



## **Music And The Learning Process: An Assessment**

**Musa Makhu AMODU Ph.D**  
**Department of Music**  
**University of Jos, Nigeria**

### **ABSTRACT**

The presence and usage of music in cultures around the world is without doubt one of the greatest assets possessed by nation states as an instrument of development in several profound ways. Given the quantum of man/music dependence and interactive/contact levels, it is arguably suggestive of the importance and strategic relevance of music within the orbit of man's quest for self realization and development of the human organism. One of the objectives of the study is to examine the relevance of music in facilitating and improving cognitive/knowledge retention in a meaningful sustainable ways. Secondly, the study tries to identify suitable methodology and models that will possibly best lead to goal achievements in identifiable study contexts. The study posits developmental visions which will further improve and consolidate gains and goals attainment in a pragmatic music oriented study models capable of engendering learning interests with enduring tangible scholarship acquisition.

**Keywords:** Music, rhythmic configurations, class learning, music consciousness

### **INTRODUCTION**

The phenomenon of cultural pluralism in its global context has signposted, ethno-methodology in cultural evolution and dispersion as an essential research mechanism in gaining significant insight into ethnic related studies. The adoption of ethnocentric related research techniques in the humanities, such as ethnomusicology, ethno-linguistics, among others has largely obviated the cumbersome process of analysis and interpretation of research findings in cultural contexts. Culture presents in its various dimensions, a conflux of tangible and intangible embodiments realizable in context within time and space in the cultural matrix of the people that owns it. In so far as these study models serves certain research visions, the bigger arguments in their favor, is the cultural connect at the grass-root platform, usually associated with 'unearthing' authentic and original research information and findings.

Ethnomusicology, the study of music in its cultural context, has significantly shown insights in music cultures around the globe. Significantly, ethnomusicology in conjunction with related research fields such as anthropology, as narrowed the huge void and contestations associated with underlying philosophy and phenomenology of vital ethnic cultural vistas as often found in 'perceived ideations' of researchers as against local philosophy and ethos. The allied fields of cultural studies has successfully brought into focus, and public domain, the theory, practice, aesthetics, function and meaning and symbolism that characterize music's of cultures around the world. Therefore, fostering closer cultural affiliations and in the process engendering cultural understanding, and setting aside ingrained stereotypes associated with certain cultures albeit in negative terms.

In its developmental field phase, ethnomusicology has been able to document in context, the role and function of music in daily routines and work timetable in cultures around the world. Some of these studies showcase the facilitating and engendering functions of music in work situations and organization and ordering of the society. Significant for this study, is the positive activation of music's sonic/ sensory and human sinuses in an integrated order aimed at educating, informing and transforming an individual and or community and society. Local models in this direction exist in extant ethno-methodology techniques and traditions of moonlight tales performances in ethnic cultures around Nigeria. Local narratives chronicling tribal heroic legends are vital aspects of social-cultural thrills and rites of passage in African societies.

Traditionally adopted as a process in cultural learning, the platform has proven to be invaluable in the transmission of cultural formulae integral to sustenance and perpetuations of tribal customs and traditions.

### **Music in Society Ordering and Organization**

Music, dance inclusive, in traditional African societies represents the heart and soul, spirituality, epitomizing in unique condensed capsules of sonic and visual epistemology the essence of life and living. Music in some other cultures around the world does not depart significantly from this music consciousness. Music can be surmised intrinsically as a store of values representing in its microcosm the true nature of man/woman. Confucius sees music in the vision of a steadying force and universal order, and concluded that music is the only art form in the universe that defies pretense. Confucius, envisioned music's substance and philosophy beyond the narrow alleys of entertainment and surmised that the essence of music is to purify ones thought.

Music is that aspect of human's evolution, preserved and presented in sound, rhythm and plastic arts. To this extent and more, some music historians view music as the documentation of history in sound. As a living and vibrant art, and vital component of the social and spiritual order, is believed to work in conjunction with the metaphysical to regulate human activities and destiny. Most ancient Greek philosophers believed that listening to music based on certain of the modes in use at the time was beneficial to the development of a young person's character and warned that listening to music based on certain modes would have harmful effects".(Waterman, n.p). There is music for different occasions, moods among others, in accordance to the needs and requirements of the times and moments in view. In India for instance, 'many of the elaborate melody patterns of India called Ragas are believed to have magical or curative powers. Ragas are traditionally played at specific hours or during specific seasons. It is believed that to depart from this timetable would be harmful to the performer and audience". (n.p).

### **Music in the Learning Environment**

The work leans greatly, but not absolutely on the entertainment-education theory as posted by Papal and Singhal. The kernel of the theory is that learning potentials thus exist, and can readily be harnessed and harvested within the context of entertainment. That is, education, and learning can consciously and or unconsciously be imbibed or imparted in the process of entertainment. Local work models in cultures around the world are leading examples in this regards. In many African religions, sound is believed to be one of the primary means by which deities and humans impose order on the universe. In West Africa, drummer's plays a crucial role in the possession-trance ceremonies in which the gods enter or 'ride' the bodies of devotees. A competent drummer must know the scores of specific rhythms for particular gods and be responsible throughout the performance for regulating the flow of supernatural power in ritual context".(n.p). Traditional African societies live a mutually, inclusive communal subsistence and sedentary form of existence. The agrarian lifestyle encourages and fosters collective participation on the socio-economic and spiritual plains. Music features and plays a vital and functional role in their activities. Waterman observes that 'music is also used to organize activities. He observes that "Kpelle men in Liberia use a form of vocal hocketing to coordinate their machete blows while clearing dense brush for rice field". Similarly, 'in Pigmy societies of Central African rain forest, singing and vocal cries are used to coordinate the movement of hunters through the brush". Elsewhere, "in South Africa, herders use flutes and other instruments to help coordinate the movement of cattle". (n.p). Beyond these economic spheres however exists a vast and substantial music- work affiliations and collaborative drive in social cum spiritual contexts aimed at stabilizing the community and attaining positive gains and results.

One of the early successful Musicals that succinctly asterisked the invaluable substance of music as agent proximate in its socializing voyage is the 'Sound of Music'. The Sound of Music, motion picture about a religious young governess who brings music and happiness to a widower's large family, set in Austria during World War11(1939-1945) Julie Andrews stars as Maria, the governess who takes up a job in Captain Van Trapps household caring for his seven children. Maria teaches the children to sing and she and the captain begin to fall in love". (Butler, n.p). One of the lasting impressions that remain on viewers

of the musical sub-consciousness the most is the convivial joyful atmosphere that subsists while the musical unfolds. As a genre of music, "Musical or Musical comedy is a theatrical production in which songs, instrumental accompaniment and often dance are integrated into dramatic plot".(n.p). In a profound way, the dramatic personae and entire actions is packaged as a musical web conditioned on a theme and ideologue of exemplifying the carrying power of music as a catalyst for social cohesion, prefixing and foregrounding the right atmosphere for the development of mind soul and body.

The affective franchise that issues forth from music performance, elicits several levels of inward and outward manifestations and responses. One of which is a subdued psychological state of wellbeing occasioned by musical experiences over a period of time. Outward show and flow of responsorial proclivity often in an animated form, is a common feature of response to musical activity. The time span and status of affectations are by no means stable, static and vary from individuals, context, mood, the affecting music and music's and other factors considered. While the extent to which the empathizing substance and power of music to influence, aid and encourage a particular form of reaction or reactions to a musical activity is dependent on vagaries of factors, the affective dynamics are usually too strong to ignore totally. Thus, several levels of music cognition and appreciation are readily discernable. In no particular order and hierarchy, they are firstly, active participation/appreciation, secondly, inactive level of listening and appreciation, the other is passive level and the last being perceptive listening and level of appreciation. That, the conditions presents and represents what can be referred to as active and less active zones of participation, notwithstanding, learning experiences are still feasible in all of them to certain degrees.

Because of the nature of music, the dualism and conflux of extenuating tenors of sonorities/timbres, in which it manifest, music as aid to learning must be selected with great care and artifice. This is because the several timbres are in themselves burning embers of sonic and sensual diatribe that are capable of sending the wrong signals or message and consequently with wrong results in return.

Music's in aid of learning can be at roughly divided into various categories. (a) Music from a preset mechanism such as gramophone record player, CD, and cassette player. (b) Learner's practical participation on choice a cappella music and perhaps familiar melodic rhythms.

(a) The first category presents several advantages as a learning tool. It allows for careful editing and controlled performances situations. It gives room for repetitions especially in areas were emphasis is required. It is invaluable in off-context learning situations as the learner can study independently without close supervision.

The music-material in use should meet certain criteria. The target interest should be considered carefully as music for formal class learning, is substantially different, from music for high level density stress related workouts as in dance exercises and aerobics. A simple tune with less superfluous rhythmic configurations, moderate tempo and minimal vocal inputs is preferred. This type of music is less likely to commit participants to adverse responses outside the vision and scope of learning. Use music that is meaningful to the learners. Not overly "busy", distracting, loud or fast" The music should be "age appropriate", "lyric appropriate", and "fun" oriented. (La Bella, n.p).

Learner's practical participation in music sessions is a better and more appropriate model of learning in music. Existing popular tunes are used as vessels for transmission as they easily allow for parody and as building blocks for improvisation. Extant kindergarten nursery rhymes such as 'Twinkle twinkle little star', local lore as 'Ise oluwa kole baa jeoo', and many others, could be adopted as study tools and models. The most suitable models are those which allow for 'code switching', interplay of intended learned behavior, ideas, codes, techniques, and vessel-music are recommended. The interplay should be interesting, with ample room and opportunity available to sway, clap, and have fun while you learn. This model is an instant 'hit' for crèche and kindergarten youngsters. The model can be replicated at adolescence level with modified procedures. Sustainable study interest can be creatively pursued within this context.

The knowledge and ideas to be learned could be formulated into rhymes to achieve necessary poetic and aesthetic ambience. This in itself takes a measure of creativity on the part of the teacher. According to

Stein, ‘studies suggests that music and movement; nourishes the brain while affecting all areas of development, strengthen listening and motor skills, language problem solving, spatial-temporal performance and literacy, helps develop critical listening skills, create space for emotional wellbeing, provide opportunities to practice social skills, support phonemic awareness, instills acts of kindness and cooperation, calms and focus the mind and encourages interaction in non threatening ways’.(n.p). ‘ kids are hard-wired to seek sensory inputs through movement...and movement involvement involves the visuals, auditory, tactile, pro-prio-ceptive and vestibular senses’. (La Bella,n.p).

### **Jos Creche Study Example**

In Jos, several primary schools have classes for youngsters between the ages of 2 and 3 years. Such infants classes are fondly referred to as play class. The class is intended to supervise the youngsters in preschool academic environment with the objective of gradual maturation and acquiring in the process minimum base knowledge. Another study objective of these classes is to prepare the children for acquisition of graded knowledge in subsequent years and in so doing make the school environment inviting and interesting to the youngsters. The principal study technique is knowledge acquisition using the play-study platform.

Over the years, the study outcomes is appreciably promising, if the amount of knowledge acquired in the process is anything to go by. Beside the basic lessons of studying alphabets, numbers, colors, shapes and identifying objects, the kids learn social issues and current affairs. Of these, it is in the memorization of social and current affairs that the play-study model presents perhaps the brightest prospects. As part of result outcomes using this model, they easily and readily learn faster, acquiring so much within a very short period. They commit to memory, among others, states of the Nigeria Federation, their capital cities and the governors with less stress. Ordinarily, this exercise is for higher grade classes because of the volume of material involved and the challenge of correctly committing to memory and recalling same outside the play-study model. Harris expresses similar experience thus: “Okay, class, lets sing our song about the 50 states to the tune of ‘Turkey in the Straw’. I could never recall the names of the United States in alphabetical order until my children taught me ‘Song for Learning the Names of the United States’ song. Then it was easy. Why? Integrating song with content area learning has a long history. In the 1800’s, lessons in mathematics, history, science, geography, language arts were regularly reinforced with song. We all intuitively understand how the ‘ABC Song’ demonstrates the effectiveness of music”. (n.p). Also “music can function as mnemonic device to aid recall of information. Just as we might the expressing “ in fourteen hundred and ninety-two Columbus sailed the ocean blue” to jug our memories, we can use song to augment our recollection of facts”. (Harris, n.p).

Learner’s practical participation model is used in these classes as the children derive joy and feel loved and as they giggle, clap and gesticulate in the process of learning without any inhibition. Several factors accounts for this virtual flair and infectious conviviality in the learning process. One of them is the relaxed atmosphere without the sternness and sanctimonious demeanor of the teacher fondly referred to as aunty or uncle as the case may be. A second factor is that the atmosphere suggests that no one is under ‘trial’ and there is free reign of feelings and at least un-harmful moves as the studies progresses. A third factor is perhaps the reward and recognition the children get when the teacher calls for volunteers to perform what has been learnt so-far. The quick thrust of fisted fingers into the air and the chorusing of; I sir, I aunty, I uncle, has its own positive psychological ambience which excites and thrills the children. To Harris, “research suggests that the more senses we use, the deeper and broader the degree of learning. Teachers are encouraged to use auditory, visual, kinesthetic and tactile modes to support the learning experience. While music is obviously an auditory activity, the kinesthetic, visual and tactile modalities can be activated via clapping, dancing and instrument playing”.(n,p).

Beyond the immediacy in virtual mental scope and learning capacity, the children appropriate valuable experiences. Juntunen and Westerlund quoting Swanwick and Jacques-Dalcroze observes that ‘another kind of relationship between the body and music ... (is) the connection between feeling, gestural, movements, imagination and musical sounds’. ‘In practice this could mean that concrete bodily

performance, for example of musical phrases, clarifies and strengthens musical experience. An educative bodily involvement with music changes thinking-in-action and leads to improved experience'. (209). Desirable cognate habits also accrue from this process; better awareness, concentration, social integration, realization, experience and expression of nuances of time, space, energy and sound-feeling. 'Transformation towards the goals of eurhythmics develops our contextually developed musicianship within our mental-emotional-bodily being, thus leading to ease, accuracy and personal expressiveness in and through musical actions, such as hearing, performance analysis, reading, writing and improvising'. (Juntunen and Westerland, p.211). La Bella observes that: multi-sensory teaching produces the best learning. When there is a difficult learning through one part of the brain, the other senses and learning modalities can compensate, compliment and cement the skill, lesson/goal you are trying to teach''. Stein observes that "music supports the development of reading skills''. To him, "children with a strong sense of beat are more likely to read well, and early music exposure helps children learn by promoting language, creativity, coordination, social interaction, self esteem and memory''. He notes further that "singing games supports children need to socialize and play instead of "pre-academic skills''. That 'music stimulates all the senses, helping children learn to recognize patterns and sequences, and that "music helps 'wire' the brain supporting a higher level of thinking and the more we get together: nurturing relationships through music, play, books and art''. (n.p).

## **CONCLUSION**

Perhaps, the greater integrity of music art lies in its credulity in relaying with required appropriateness temporal human anxieties, sobriety and solemnity of spiritual order, while contemplating contemporary and historical sequence of human existence in sound, and plastic art. While defying subterfuge associated with human quest for internal and external stability of soul body and cosmos, music represents the orbit where the past, present and future are contemplated and reconciled.

In several cultures of the world, music and society is closely integrated and works to regulate public and private affairs to achieve appropriate balance required for stability and development of the state. As a store of values, the future of the society is shown brightly or dimly depending on how the treasure throve is preserved or neglected. One of the several advantages has been attested to by scholars in various spheres of music education some of which has been captured in this study.

To observe that music takes away attention from the harrowing experiences of routine daily state of existence is perhaps stating the obvious. In the terrain and business of preparing the youth for scholarship and leadership, music has proven to be an appropriate media and mechanism for arresting and consolidating their often shifting interests and concentration for gainful studies within the context of fun and amusement.

## **Work Cited**

- Butler, David "Sound of Music" Microsoft CD Encarta® 2009 (DVD) Redmond WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.
- Harris, S. Ruth "Song as a Tool for Content Area Learning" Using Music to Promote Learning 5501 Dr. W. Ross, 2002-2013.
- Juntunen, Maria-Lean and Westlund, Heidi "Digging Dalcroze, or, Dissolving the Mind-Body Dualism: philosophical and practical remarks on the musical body in action". Music Education Research Volume 3 Number 2 2001.
- La Bella Margie "Songs for Teaching" Using Music to Promote Learning 5501 Dr. W. Ross, 2002-2013.
- Michael, J. Papa & Arvind Singhal A Dialectical Journey of Theory and Practice. London Sage Publications, 2006.
- Stein, Gari "The More We Get Together": Nurturing Relationships Through Music, Play, Books and Art. Using Music to Promote Learning 5501 Dr. W. Ross, 2002-2013.
- Waterman, Chris "African Music" Microsoft CD Encarta® 2009 (DVD) Redmond WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.