

# CO-ORDINATION TECHNIQUES AND STYLES IN ESE MUSICAL PERFORMANCE COMMUNICATION IN NIGERIA

**Okoro, J. C.**

*Department of Music, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria  
E-mail: chuksjevang@yahoo.com*

**Okoro, B. D.**

*Department of Music, Pankshin College of Education  
Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria*

## ABSTRACT

*This research was conducted to assess the co-ordination techniques and styles in Ese musical performance communication. Through active participation, records were taken on dance formation; costuming and their functions; the significance of the song texts; the general organization in performance activities coupled with distribution of musical roles such as: stage formation and communication network among the dancers, singers and the instrumentalists. From the study, there was great need for trained personnel to man Ese in Mbaise culture, the native land of its origin; this done will revive the socio-cultural art, which for the time being is on the verge of neglect.*

**Keywords:** *Instrumentation, dance, vocals, ese ensemble, communication, composition*

## INTRODUCTION

Over the years, mankind has always wished to extend their mental power and use it to explore creative possibilities in order to make room for new learning, cross cultural interactions and broad societal focus. This indispensably makes a broad minded society open to unlimited ideas that creatively entertain, educate and morally orientate them to a successful end. Invariably this study is strictly geared to achieve the above claim. By accomplishing this work successfully, African music researchers are possibly assured of meeting up satisfactorily with their ethno musicological deliberations; Ese being their part guideline, material evidence and sense of direction for corrective measure.

The context of this research will instill into the beneficiaries, further awareness of the aesthetic quality of Ese, which could enhance its practice and promotion in the festival of arts and culture. It motivates the need to appreciate the origin of musical ideas and conditions conducive for Ese musical performance. By augmenting one's understanding of the art, the study will make it possible to follow the message of Ese intelligently and as such, gain enjoyment from the dance music.

To this end, this draws us into learning at close quarters, those rudimentary limitations to the recognition of Ese only in the places of its practice. The move stands as a source material guide for ethnomusicological reference. It shows the potentiality in Ese performers beyond their confinement. Most essentially are the basic skills in non verbal communication in the context of music and dance.

### **THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS OF RHYTHMIC PATTERNS IN THE FORMATION OF DIALOGUE STRUCTURE**

The Ese relies very much on rhythm and pitch, which are strictly observed by the ensemble. Rhythm is a regular pulsating phenomenon regulated in time and space.

In the words of Nketia 1975:

*The total impact of a piece of music on a dancer Influences the expressive quality of his dance. It is generally the rhythmic structure that influences the pattern of his movements. He derives his motor feeling from his rhythmic structure, whose elements he articulates in his basic movements. The rhythms that govern the choice of movement sequences or the grouping of such sequences may be organized linearly (Nketia, 1975)*

In this study, rhythmic variations are indicated by different dance steps. In this case, 'Amadioha' (a functional name to the drum) *Ese* and 'Etiti' (medium drum) *Ese* consistently and persistently imitate (in time) the restless and rapidly alternated feet of the dancer. Multi-linear rhythms give rise to polyrhythmic complexities, with the combination of tempi derived from dialogue between or among the rhythmic instruments. The mark of rhythm by the membrane drums binds the music through the process of a well co-ordinated beats. This is brought into effect depending on the skill of the master drummer, kind of audience and the degree of formality attached to the rehearsal or performance proper. The 'pattern of rhythm established appears to be most useful concept of *Ese* music presently available. 'Pattern' as applied to rhythm means: "a repeated sequence of pulses, arranged in some particular rhythmic organization which either does not vary or which varies minimally, which has defined starting and ending points, and which serves as a centralizing factor for the rhythms of the piece of music" (Merriam, 1954).

In the scheme of instrumental combination, individual features of the instruments, pitch and range are unavoidably considered. For instance, the two tones of the slit drum are used judiciously to fill in the inner rhythms. Due to its hollow sounding tones, a roll sounds better on the slit drum than on the skin drum; the roll alternating with irregular staccato beats is a feature of the instrument. Rhythmic figuration of the slit drum and those of the conga drum are apparently defined. The deep booming regular beat of the drumming conga narrates the history of the ritual event being celebrated. It is the main beat of the piece which sets the time for all other rhythms of voice, hands and instruments. The other rhythms may neither have any possible similarity to it nor any relationship of any sort. However, on its first beats all others have to coincide resulting in a clash of multi-rhythms.

## **INTRODUCTORY CUES AND CHALLENGE SIGNALS WITHIN THE ENSEMBLE**

Application of introductory cues or signals necessitates the dancer's postural adjustments, and involves minute changes or a few alterations in the singers' vocal cords. For the master drummer, the changes which he

can resort to and indicate on his instrument are many with variance. However, there are certain rhythmic patterns that recur every now and then, and tend to provide standard rhythms for definite instruments. Call - response, dialogue structure exist between the upper and lower sets of the 'Aria-nkwa' (drum chime). Vocal and instrumental resources that feature in the dance are not given equal prominence. The instruments dominate because Ese is almost purely an instrumental music meant to guide and accompany the dancer, while voice is just merely introduced (not only periodically but also in piece-meal) for a fulfillment of certain other cultural values than musical objective.

When a solo vocal element is introduced, it is chanted recitatively by the lead singer being accompanied by the drum chime till a dance movement elapses. The periodic and exclamatory phrases or words "I-ya, O-we, Ayamma" et cetera, sung by the lead singer as the dance is on typifies the vocal melody. They serve as "gestural conducts", which communicates different coded information having to do with dance performances involving the instrumentalists and the dancers. Supremely, interjections indicate performance technical or stylistic alterations in assorted dimension, and do activate and increase the intensity of performance efforts.

The musical instruments of Ese are tonally constructed and tuned so as to facilitate the text. This subsequently gives room for effective interpretation of, or response to the disseminated 'logogenic or logogramatic' message by the dancer. All regular intervals, every other phrase of rhythmic pattern conveys to the dancer, what to do, when to do it and of course, how to do it. Alternatively, through stylized movements and steps, the dancer could as well dictate to the instrumentalist(s). The Ese master drummer solicits, in his preparatory 'drum questions', readiness and lack of disappointment from the vocal and co-instrumental accompanists.

## **THE APPROACHES TO CREATIVE PROCEDURES IN COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES**

To a great extent, certain aspects of peoples' culture suggest the style of music (and its by-products - rhythm, scale, structure, et cetera). Creative Procedure here means - performance composition and presentation process underwent in the course of bringing the music to live performance.

The said procedure should not fall short of "Sound in time which expresses ideas and emotions in significant forms through the element of rhythm, harmony and colour" (Dictionary, 1948). People make music for others as a learned behaviour. It cannot and does not exist by itself; human beings see to its composition, or production. Music is not a phenomenon of sound alone because it involves the behaviour of individuals, or groups. Its specific organization calls for the social gathering of those whose responsibility is to approve what it ought to encompass. As a socially accepted pattern of sounds, Ese music is shaped in terms of culture to which it belongs.

The continuity of the music depends on more than the imitation of cultural forms in the shared experience of performance. The lead singer is expected to add new words to songs by creating new patterns of melody according to a system which must be learned instinctively or by natural impulse instead of instruction or imitation. Melodic variations are generated by the speech-tone patterns of words, which are reflected by the tale of the song, brought about by responses to social experiences. There is a body or collection of variations which can only be created if performers have learnt the principles of the system by which existing melodies have been created. All the same, the general form of the music basically depends on musical rules learnt by imitation. During the creative process, stylistic formation of variable patterns, including forms and figures etc. are considered in relation to expectations drawn directly from the cultural nuances of the people.

The composers also, consider regularity in rhythm as the life-line of Ese dance and the root upon which its music and dance are based. The introductory sequences of dance depend on figures that accompany them. While bridges established between the dance sequences terminate or punctuate the idea of the theme, before establishing the dance patterns of the new sequence. The effectiveness of the mode of interpretation during evaluation and analysis of the stylized dance movement is given more consideration than its aesthetic values. On the whole, talent and constant practice advance their approaches to creativity in compositional technique.

## SYSTEMATIC PERFORMANCE-PRESENTATION OF RESPECTIVE INSTRUMENT PARTS

Ese music is more or less founded on a rhythmical stirring of the whole body. For instance, each drumbeat with either the hand, or stick depicts accordingly, how the part of an entire body movement is made. And the movement when visualized is easily understood to have synchronized with the instrumental rhythms. The importance of body movement in this regard reflects the basic relationship between the music making and dancing, and between the emotional impact of music and the social and physical experiences associated with its performance.

During performance, the instruments do not start all at once. As a matter of routine, the 'Ike' (power drum) Ese and 'Isi' (head drum) Ese supported by the rest of other drums of the 'Aria-nkwa' (drum chime), exclusive of the Nwa kparakpara' (an onomatopoeic name of the drum), set the tempo and style to which "Ekwe/Uhe and Ebelu" (names of membrane drums based on their functions) later adapt their rhythmic figurations as they join in. With a constantly maintained systematic accompaniment that varies periodically throughout the performance, the drummers of drum chime at complete liberty, extemporize variations within a limited given point in time. Continual rhythmic ostinato of the chime is punctuated at intervals by the booming sound of the 'Ike' Ese. To produce a variety of sounds, the master drummer usually uses a complex system of techniques for striking various points on the drums heads.

***Ike Ese:*** This is characterized by long period of silence. It announces the very development of any musical idea punctuates and indicates every musical phrase. 'ike' Ese produces monotonous embellished with crushed sound effect, otherwise when it coincides with 'Isi' Ese it does not bear any grace note. Transition in both rhythmic structure and tonal quality, programmed sequence of rests alternated with crushed notes are typical of this unique local drum. At times the instrument appears to have punctuated an abrupt musical idea in progression, thereby creating an impression of 'surprise' cadence. Most of the stoppages occur at the 9th or 12th beats of 98 and 128 respectively; with very sturdy stress underlying the said beats. Once in a while triplets are involved after every six quaver counts rest. Readable tunes are very unusual of the instrument and as such are performed peradventure.

**'Isi Ese' And 'Osoje Isi Ese':** The above named instruments collectively supply the background tune to the drum ensemble. As a principle, the two instruments commence Ese music with more defined tunes (capable of creating an impression of absolute readiness for Ese performance) than the accompanied solo section. After this development, the rest are cued in.

Just immediately after the second bar, trills (interrupted with tacets that occur every now and then) are commonly displayed, and periodically repeated over and over again within the 'Ilulu-nkwa' (proverbial music) compartment. This technical cum stylistic structure is remarkable of the early part of the music. This feature is rounded off with exhibition of both exact and slightly exact repetitions of itself, with trills incorporated in improvisations. 'Etiti' Ese is at times shared between the instrumentalists of the chime, who sometimes incidentally play simultaneously on it. Rhythmic patterns are not frequently altered by the receiver soloist, but are inevitably embellished with ornamentations and grace notes for chromatic and aesthetic effect. Fundamental cadential 'roles' introduced are intermittently varied at the description of the master instrumentalist till the music comes to an end.

**Nwa Kparakpara/Amadioha Ese/Etiti Ese:** a dialogue tune incorporated with rest typifies the rhythmic structure of the trills of the solo/melodic drums at the early movement of the music. This rhythmic structure is modified with little improvisation wherever else it recurs within the musical score. Musical variations with cluster of rests, triplets, stressed/accented notes, and crushed notes are employed within the framework of the musical continuity. This forthwith saw to the introduction of their collective melorhythm interpreted vocally as 'chenunche' that is, 'be on guard'. Repetition of an already established musical idea characterizes the readable tunes of the solo-melodic drums which play different names in song forms for the responsorial receiver chorus. Sometimes a transitional rhythm adds further musical expression to, or subtracts from already established one in the course of performance-composition continuity.

**'Ekwe (slit drum):** the slit drum has two different pitches; the back and front pitch. The former has high pitches compared to the latter which is naturally closer to the performer. During the performance process, the slit

drum interacts more (though at intervals) with the drum chime soloist than with the rest of other instruments of the ensemble. Most of its crushed and staccato rhythms are alternated with trills played ad lib. At a point of performance the quaver rhythm of the slit drum coincide with those of conga drum; both bearing similar note value. In this context, the rhythms of the slit drum are noted to be struck invariably on the alternative tones of the instrument. Alteration in time signature (from 128 - 98) introduced by the metronome instrument, conga drum occur at this point in time and is sustained to a reasonable degree. In slit drum part, absolute different musical expression starts up to the cadential point. But within this moment in time before the musical finality, the 4th, 8th and 12th beats (of the right hand rhythm) of each bar respectively, is leisurely and randomly bisected at the instrumentalist description. The tonal transitions are generally marked by introduction of grace and crushed notes. Basic samples to this effect abound in the musical interlude.

**'Ebelu' (Conga Drum):** After eighteen and a half bars rest, conga drum is cued in; it observes another five bars rest before it is punctuated. Thereafter, further rests witness the range of forty-two bars of twelve beats measure. The rhythms are as emphatic as they are conceptualized to be activating. Within the period of tacet however, the conga introduces unevenly, casual and assorted rhythms as it waits for its performance-proper moment. Sometimes this might be an answer of its readiness to the soloist. During trilling and improvisation by other instruments, the conga drum plays very soft rhythms that yield a background sound to the aggregate music. The tone becomes 'forte' in a given bar and increases more and more for a while. This loudness in volume is eventually rounded off within a minim rest.

**Metric Organization:** In metre, there is exactness of regularity in sound heard as beats. Metre is a relatively small aspect of rhythm (which itself is), an integral part of time signature. The song, the recitative verse and the chant respectively give clear evidence of a common element that determines the metre. Also, the ordered arrangements of strong and weak rhythmic notes correspond to metre. Their over all conclusive sections are the most fixed portion of the metric measure.



The master drummer's metric organization regularly changes the rhythmic patterns by introducing some rhythmic figures that fits into a desirable time division. The other drums adheres to a simple rhythm of almost same nature, and he bases the alterations on these. This stands to reason that "The biggest drum plays regularly with very little variation. The only changes in the pattern is the sub-division of a single beat in each measure into two or the substitution of one beat in each bar; these variations do not change from measure to measure, although they may be applied to any beat in the bar" (Merriam, 1959).

Usually, whenever the general musical movement becomes fast, the music gradually changes performance pattern to usher in another musical idea. The music is not devoid of multimetric measure due to occasional simultaneous use of two time signatures between the master drummer and the rest of other instrumentalists of the ensemble. In a bid to reconcile the idea of 'time signature' with musical note value, 'broken rhythms' across the bar become inevitable. A different rhythm (in a given bar) introduces another time signature - 98 contrary to 128 in another bar, while the third basic rhythmic variation starts from next movement. As some other instruments still maintain 128 per bar, the conga resort to 98 from the pivotal bar of musical progression. The rhythmic changes either present themselves in full or in part within the bar of the movement or progression, otherwise the entire bar observes absolute period of silence.

***Distinct Features of the Vocal Melody:*** The Ese vocalists give themselves special freedom in musical expression. They are however, somewhat bound to the principles which govern relationships between patterns of melody and the speech tone patterns of the accompanied words, or to the rhythmic restriction that each syllable of a word must be accompanied by only one tone. Notwithstanding the uniformity of the bars, or the metre, singers sustain the final note of the tune. Though in this work, instead of using note values of long duration, rests are preferred because the instruments do not play 'sostenuto' (sustaining tones). Also, spoken or whispered tones characterize the vocal style. This is simply because most of the time, singers and instrumentalists alike, strive for a fuzzy, or boozing tone for a special effect. When the singers use an open resonant voice quality, a wide variety

of tonal qualities is employed. This variety in timbre sometimes lead to a rather persistent use of a "burred" tone. At times the singers may even "shout" or "yodel". This "ululation" is not devoid of meaning as an uninitiated listener would imagine; rather, it is a purposeful effort to enrich the music. Use is also made of rising attack and falling release as well as glissando. The melodies are nearly always short, many a time very repetitive and fragmentary. The first section of the melody is brought back as occasion demands; while wider range of voice is highly exploited. Then for maintenance of true meaning of the melodic line of the song, the pitch is changed, while the melodic curve remains static. Short melodic lines are however, prolonged by the use of additional neologistic tunes.

**Form:** The Oxford Dictionary (1955) defines music as "that one of the fine arts which is concerned with the combination of sounds with a view to beauty of FORM and the expression of thought and feeling". In this perspective of "form" in Igbo musical practice, Akpabot (1986) affirms that "form is dictated solely by traditional norms with their in-built constraints and taboos; all these manifesting themselves in the melodic pattern, harmonic structures and rhythmic figuration of the music".

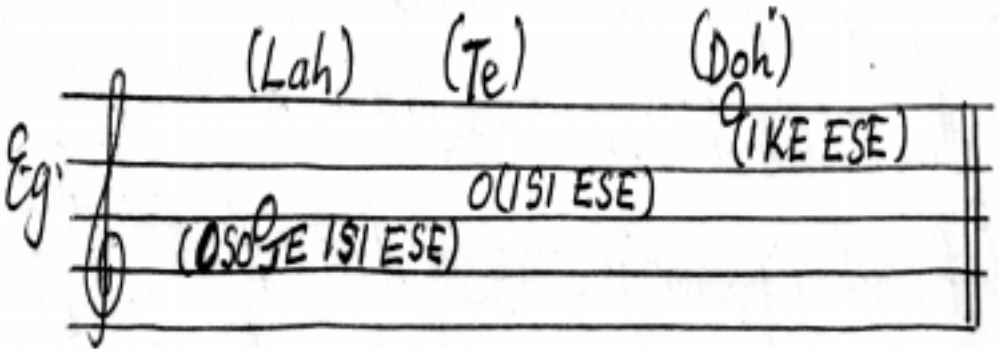
Binary "form" is very much employed. The majority of them is so short and consists of just two and four phrases such that "form" becomes rudimentary. On the whole the shorter melodies are in binary "form", and is often modified, by ending of the second-half with an imperfect cadence. Of the hundred and sixty-five bars composition, ternary form is recorded in ten bars (543-553), binary form predominates with a model tune that reads thus: call - "Emeanaa gbalaga"; Response - "Umu-aro A biala". That is ... run away ... have come.

**Vocal Range and Melodic Contour:** melodic level from the very beginning to ending tones is either even or slightly descending. Somewhat sharp interval rises, followed by slow descents; frequently binary in form, with the two parts built on divers notes; off-beat phrasing between the rhythmic pulse rather than coinciding with them. In all, the voice meanders within the range of a minor 3rd, which is altogether the range of the first-three smallest melodic role of the drum chime.

Speech-melody sets up certain patterns of sound that should be followed, at least to some extent in music, for the music text fusion to be

understood by the listener. And Igbo melodies are guided by the tone patterns of the words. It is on this ground that Bright in Merriam (1964) comments thus:

*Languages display regular patterns of high pitched and low-pitched syllables; and different languages give different emphasis to these factors. Since patterns involving these elements of pitch, dynamics, and duration are also among the basic element of music, it is at least a reasonable hypothesis that there may be some culture in which features of spoken languages have played a part in conditioning the musical pattern of song.*



**Fig 1:** Structure of melodic interests.

**The Structure of the Melodic Intervals:** the order of descending or ascending notes of the interval is considered more essential than its precise pitch because certain parts of the melodic intervals are anticipated to reflect alterations in speech tone. The rule is generally that words change and hence, melodic variations occur in the call section of a melody, which is sung by a soloist; while the response, which is sung by chorus does not change. Thus, the vocal verse as a rule generally bears resemblance with the tune structure of the solo instruments of the 'aria nkwa' tone row.

**The Parameter of the Constituent Pitch of the Scale:** The idea of scale as a succession of fixed degree does not quite apply in this work, though certain tones (in the transcription) aptly fit together with the tonality established by the "function and mutual relations of the notes". The scale is formed from the harmony of a single tone - 'Lah te doh', the highest three pitches of the six tone scale drum chime.

**Texture:** Here texture as a musical fabric stands for the simultaneous sounding of two or more pitches created by interplay between voices and music instruments during chorus. Soon after the beginning, the straightforward call and response is elaborated into a quasi-contrapuntal sequence. A variety of melodies emerges on top because in the excitement of the on going music, the voices of the singers rise. One person plays or sings a short, melodic line, while the second sings or plays a diverse form of the melody altogether. These two or more independent complementary melodies lines/voices expressed simultaneously result in dense texture.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ese needs to be sustained and improved upon its practice. This will on that account, serve as a key to the modification of this dominant art form for its performance continuity. There is need to have it recorded under western notation system, so that it will be among the documented Igbo dance music repertoire. Furthermore, the diverse binding rudiments in Ese ought to be ameliorated through intellectual and scholarly approach. This 'in effect' will manifest authentic picture of the music in the light of its features and performance techniques.

Informal and suggestive generalizations not typical of Ese (an avenue of quiescent communication), if not logically resolved with musical and choreographic facts will entail that the art falls short of the taste of time. Besides, the mediocre artistes inapt remarks and wrong notions contrary to the ensemble's inclinations also call for attention. Consequently, it is recommended that with the services of the town crier, a minority of the learned class disinterested in Ese can be made to understand that academic status and societal positions are no barriers to membership of Ese. This is because, custom and tradition know no class distinction.

Hopefully, via news media and communiqué, there will be further recognition of the ensemble. Calls for aid and grants for equipping the group with music/dance paraphernalia are also necessary means to achieve this end objective. Those who wish to fritter away on dancing during pleasure should be authorized to enroll into Ese (rather than be discriminated

against, or looked down upon), unless they are not capable of performing in accordance with the laid down principles guiding the art. There is great need for trained personnel to man Ese in Mbaise culture, the native land of its origin; this done will revive the socio-cultural art, which for the time being is on the verge of neglect.

## REFERENCES

- Nketia, J. H. K.** (1975). *The music of Africa*. London: Mgbo publications limited.
- Merriam, A. P.** (1959). *African music. Continuity and change in Africa culture*. Chikago: University of Chikago Press. 49,86
- Merriam, A. P.** (1954). Traditional music of black Africa. The traditional in contemporary Africa. Ibadan: 3, 243,257.
- Merriam, A. P.** (1964). *The anthropology of music*. The USA: Northwest University Press.
- Akpabot, S. E.** (1986). *Foundation of Nigeria traditional music*. Ibadan: Spectrum books limited.
- Okoro, J. C.** (2000). Communication and dance in Ese music of Enyiogugu, Aboh-Mbaise L.G.A. An unpublished M.A. thesis submitted to University of Nigeria Nsukka.

The American College Dictionary (1948), Text Ed.

The Oxford Universal Dictionary (1955), 3rd Ed.