

(Re) investigating Man, Drum and Music in Healing

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the trio, man, drum and music as God's direct and indirect creations and their collective significance in music healing using experiences from Nigeria. In this connection, it studies their independent attributes and discusses them within the general framework of indigenous beliefs in non-western music healing traditions. The opinions held in this study are derived from a review of literature and field investigations. The researchers discovered that for music healing to thrive in modern societies, there should be an interaction between the ancient and the modern in terms of philosophy and practice. Hence, the factors which make indigenous music healing efficacious require a genuine scrutiny. This stride will obviously be helpful to all interested in music healing.

INTRODUCTION

For nearly two decades now, interest in music healing has developed and advanced with great rapidity. With the dawn of each day, explorations are made for possible areas where the art of music healing has had impetus from. This search has led to the query of an arm of number symbolism. To Christians and non-Christians alike, the mathematical alphabet three (3) is of great significance. Among most Christians, their thoughts revolve around God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit which is often referred to as Holy Trinity. In the Vedic culture, three-fold miseries are often mentioned, they are: *Adhibhautika* misery – misery caused by other living beings, *Adhidaivika* misery – misery caused by nature, and *Adhyatinika* misery – misery caused by ones own body and mind (Swami Praphupada 2004).

Discussing the indigenous Yoruba psychiatry, Prince (1969) identified three groups of disease classification according to their aetiology, as natural, preternatural and supernatural. To him, natural causes of mental disease could also include hereditary factors, preternatural causes caused by jealousies in communities, witchcraft in magical practices of sorcery and supernatural include ancestral connections in mental ill health. This again takes us to three major beliefs of illness causation.

In some Nigerian ethnic groups including the Esan of Edo State in Nigerian, emphasis is on odd numbers like three or five and so on. Among this people, three or five tubers of yams or three or five kola nuts are widely favoured, two or four

are usually unacceptable gifts for visitors. Exactly how old this practice is obviously outside the purview of this study, but its thrust is to examine through preliminary investigation a collective trinity shared in a tripartite unity of man, drum and music so as to be able to make relevant remarks on their collective healing properties. To enhance our general view of this study, the attributes of man, drum and music will be discussed with particular reference to healing.

MAN IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

The concept of man is a very difficult issue to address in philosophy. Descartes sees man as purely spiritual – soul that is independent of the body and that which can exist separately from the body which he considered as an extension (Akintona 2004). There have been copious literatures on the scientific origin of man and his evolution. These literatures have been backed up with evolutionary theories. Unreasonable they may sound in religious circles; they still remain subjects of so much interest for scientists, social scientists and philosophers. However, life has never been created out of matter. Swami Prabhupada (2006) queries scientists thus “if life originated from chemicals and if your science is so advanced, then why can't you create life biochemically in your laboratories”. He observes further that the issue of life, death and possession of spiritual attributes is the duty of God. Hence, he said:

No one wants to die, but scientists cannot stop death. They speak superficially about death because they cannot give any relief from

it. We do not wish to die, we do not wish to become old, and we do not wish to become deceased. But what help can the scientists offer? They cannot do anything about it (Swami Prabhupada 2006).

By these queries, it could be seen that God is the real hand in man's creation and continued existence. Hence, it becomes reasonable for man to be sociable because he lacks self-sufficient power. He has to interact to make possible the division of labour and exchange of commodities, which are necessary for the satisfaction of his material needs. These include adequate food, shelter, protection and established institutions such as the family, school church and the state (Aina 2004). The observations of Aina are important in this discourse. Man's lack of self-sufficient power in spiritual, self-protection and family matters kindles his search and respect for God. In African cosmology, God is generally acclaimed to be the creator of the entire universe and all its creatures. Aside God, there is a cyclical chain of communication between the living and the dead which are referred to as ancestors. To Fisher (1999),

Continued communication with the "living dead" is extremely important to traditional Africans. These are ancestors who have died recently enough for some people still to remember them personally. Food and drinks are set out or poured for them, acknowledging that they are still in a sense living and engaged with the people's lives. Failure to keep in touch with the ancestors is a dangerous oversight which may bring misfortune to the family.

This view above is further corroborated by Opoku in an interview conducted by Fisher (1999) when he described a scenario in Ghana thus:

Our ancestors are our saints. Christian missionaries who came here wanted us to pray to their saints, their dead people. But what about our saints... if you are grateful to your ancestors, then you have blessings from your grandmother, your grandfather, who brought you forth. Why neglect them because they are dead or call them evil people - non Africans came in and said we should not obey our ancestors, should not call upon them at all, because they are evil people. This has been a mental bondage, a terrible thing.

Just as it is in India where one makes enquiries into issues like "Why is one person rich and another poor, one an exploiter and another, the

exploited, one a victim and another the victimizer?" (Swami Prabhupada 2005). In most Nigerian communities, individuals also make personal enquiries into their careers.

Being a Healer in Nigeria: Some Insights

Many Nigerian healers claim that they were chosen by God because of certain circumstances that surround their conception and birth. Some of such circumstances are that their mothers suffered secondary barrenness before they were conceived, or that they were conceived for longer periods than nine months, or that prophets had announced their birth through in particular family or that they were born with dread locks and extraordinary abilities for dreaming accurate dreams about events or incidents which are yet to occur at a young age. Most of those belonging to this group of divinely selected healers, suffer one kind of affliction or the other individually and they see their affliction as a call to service. For instance in many African religious societies the healer or the medicine man is often a former patient and this is also the case among the Mashawe in Malawi (Chilivumbo 1972). The idea of initiatory sickness or illness surrounds the special selection of master healers (Hart 1990; Kongo 1997; Friedson 1997). In supporting this view, Nzewi (2002) opines that:

In some African cultures a person who will eventually become a healer is supernaturally selected through signs such as sickness. The signs, which often result in strange behaviour of physiological ill health, manifest irrespective of age and gender. When diagnosed, proposing or capacitating the person to become a healer could entail the medical- musical theatre of opening the inner eyes to perceive beyond the commonly visible) or the reception extraordinary communications (Nzewi 2000).

Nzewi stresses further that when such signs are apparent on a person, induction ceremonies are held to further empower him to be able to diagnose sicknesses and use them through super-ordinary sensitization. Initiatory sickness is a common phenomenon in Nigerian societies. Some of the ailments they suffer are severe headache, unexplained weakness, fainting, hearing voices, seeing strange things, discussing with invisible forces, which others around do not see, eating odd kinds of food and refusing to have a

bath for days or weeks, not being able to remain in any profession or do tangible things of economic value as an adult. While in this state, they make occasionally accurate predictions or statements even when the persons are thought of as being mentally sick. In seeking relief from their ailments, they often get double portions of being healed and becoming healers, seers and priests. Picturing a similar situation among the Binis of Midwestern Nigeria, Bradbury's observation (1973) is informative. He said:

It is believed that before a person is born, he goes and kneels before his Creator, Osenobua, and tells him what he wishes to be in the world—whether [as] a farmer or a trader, a warrior or a carver, whether a thief or a chief.... And asks for all the things material or spiritual which will enable him to carry through his chosen role successfully (Bradbury 1973).

He concluded that deviation from these predestined arrangements before God and one's guardian angel – *Ehi* could usher in ill luck for an individual. It is believed that when individuals go against their predestined plans, they also begin to experience unusual difficulties, which may lead to serious problems in the physical world. This view is similarly supported by Hart (1990) when he reported that: In Mexico, a young boy is bitten by a snake and he is paralysed for months. His grandfather, a Shaman, predicts that if he lives, he will become a great Shaman.

The Mexican could have been bitten because of digressions from original intention. Among most Nigerians, The divine ordination of a profession is still highly respected hence one finds families of morbid anatomists, musicians, healers, wine tapers etc. There is a general belief that individuals decide and define their professions in the spirit world before God moments close to their birth. Deviation from the original plan results into trouble. While grappling with such troubles, the causality of their problems is investigated and the patients are advised to retrace their steps so that they may be cured and become prosperous in their predestined field. To end this section the issues raised above are further reinforced in the words of Gartoulla when he posited that: To solve human needs and problems the gods have several alternatives. One of the most important alternatives is to empower a few chosen persons through dreams to help cure sickness and diseases (Gartoulla 1998).

THE DRUM IN NIGERIA

Much work has been done in Nigeria on musical instruments by some Nigerian and non-Nigerian musicologists alike. Prominent among them are the contributions of Beier (1954), Akpabot (1971), Ojo (1973), and Bankole et al. (1975) to mention just a few. In these works the extra musical functions of the selected instruments were also treated. Arising from this growing literature, it is evident that musical instruments are not just artificial sound producing materials for the accompaniment of songs or entertainment tools alone but have other functions especially in healing rituals. The identification of the tree to be cut, the construction and consecration of the drum before use are rituals knitted.

It is generally agreed that drums among all African peoples have anthropomorphic features. This understanding pervades the works of Sowande (1972), Bebey (1975), Hart (1990), Finn (1992), Koetting (1992) and Aluede (2006). To them certain African instruments are gods, deities and spirits. This is of course why drums are named after various deities. Beyond christening drums after deities, the woods used for drum construction and consecration processes are significant.

Bebey (1975) posits that the drum is in certain circumstances equated with a man in Africa, and so women are encouraged to treat it with much respect and reverence they give to their husbands. Consequently, women are not allowed to touch or beat the drums because women are not expected to beat their husbands.

There is a central reason why drums are respected in Africa and all over the world. Roger (1988) asserts that in Tibet, trumpets and drums are made from human bones and skulls. This view is further supported by Hart (1990) when he says specifically of Tibetan musical instrument that "the most distinctive Damarus are made from human skulls". In relation to this, Sowande (1972) says that

Among the Yorubas of Nigeria (and presumably in other areas of Africa also), the very first step in making a drum is the ceremony which placates the spirit inhabiting the tree which is to be cut down for the wood from which the drum – frame will be subsequently carved.

He elaborates on this issue further when he

describes some special features of the drums thus:

...every drum has its "altar" carved on the drum-frame. Here is the actual spot at which the drummer communes with his patron-deity of drumming. The drummer who neglects his regular communion with his patron deity will find either that his drum goes to pieces or he will be constantly out of employment (Sowande 1972).

The Yoruba people are not alone in this practice. Supporting this same view, Koetting (1992) remarks that:

There is more to musical instruments in Africa than just how they look and how they are played. Many people in Africa including Kasena, understand the material objects have spirits or souls, that is, they are more than just material objects... when a Kasena craftsman makes a calabash drum, for example, he does not just begin to play. Certain things must be done for the spirit of the drum to ensure that the drum will speak properly (Koetting 1992).

The Yoruba of Nigeria and Kasena of Ghana are not alone in this direction. In Esan, cowries, native chalk and white cloth are presented at the base of the tree they want to use for construction. The essence of this ritual is to make the spirit of the tree accompany the wood which will be made into drum frame. Though not a general practice in the whole of Esan, it is done by those in special societies and cults. In some cases where devotees do not construct their musical instruments by themselves, after the purchase, the instruments are further consecrated. In Iyayi society of the Esan, for example, the senior priest leads others after purifying themselves with alligator pepper, to consecrate the instruments with alligator pepper to purge them of their impurities they have acquired from the market. After this preliminary purification, the instruments are further blessed and anointed with palm kernel oil and palm oil. Immediately after this exercise, the instruments automatically assume the status of sacred musical instruments and are treated as such.

In Africa, there are records of drum construction and consecration procedures. It is these exercises that give African drums their status of human equivalence. From available records in Ghana, the sacrificial drums of the Ashanti are covered with the membrane of human skin and decorated with human skulls. Similarly, in East

Africa, it is said that coronation drums were only played by sticks made from human tibias. How old these practices are and where exactly it first started remains an unattainable goal and outside the purview of this paper. However, this practice may have been in existence ever since the origin of African nation. The quotation below confirms this view.

In South Pacific, I've read the drum maker climbs the tree that is to furnish the wood for the drum and does not come down until the drum is finished. ... In parts of west Africa, the selected tree is fed on egg while the drum, maker delivers this prayers: I'm coming to cut you down and carve you up! Do not let the iron cut me. Do not let me suffer in health (Hart 1980).

Relying on his observations, Hart remarks further that for the Shaman, the drum is not so much a musical instrument as a vehicle for transportation most frequently in Siberia, it is characterized as a horse that the Shaman rides to the world tree, though it can also be a boat (with the drumstick becoming an oar) or a bow (with the drumstick doubling as the arrow (Hart 1990:171). From the ongoing discussion, it has become unnecessary to further stress that drums are believed to have inherent powers in them by their nature of construction and consecration.

The Nature of Music and Its Attributes

In this segment, the origin of music will be discussed. This will lead us into some important attributes of music and its relevance. Music has never at any time been seen to be an invention of man. Reck (1992) says in Hindu mythology, music was originally reserved for the Gods alone, but they took pity on the struggle of human beings and so brought music to them in order to relieve their sufferings. If one may ask what constitutes suffering? And how can music help in attenuating these? The answers may be found in the following views.

The existence of illness in the body may be called a shadow of the true illness which is held by man in his mind (Hzrat Inayat Khan 1973 and 1978). He says that by the power of music, the mind may become exalted so that it rises above the thought of illness; then the illness is forgotten. In a similar vein, McClennan says that:

The exoteric philosophy and practice of music is our legacy and heritage perhaps the oldest and most sacred of our musical traditions.

Born of an awareness that in some way music-making helped us to feel bolder and less afraid, music was a vehicle through which we expressed the interconnectedness of our universe (McClellan 1988).

Although the healing effects of music is attested to by most peoples of the world as an age old tradition, there are palpable concerns of scholars which is captured in the preceding words.

Are we not over stretching the potency of music? Can music do all these that are being ascribed to it? If music is used along side any oral item like anointing oil as used in most Pentecostal churches, can't the oil be seen as material medica? If music accompanies any healing ritual, how do we measure the level of contribution of the music used or the ritual in healing? Put differently, can't what is thought of as material medica be placebo? (Aluede 2009).

Such comments allude to the fact that music healing still assumes an imprecise status in some areas. Greatly disturbed by this development, Friedson (1996) complains that "Ethnographers have not given musical experience a correspondingly prominent place in their research. Music is usually treated as an epiphenomenon, something that accompanies other more important ritual activities". Much light was thrown into this somewhat misty climate when Danielou attests to the many uses of music as a vehicle to immaterial world and as a calmativ for the sake of brevity. In his words, he says,

Music can be a powerful instrument of psychological action, a means of communication with the supernatural.... there is music which is orientated towards a ritual or magic action, towards a psycho physiological action creating states of trance or else towards the creation of an emotional climate acting either as a calmativ or a stimulant; this kind of music is based on elements that are utterly different from those of decorative music (Danielou 1972).

In support of the opinions above, Hindley (1982) says, bed wetter among the Akan of Ghana are cured of the disorder when they are treated with songs for bed wetter devoid of any other ancillaries. McClellan (1988) and Swami Prabhupada (1991) observe that nowhere in the world is the practice of music as a spiritual discipline more highly developed than in India where Mantra Yoga and Nada Yoga - two forms of meditation are practised. The Indians believe

that two types of music are used for spiritual purposes; one leads to a state of trance while the other leads to a meditative state. The music that leads to the state of trance is used for spiritual and healing purposes. In Hindu belief, chanting can be done in two ways: real chanting which is called kirtana and singing the mantras, which if sung devotedly makes the singer achieve physical and spiritual purity which in other words are physical and emotional healing (Prabhupada 1991).

Man, Drum and Music: What is the Connection?

The coming into being of any society presupposes admittance of some values: moral or constitutional. Each society specifies its moral conventions and moral values, which differ from society to society. The kind of political ideology obtained in society is derived from the set of values put in place. There is no individual good that can be pursued with out the influence of the dictates of the larger society. Hence, the society plays a predominant role in the making and unmaking of the individual (Akintona 2004)

To be able to fully appreciate what is to be discussed in this segment, the Figure 1 is very vital. In the figure, it is contended that God is the creator of man who in turn makes the drum and God himself is the creator of music. This triangle of man, drum and music is further encircled by God's creative energy. The circle is representative of the world and its creatures as God's handiwork.

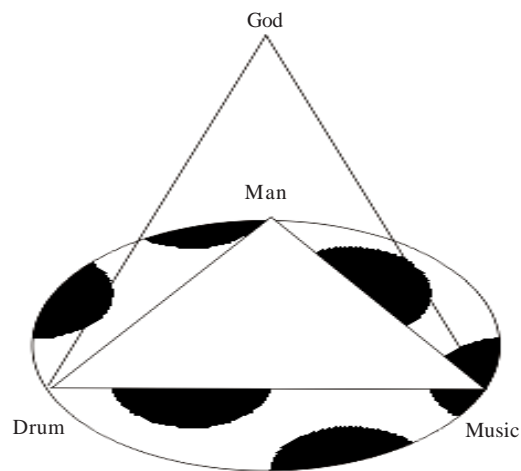


Fig. 1.

Giving a personal experience Olatunji in an interview conducted by Hart (1990) says:

For many years I have thought about the healing power of the drum, and the philosophy I have come to is that the drum is a kind of trinity. The body of the drum, which comes from the tree, contains the living spirit of the three. Great care is taken to make sure that the wood of the drum is alive. And the same is true of the skin; whether it is a tanned hide of a goat or a Buffalo, it also contains a spirit that is still alive. And they join those two spirits with that of the person playing the drum, the result is an irresistible force, a trinity, a balance that gives the drum its healing power.

This trinity is the precursor of another broad trinity of which man has with music and the drum. It may be superfluous to say that each member of this trio is energy charged and that they have vibrations. Ernst Berendt's opinion cited by Hart (1990); is of much necessity in this regard. He opined that the entire world is sound, and he proposed that:

- a. Since the one sure thing we can say about matter is that it is vibrating and
- b. Since all vibrations are theoretically sound, then
- c. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the universe is music and should be perceived as such. In a similar development, McClennan (1988) examined the use of tones in healing process. He remarked that the study cannot be perfectly carried out without a leaning to exoteric concepts. He remarked that:

....Humans and indeed all manifested beings come into the world with the aid of an actual frequency, maintain a frequency through out life and exit from this life by a means of frequency...the whole cosmos and each being within the cosmos is maintained through the principles of resonance (McClennan 1988).

Although the scientific investigation of the effect of frequency on human body and psyche is relatively new, it has been a subject of much concern to the traditional peoples of Nigeria hence its use in Bori, Olokun and Iyayi to mention but a few. In both formal and informal settings, man makes music consciously and unconsciously. From taking an evening walk, bathing in the house, working on the fields or in the office to making music during healing rites, music remains the hub or pivot of an African's life. In the

opinion of Callahan (1989), "Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". To achieve this physical, mental and social well-being, collective human activity is a *sine qua non* and the recipe is found in musical activities. This assertion is authenticated by Cottrell when she said that

A principle that music utilizes in affecting patients is the principle of diversion. This method of utilizing music and sound is helpful in taking the attention away from an unpleasant and unwanted situation. An example of diversionary music is playing of bright, happy, energizing music when the listener feels down in the dumps. Music in this sense can be used in a therapeutic situation to reduce anxiety and pain, transporting the listener to another reality temporarily during the healing process (Cottrell 2000).

To use music for therapeutic purposes in an ethnomedical sense requires much caution, Gartoulla (1998) warns that

The treatment of a disease depends upon what is held to be the cause of that disease. If an educated man believes that the cause of disease is naturalistic, he contacts empirical medications from various sources such as drug peddlers, drug retailers, grocers, community leaders, doctors etc. In a similar fashion, if a man believes the cause of a disease to be the wrath of gods, influence of an evil spirit, sorcery or breach of taboos, he consults appropriate agencies for treatment by witchcraft and magic, charms, amulets, or even sometimes uses ethnomedicine where they are held to possess magical properties.

Indigenous Nigerian cultures have strong consciousness of the therapeutic imperative of the musical arts that methodically target all ages in a society. In many of her ethnic groups, music is held to be of so much significance and its role in healing is well-attested to in their music healing traditions all over. Through a review of selected literature as shown in this study, one could see that the trio which man forms with the drum and music in traditional healing rites are symbolic. So many healing equations can be arrived at in this trinity and some of them are:

1. Singing + drumming + dancing = an improved audience (general group healing). This could be seen as prophylactic treatment.

2. Singing positive healing texts to self + drumming + dancing = an improved man (individual healing).
3. Intense drumming+singing+hand clapping = Healing (a strong weapon against fear of loneliness, bereavement and fears associated with aging).

CONCLUSION

In this paper, an attempt has been made to identify man as God's creature, the drum as a human effort and music as God's invention. After this identification, the study investigated in detail their independent attributes and how they aid in collective music healing. It is an admitted fact that in a paper so short, musical trinity and their essence in music healing equation cannot be effectively dealt with as a matter of finality. However, in this study, it is brought to the knowledge of scholars interested in music healing that beyond music, the music healer, and the musical instruments used in music healing rites are in themselves healing forces and so researchers and researchers should explore these areas for the total healthfulness of man. If this presentation is able to engender further discourse on this critical issue of our time, then it may have achieved its purpose.

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