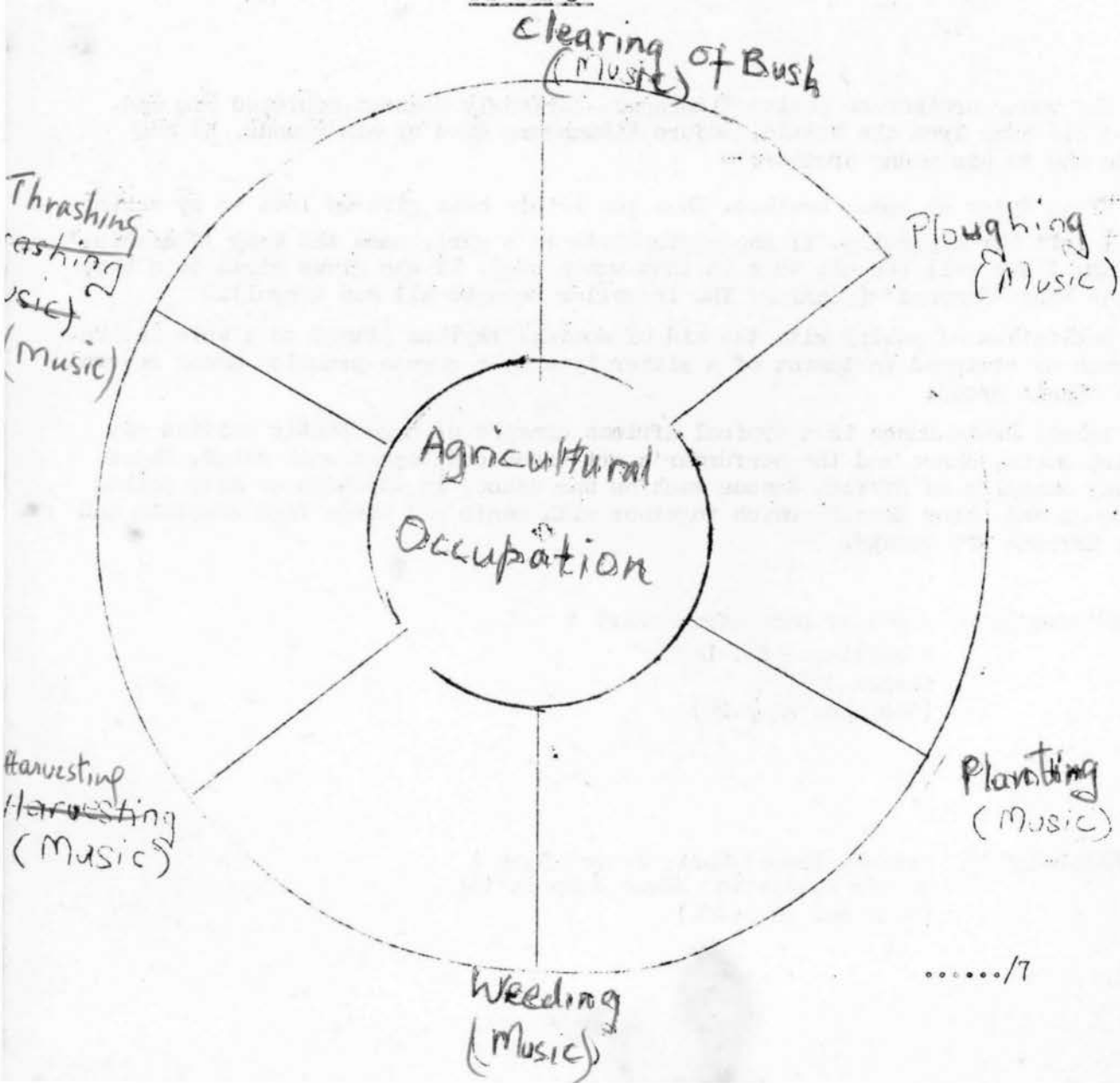
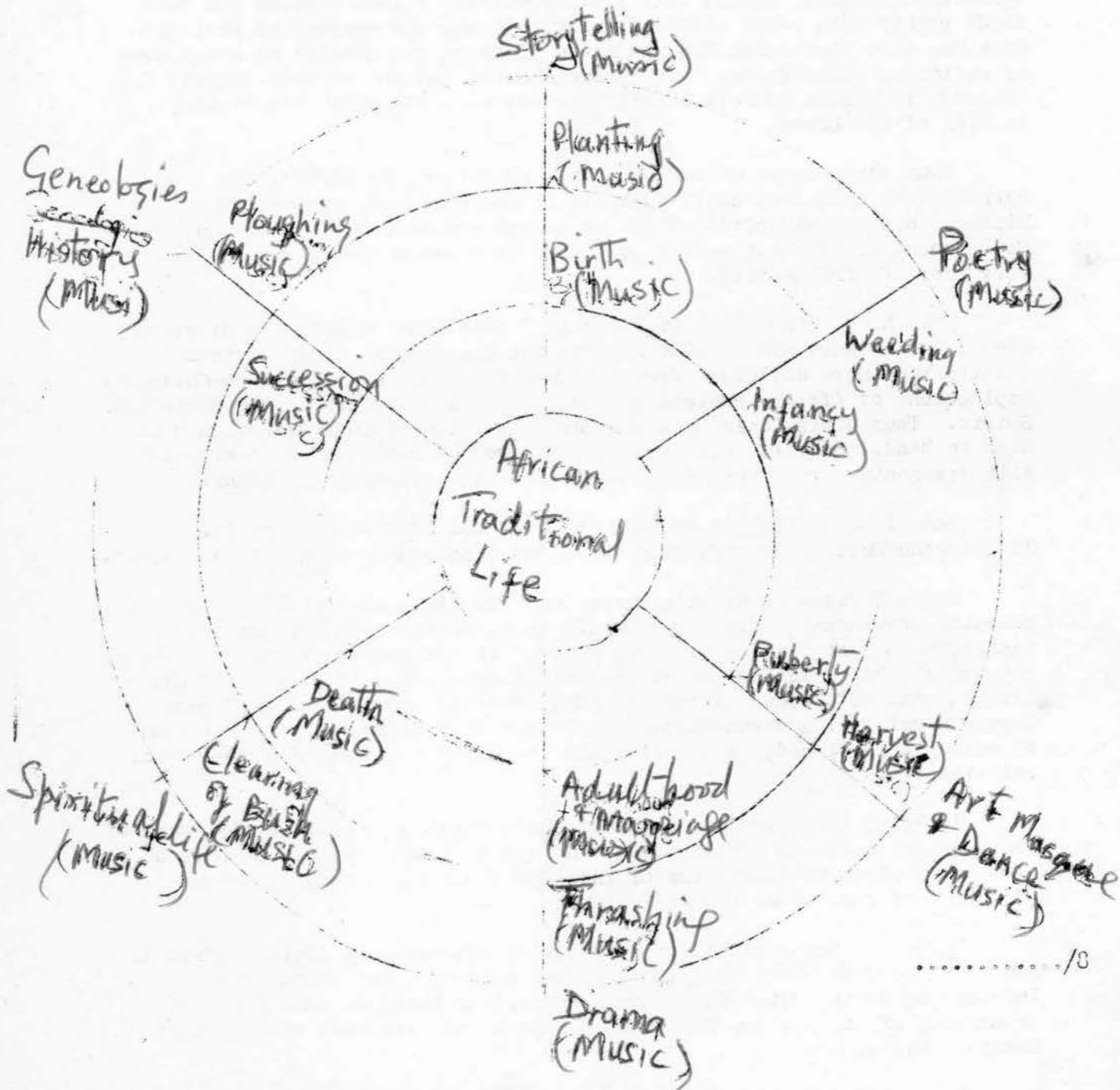


Figure 4 is a superimposition of figures 1, 2, and 3. It is made in order to illustrate, more vividly, how indigenous music is firmly entrenched in the diversity of social, economic and spiritual functions in traditional Africa, as well as demonstrate the fact that music in Africa is not a luxury but that it forms part of the whole process of living.

FIGURE 4



MODERN AFRICAN FORMAL EDUCATION SHOULD BEAR RELEVANCE
TO REAL AFRICAN LIFE

The history of modern education in most of Africa was enacted by Catholic and Protestant Missions which arrived previous to, or at the time of the Partition of the Continent. Although Islam had had been introduced in Africa long before Christianity, it had not taken firm roots in several parts of the Continent by the time of the arrival of Christian Missions, because the primary motive of Arab Moslems had been trade rather than propagation of Islam. It was the arrival of Christian Missions that threatened the expansion of Islam and created an atmosphere of religious competition. The Moslem faction had not at first shown interest in modern schools beyond the religious one which taught the reading of the Koran.

Thus the concept of modern formal education, in Africa, was motivated by religious zeal. Schools in the hands of, especially Missions had a destructive effect on social cohesion of the African. Replacement of the indigeneous religions by foreign ones struck at the very foot of African life.

The phrase "Christian Civilization" idealized by European Missions became the primary aim of education in the Continent. Where African institutions were different from the European they were termed un-Christian. Replacement of African customs by European was a victory of the Christian Spirit. Thus Christianization and European cultural indoctrination went hand in hand. Schools were regarded as powerful means for disseminating this missionary propaganda since they were also attended by Pagans.

School subjects bore no relevance to real life of the people. Indigeneous Music was considered pagan and despised by teachers and pupils.

While Christians Missions were busy founding schools, European colonial governments were pre-occupied in building up administrative machinery and establishing law and order. It was soon realized by colonial government that a little schooling would increase the usefulness of the African; and different policies of education were enacted by different European colonial governments in conformity with their own colonial aims of education designed, especially, for the African to suit Master-Servant relationship.

Ideally, first lesson in Humanities should be to make pupils aware of their contribution to civilization; and second lesson should be to teach them about other civilizations of individual peoples. Thus, a proper appraisal of each other should follow.

Under the European colonial system of education in Africa, Africans had to learn much about their Masters and nothing about themselves. Indigeneous Music, which is the music that is related to real life and experience of the people, was branded pagan and discarded in favour of European Music.

Separated from his environment by education, the schooled African developed loss of Value in, and disrespect of his heritage. A general ambivalence toward African heritage among schooled Africans is a problem that challenges modern African educations.

The loss is not only spiritual but it is also technical.

Exclusion of indigeneous music from the colonial European conceived school curricula has led to formation of generations of men and women who are incapable of performing African Music. The skills of performance and the rules of the art are gradually disappearing.

European colonial conceived education did not only turn pupils away from their community, but it promoted negative ethnocentricity which beset proper growth of young African Nations, by producing a large number of inert and lifeless mass who are uprooted from their society, and are no longer acting as Members of a unity or conceiving themselves from the standpoing of the group to which they belong. They became extremely disunited and incapable of offering effective service and leadership to their communities.

INDIGENEOUS MUSIC IN THE MODERN AFRICAN EDUCATION

Schools have come into existence in Africa because civilization has grown complex; so, the formal method of education has been superimposed upon the traditional or informal method, unfortunately, without prior study and appreciation of the latter.

Life means growth, and living has its own intrinsic quality which becomes the main concern of education. Life and its dichotomy constitutes highly valuable experiences ingrained with qualities and values most interesting to educators who seek to reconstruct such experiences for enrichment of the minds of their students and stimulation of their powers of creativity.

Childhood and pubertyhood are not merely preparations for adulthood, they are values in themselves and possess their own creativeness.

While we realize that the purpose of learning is not merely continuance of tradition, we should however, reconstruct such positive and natural experiences of childhood and pubertyhood for early education of our pupils. Such experiences would create confidence among the pupils and bring forth morally positive reations.

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate vividly the interdisciplinary character of Africa indigeneous music. The study of indegeneous music is bound to contribute considerably to understanding of related aspects of learning.

Bearing in mind that highly divided curriculum that separates artificially the segments of life common to all people is not desirable. Teachers could exploit the interdisciplinary nature of the study of indigeneous African Music. The time thus gained would benefit all subjects.

RAYS OF HOPE

With the advent of new independent nations in Africa during the middle of the present century and emerging Universities throughout the Continent, Music is beginning to receive the same emphasis as other school subjects and the concept is developing that Universities should be spearheads for promoting, encouraging and stimulating a continued evolution in the culture of Africa and that they should enhance growth of Music to function as a true element of that culture

A conference of African States on the Development of Education in Africa held in May 1961 at Addis Ababa expressed the need of development of African Culture.

Among the conclusions and recommendations of a conference on the Development of Higher Education in Africa held in September, 1962 at Tananarive was the following quotation: "encourage elucidation of and appreciation for African Culture and Heritage."

A Report drawn up in 1962 by the former University of East Africa on "Needs and Priorities reads as follows:

"We regard the following academic subjects as among these it will be desirable to introduce in the East African setting when conditions allow of such new developments. We have not attempted to establish an order of priorities here and the subjects are therefore listed alphabetically:

Anthropology; Archeology; Biochemistry; Islamic studies
Marine Biology; Meteorology; Music; Nutrition; Philosophy;
Psychology; Tropical Ecology.

In 1961 a "Research and Training in African Music" programme was launched at the then Makerere University College of East Africa through the financial assistance of a Rockefeller Foundation grant of £17930.

Similar programmes have been launched at different African Universities. In most Universities the work is still being conducted mainly on research basis. But at other Universities - foundations for full - fledged Schools and Departments of Music have been laid and the teaching of the subject is in the full swing.

Meanwhile the world has been gaining more conceptual understanding of Music and, although the subject is late in being introduced into African University studies, this can be looked at as a blessing in that scholars are embarking upon the teaching of music, fully equipped with the modern conceptual knowledge of the subject.

Music contributes an essential facet of Man's cultural manifestation. It is created by man. It is a product of his general physiological constitution, motivated and diversified both by individual or collective inventiveness and by cultural environment. It can not be properly investigated if approached as an isolated phenomenon.

The world now realizes that Music does not exist by and of itself but it is part of the totality of human behavior. This point has been fully brought out by Kolinski in the journal of Ethnomusicology of 1967 Number One.

A new branch of Musical study entitled Ethnomusicology that has been structured into some of the courses offered at the newly established Departments and Schools of Music is a direct acknowledgement of this universal aspect of the study.

Another aspect of the concept of music that is being fully acknowledged at the newly established Departments and Schools of music is its interdisciplinary character.

Earlier on in this paper emphasis was made on the role of African Music upon the social, spiritual environment of the African. While African orientated studies are still at their earliest stage, a stimulus for their development must come from a comprehensive approach to the study of African Music which takes into account the cross-disciplinary character of the subject which would constitute an enormous academic value to African studies in general.



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