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# The organ works of Fela Sowande: a Nigerian organist-composer

Godwin Simeon Sadoh

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, gsadoh1@lsu.edu*

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**THE ORGAN WORKS OF FELA SOWANDE:  
A NIGERIAN ORGANIST-COMPOSER**

**A Monograph**

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Musical Arts**

**in**

**The School of Music**

**By**

**Godwin Simeon Sadoh**

**B.A., Obafemi Awolowo University, 1988**

**M.A., University of Pittsburgh, 1998**

**M.Mus., University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2000**

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## ABSTRACT

Fela Sowande (1905-1987) has a huge compositional output including orchestral and vocal works. However, his organ music outnumbered the totality of his compositions. His organ pieces represent a truly intercultural music in which distinct tripartite cultural idioms are evident—Nigerian, African American and European. Works of this nature serve as creative source materials for aspiring composers, performers, scholars, music educators, and students in Africa and the world.

This composer, folklorist, and music educator was born into a well-known music family in Nigeria. He was active in radio broadcasting, Yoruba folklore and mythology, indigenous music research, Nigerian art music, performance, orchestral conducting, and teaching at various institutions of higher learning in Nigeria and the United States of America. The research works were funded by the federal government of Nigeria and a Ford Foundation Grant. This led to the production of a series of manuscripts and cassette recordings including secular, traditional, and contemporary Nigerian music, poetry, proverbs, and language, for distribution by the Broadcasting Foundation of America as educational materials.

This study focuses primarily on those organ works by Sowande in which indigenous Nigerian source materials are copiously employed. Chapter one presents a brief historical background of art music in Nigeria; chapter two is a short biography of the composer; chapter three deals with the classification of the organ works according to their function in the church: (1) liturgical pieces; (2) preludes and postludes; and (3) concert or recital pieces. Chapter four presents a cultural and/or ethnomusicological

analysis of the selected organ works. This entails a discussion of the pieces under three salient characteristics of Nigerian traditional music: (1) the elements of musical communication; (2) the elements of dance; and (3) the elements of musical conception.



## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has been blessed with a few well trained organist-composers since the arrival of Christianity around the 1840s.<sup>1</sup> The schools built by European missionaries and the colonial administration had a great impact on the emergence of the ‘Nigerian organ school.’ The incentive to become professional organist-composers was further propelled and inspired through the private lessons given to talented Nigerian church musicians at an early age. The musicians had their formative periods at the mission schools, church choirs, and under organ playing apprenticeships.<sup>2</sup> This thesis will primarily focus on selected organ works by one of these musicians, Fela Sowande, a Nigerian organist-composer. He composed seventeen major works for organ:

1. *K’a Mura*, 1945 (publisher: Chappell, London)
2. *Pastourelle*, 1952 (publisher: Chappell, London)
3. *Obangiji*, 1955 (publisher: Chappell, London)
4. *Kyrie*, 1955 (publisher: Chappell, London)
5. *Yoruba Lament*, 1955 (publisher: Chappell, London)
6. *Jesu Olugbala*, 1955 (publisher: Novello, London)
7. *Joshua Fit de Battle of Jericho*, 1955 (publisher: Chappell, London)
8. *Go Down Moses*, 1955 (publisher: Chappell, London)
9. *Oyigiyigi*, 1958 (publisher: Ricordi, New York)

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<sup>1</sup> Bode Omojola, “Style in Modern Nigerian Art Music: The Pioneering Works of Fela Sowande,” *Africa* 68, no. 4 (1998) : 455.

<sup>2</sup> Godwin Sadoh, “A Profile of Nigerian Organist-Composers,” *The Organ* 82, no. 323 (Feb-March 2003) : 18.

10. *Gloria*, 1958 (publisher: Ricordi, New York)
11. *Prayer* (Oba A Ba Ke), 1958 (publisher: Ricordi, New York)
12. *Sacred Idioms of the Negro* (unpublished manuscript)
13. *Plainsong*, n.d. (publisher: Chappell, London)
14. *Fantasia in D*, n.d. (publisher: Chappell, London)
15. *Festival March*, n.d. (publisher: Chappell, London)
16. *K'a Mo Rokoso*, 1966 (publisher: Ricordi, New York)
17. *Choral Preludes on Yoruba Sacred Melodies* (publisher: Novello, London)

This study will be limited to the organ works in which indigenous Nigerian source materials are employed. Organ pieces with original themes or works based on Afro-American spirituals such as *Joshua Fit de Battle of Jericho*, *Go Down Moses* and *Bury Me Eas' or Wis'* (from the *Sacred Idioms of the Negro*), shall be exempted from the analysis.

Fela Sowande and his organ music deserve a scholarly study for several reasons; although he belongs to the second generation of Nigerian organist-composers, it was Sowande who laid the foundation for the 'Nigerian organ school' through his numerous compositions for the instrument. Sowande is the first Africans to popularize organ works by natives of Africa in Europe and the United States. He was one of the pioneer composers to incorporate indigenous African elements such as folksongs, rhythms and other types of traditional source materials in solo works for organ. He is considered the most prolific Nigerian composer for solo organ in his country.

Sowande's accomplishments in the field of music demonstrate his worthiness for an independent study. Eileen Southern acknowledged that Sowande's works have been performed and recorded widely in the United States, Africa and Europe.<sup>3</sup> Abiola Irele points out that art music composed by Africans is one of the least to get recognition at the international level.<sup>4</sup> It is for this reason that efforts are being made by African scholars, composers, and performers to research, document, analyze and promote modern African art music such as Fela Sowande's organ works.

This study will contribute toward the understanding of organ literature in Nigeria as exemplified in the life and music of Fela Sowande. It will answer some of the questions about how Africans became interested in writing Western classical music. Afolabi Alaja-Browne states that Sowande, like many great minds of the contemporary musical scene, turned his attention to issues involved in the syncretic (African and European) approach at a time when some of his colleagues thought it would be futile.<sup>5</sup>

The discussion of Sowande's music will illuminate the relationship between traditional and contemporary musical processes in post colonial Nigeria through the examination of rhythmic, melodic, and extra-musical properties. Kwabena Nketia, one of the leading African musicologists, argues that procedures in contemporary music should employ the process of developing modern idioms out of traditional music or the usages of previous generations of composers and creative performers.<sup>6</sup> Kofi Agawu also corroborates this assertion when he states that in most cultures of the world, the creative

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<sup>3</sup> Eileen Southern, "Conversation with Fela Sowande: High Priest of Music," *Black Perspective in Music* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1976) : 92.

<sup>4</sup> Abiola Irele, "Is African Music Possible?" *Transition* 61 (1993) : 56.

<sup>5</sup> Afolabi Alaja-Browne, "A History of Intercultural Art Music in Nigeria," *Intercultural Music* 1, no. 29 (1995) : 82.

<sup>6</sup> Kwabena Nketia, "Developing Contemporary Idioms Out of Traditional Music," *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 24 (1982) : 82.

act of composition may be defined simply as the transformation of pre-existing material into new, individualized structures.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the analysis of Sowande's organ works will stand as source materials for creative use by composers both in Nigeria and the world at large. The investigation thus affords African and non-Africans alike the opportunity to understand the creative procedures of contemporary Nigerian art music. Indeed, this study will contribute toward ethnomusicological research on modern intercultural music, and the synthesis of African and European idioms.

The introduction to this study sets both the purpose and the parameters for the writing. In retrospect, the purpose is to examine mainly organ works based on indigenous Nigerian source materials by Fela Sowande in the context of cultural, religious, and socio/political influences on music making in post colonial Nigeria. Any references to organ building, registration practices, secular compositions or choral works for voices and organ accompaniment will be excluded.

The historical background as it relates to the development of art music in Nigeria will be the focus of chapter one. It will illustrate how Nigerian musicians first came in contact with Western classical music such as organ works through the churches, schools, modern elite, and socio/economic factors instituted by the European missionaries and colonial administration.

Chapter two will present a short biography of Fela Sowande as the pioneer of solo organ works in Nigeria. The impact of his bi-cultural upbringing in education, religious beliefs and philosophies of life, and events that surrounded his formative years will be

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<sup>7</sup> Kofi Agawu, "The Impact of Language on Musical Composition in Ghana: An Introduction to the Musical Style of Ephraim Amu," *Ethnomusicology* 27, no. 1 (January 1984) : 37.

thoroughly addressed as a major influence on the type of music he composed. In this regard, Sowande may be perceived as a conduit of Nigerian cultural heritage.

The major portion of this study will be devoted to the discussion of Sowande's music. In chapter three, his organ pieces will be classified according to their function in the church as (i) prelude or postlude; (ii) liturgical music, e.g. offertory, communion; or (iii) as concert pieces meant for recitals.

Chapter four will present a cultural and/or ethnomusicological analysis of Sowande's selected pieces for organ solo. This will involve an examination of specific indigenous source materials such as rhythmic organization, melodic constructs/thematic materials (music communication), interrelations of music and dance, and titles given to the works. As Sowande himself points out:

African music can only be understood and appreciated in relation to the special quality of African Society. For the African, the structure of his society is the environment which shapes his attitude to life and therefore conditions his art. . . Its philosophy, religious and ethical ideals influenced African music. . . The rhythm of the recurring seasons, the natural rhythm of the earth, has inspired much of the specifically religious music and is reflected in many traditional melodies. It formed the basis of African rhythm, essentially a religious rhythm.<sup>8</sup>

Emphasis will be placed on a cultural approach to the understanding of Sowande's organ works. Agawu rightly explains that one of the most persistent and at the same time controversial dichotomies used by ethnomusicologists is the us/them discourse. This concept is also referred to as the insider/outsider, etic/emic, or experience near/experience far.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the crux of analyzing Sowande's music will be essentially based on the etic approach; that is, an explanation of the music from the viewpoint of an insider--a Nigerian ethnomusicologist.

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<sup>8</sup> Fela Sowande, "African Music," *Africa* 14, no. 6 (April 1944) : 340.

<sup>9</sup> Kofi Agawu, "Representing African Music," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (1992) : 259.

Chapter five will summarize the thesis and briefly recapitulate some of the cogent points discussed in the monograph. It will also stress the dynamics, growth and change that art music in Nigeria is under-going in the twenty-first century.

## CHAPTER ONE

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ART MUSIC IN NIGERIA

The history of art music in Nigeria is shaped by several related experiences through contact with two domineering forces, the Christian church and colonization. The establishment of the Christian mission in Nigeria as far back as the 1840s<sup>1</sup> marked the turning point of Western musical influence in the country. However, other institutions such as the Christian mission schools, institutions of higher learning, the modern elite, and the military bands further contributed to the introduction of Western classical music in Nigeria. In addition, socio/political and economic factors also played an integral part in establishing Western art music in Nigeria. As Fela Sowande recalls:

January 1914 was a landmark in the history of Nigeria, for it was in the years immediately preceding that date that the Nigerian traditional way of life began to come under increasing pressures designed to uproot and destroy it. The ringleaders were the missionaries on the one hand, and on the other, a colonial government that had no patience with anything it did not approve, and had adopted Christianity as its official religion.<sup>2</sup>

#### The Church

The European Christian missionary exegesis that penetrated Africa as early as the fourth century A.D.<sup>3</sup> became more pronounced during the first half of the nineteenth century and brought about significant socio-cultural change in Nigeria. According to

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<sup>1</sup> Bode Omojola, *Nigerian Art Music* (Ibadan: Institut Francais de Recherche en Afrique, 1995), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Fela Sowande, "Nigerian Music and Musicians: Then and Now," *Composer* 19 (Spring 1966) : 25.

<sup>3</sup> Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 15.

Sowande, the Christian missionaries first settled in Abeokuta in western Nigeria, starting with the Anglicans in 1846, the Wesleyans in 1847, and the Baptists in 1850. By 1966, Christian activities were more pronounced in southwest Nigeria and this could be the main reason for western Nigeria to have had about a dozen musicians with academic training abroad, while eastern Nigeria had about three, and northern Nigeria had none.<sup>4</sup>

The impact of the Christian church on art music in Nigeria cannot be ignored. Akin Euba states that “music has always been a strong feature of African traditional religions and there is no doubt that the presence of music in the Christian worship was one of the elements that attracted Nigerian converts.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Nigerians were first exposed to Western classical music such as hymns, church anthems, and musical instruments like harmonium, organ and piano through the church. However, this exposure was at the expense of indigenous music. Through the church, Nigerians were taught to emulate European music as an ideal art form. Followers of the faith were prohibited from all forms of traditional practices including the playing of traditional musical instruments both in and outside the church. The missionaries feared that traditional music could lead the Christian converts back to ‘pagan’ (traditional) worship.<sup>6</sup>

Lazarus Ekwueme recounts how “early missionaries tagged all indigenous forms of art as the work of the devil, especially as almost invariably those associated with some religious or quasi-religious ceremonies . . . The amount of damage done materially and psychologically to the culture of the Igbo ethnic group may probably never be fully

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<sup>4</sup> (Sowande 1966, 30)

<sup>5</sup> Akin Euba, *Modern African Music* (Bayreuth: Iwalewa-Haus, 1993), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Godwin Sadoh, “Joshua Uzoigwe: An Introduction to the Life and Music of a Nigerian Composer” (M.A. Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1998), 12.



assessed.”<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, Western music was not easily incorporated into the church services because the congregation had no knowledge of the English language.

Consequently, they had difficulty in singing the hymns in English, which was very foreign and distant to them. Recognizing such problems, the missionaries with the help of the educated members of their congregations translated European texts into indigenous languages. This effort represents the first attempt of adapting the Christian worship to Nigerian cultural roots.

The idea of making Christian religious songs attractive to native converts merely introduced additional problems and was vehemently opposed by the educated members of the congregation. The elite of the church opposed this effort because of the discrepancy between the local dialects and the melodic contour of the European hymn tunes. Nigerian languages are tonal and, therefore, the meaning of a particular word depends on its intonation.<sup>8</sup> Euba points out that “Nigerian tone language usually had its own inherent melodic structure and the imposition of an imported melody usually resulted in a conflict with the natural melodic structure of the text, thereby distorting its meaning.”<sup>9</sup> In the traditional culture, melodies mirror the tonal inflections of the song texts. When indigenous words are sung to pre-composed European hymn tunes, the melodies invariably conflict with the tonal inflections of the local texts and distort their meaning.

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<sup>7</sup> Lazarus Ekwueme, “African Music in Christian Liturgy: The Igbo Experiment,” *African Music* 5, no. 3 (1974) : 13.

<sup>8</sup> (Sadoh 1998, 12)

<sup>9</sup> Akin Euba, “An Introduction to Music in Nigeria,” *Nigerian Music Review* 1, no. 1 (1977) : 13.

There were other reasons why translated hymns were problematic for the churches in Nigeria. Western songs are based upon the underlying rhythms of European languages. As Euba argues, the concept of rhythm in Nigerian vocal music is different from that of Europe where poetic meter is important.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Nigerian texts are not appropriate for European tunes.

The second level of adapting Christian worship to the Nigerian culture was the introduction of parodied songs. At this stage, sacred religious texts from the Christian Bible were juxtaposed with pre-existing traditional folk tunes.

In spite of all these efforts, European church hymns alienated the Nigerian church congregations, because they were unsuitable for dancing. This was due to the prohibition of traditional musical instruments, which could have provided the natural rhythmic background for movement.<sup>11</sup> Turkson argues that the whole structure of the performing arts was paralyzed when early missionaries interdicted drumming and dancing from the church. He explains that the different components of the performing arts in Africa are so interwoven that subtracting one paralyzes the structure of the whole, and the remainder cannot perform as efficiently.<sup>12</sup> Euba describes the experience among the Yoruba of Nigeria:

At the onset the music that was used in Yoruba churches was markedly different from the music to which the Yoruba were accustomed in their traditional culture. The earliest Yoruba hymns were simply translations of European hymn texts that were sung to European hymn tunes. This

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<sup>10</sup> Akin Euba, "Yoruba Music in the Church: The Development of a Neo-African Art among the Yoruba of Nigeria," Chap. in *African Musicology: Current Trends* vol. 2 (Atlanta, GA: Crossroads Press, 1992), 48.

<sup>11</sup> (Sadoh 1998, 13)

<sup>12</sup> Adolphus Turkson, "Contrafactum and Parodied Song Texts in Religious Music: A Discussion of Problems and Challenges in Contemporary African Music," Chap. in *African Musicology: Current Trends* vol. 2 (Atlanta, GA: Crossroads Press, 1992), 12.

resulted in an unhappy cultural marriage . . . Although music and dance were almost inseparable in Yoruba culture, dancing is not a feature of the modern European church and it is almost certain that the European missionaries who controlled the early Yoruba churches did not tolerate dancing in the church.<sup>13</sup>

Experiments with translated church hymns continued to dissatisfy the educated elite in the congregations, including the church organists and choirmasters. Therefore, Nigerian church musicians began to write their own hymns. Experimental composition involved adapting existing indigenous melodies to newly composed local texts. In other instances, the composers created new tunes for original indigenous texts. This involved creating melodies with contours that followed the tonal inflections of the words. Thus, the texts retained their proper meaning when sung. This effort represents the third level of adapting Christian worship to the Nigerian culture.

According to Afolabi Alaja-Browne, Nigerian church musicians began to compose their own church hymns using indigenous languages around 1902.<sup>14</sup> Also, Euba notes that the melodies of the new hymns are in consonance with the inherent tonal patterns of the texts. These new hymns employ a rhythmic style which is closer to that of traditional music.<sup>15</sup> Further links with traditional culture are evident in some of the Nigeria's indigenous church music which was accompanied with traditional instruments and dance. This kind of music may be observed in the Cherubim and Seraphim churches.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> (Euba 1993, 46)

<sup>14</sup> Afolabi Alaja-Browne, "Ayo Bankole: His Life and Works" (M.A. Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1981), 4.

<sup>15</sup> (Euba 1977, 14)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Sowande regrets that the present day Yoruba churches still persist in using foreign tunes to Yoruba texts in the current Yoruba Hymn Book, with complete distortion of meaning, while ignoring the collection of Yoruba hymns in the supplement of the same Yoruba Hymn Book, collected by the late Canon J. J. Ransome Kuti, in which words and tunes are in agreement.<sup>17</sup> An in-depth study of the relationship between tonal language and melodic contour falls outside of the scope of this study and has already been undertaken by African musicologists such as Ademola Adegbite,<sup>18</sup> Kofi Agawu,<sup>19</sup> Afolabi Alaja-Browne,<sup>20</sup> Lazarus Ekwueme,<sup>21</sup> and Akin Euba.<sup>22</sup>

The United Native African Church was founded on August 14, 1891, while the United African Methodist Church was founded in 1917. The African Church was established in 1901 by a breakaway faction of Saint Paul's Church, Breadfruit, Lagos. The Aladura Church, as well as the Cherubim and Seraphim, which epitomize the Africanization of Christianity in Nigeria were created in the 1920s, and it was in these missions that the earliest incorporation of African music within the Christian Church was utilized.<sup>23</sup>

The newly created church hymns retained some European musical properties but also incorporated Nigerian indigenous elements. For instance, the hymn writers used the Western diatonic scale system and harmonium or organ for accompaniment. It was these

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<sup>17</sup> Fela Sowande, "The Teaching of Music in Nigerian Schools," TMs [photocopy], p. 29-30, Courtesy of Dartmouth College Library, New Hampshire.

<sup>18</sup> Ademola Adegbite, "Traditional Music in Yorubaland" (M.A. Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1974).

<sup>19</sup> Kofi Agawu, "The Impact of Language on Musical Composition in Ghana: An Introduction to the Style of Ephraim Amu," *Ethnomusicology* 27, no. 1 (1984) : 37-72.

<sup>20</sup> (Alaja-Browne 1981)

<sup>21</sup> (Ekwueme 1974)

<sup>22</sup> (Euba 1989)

<sup>23</sup> (Omojola 1995, 17)

experimental procedures in the church that marked the genesis of the synthesis of traditional Nigerian and Western musical idioms.

Consequently, we could argue that the development of art music is rooted in the efforts of the pioneering Nigerian organists and choirmasters. These early composers subsequently created advanced works such as church anthems, sacred cantatas, and oratorios.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Christian Mission Schools**

The introduction of mission schools helped to create an atmosphere conducive for the teaching and practice of European music in Nigeria.<sup>25</sup> Music curriculum prepared by the missionaries in the Christian schools served as another means of introducing Western classical music to Nigerians. According to Robert Kwami, the development of Western education in Nigeria commenced in 1842. At the Yoruba mission of the Christian Missionary Society, the curriculum comprised mainly of reading, writing, arithmetic and singing. Later, formal music education started with some teacher training colleges and secondary (high) schools which expanded their curricula to add lessons in theory of music, singing and concert shows.<sup>26</sup> This view is shared by Mosunmola Omibiyi who writes, “The aim was merely to produce catechists, priests and headmasters who could read music, play hymns and chants on the harmonium from staff notation . . . The content of the curriculum was confined to singing, theory of music and harmonium playing.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> (Sadoh 1998, 15)

<sup>25</sup> Bode Omojola, “Contemporary Art Music in Nigeria: An Introductory Note on the Works of Ayo Bankole,” *Africa* 64, no. 4 (1994) : 534.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Kwami, “Music Education in Ghana and Nigeria: A Brief Survey,” *Africa* 64, no. 4 (1994) : 546.

<sup>27</sup> Mosunmola Omibiyi, “The Process of Education and the Search for Identity in Contemporary African Music,” Chap. in *African Musicology: Current Trends* vol. 2 (Atlanta, GA: Crossroads Press, 1992), 29.

Apparently, the intention of the missionaries in this case was to meet the immediate needs of the church. Sowande corroborating this view writes:

The mission schools conferred great benefits on the young Nigerian, but at the price of further weaning him away from his traditional background and music; while these mission schools paid great attention to music education, it was to European music, and with the purpose of enabling their schoolmasters, catechists, and priests to play simple Anglican chants and hymns from staff notation on the harmonium, which replaced Nigerian traditional musical instruments. Nigerian drums were totally taboo—they were ‘pagan instruments,’ and in the front line of those things destined to be consigned to hell . . .<sup>28</sup>

Throughout elementary and high schools, Nigerian traditional music was excluded from the syllabi during the colonial era. Rather, the curriculum consisted of Christian hymns, European folksongs and songs with vernacular texts set to pre-existing English folk melodies. Special schools like government high schools—Queens’ College and Kings’ College in Nigeria, added piano playing and the history of Western music to the syllabi. Students showing promising talents were enrolled for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, London, examinations.<sup>29</sup> Kwami reiterates this view by admitting that, “music taught and performed in a number of British West African schools during the nineteenth century comprised predominantly, if not exclusively, Western hymns and songs.”<sup>30</sup>

Prior to the mid-1980s, the formal music syllabus in Nigerian schools included mainly European music. Thus, students who participated in art music could graduate without any knowledge of their traditional music, but with a taste for Western music. Informally, schools had drumming and dancing ensembles that were based on traditional idioms. It was in the late 1980s that indigenous music was first introduced into the

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<sup>28</sup> (Sowande 1966, 31)

<sup>29</sup> (Sadoh 1998, 17)

<sup>30</sup> (Kwami 1994, 547)

Nigerian school syllabus by the Federal Ministry of Education. For the first time in the history of music education in Nigeria, pupils were being taught music of their native country. The new syllabus introduced both the study of traditional music and the study of modern Nigerian art music by its composers.<sup>31</sup> It was also about this time that the West African Examinations Council introduced a new syllabus for music in the prospectus of the West Africans' Schools' Certificate (presently referred to as the General Certificate of Education). As Kwami observes, "unlike the former examination, which was based exclusively on the academic study of Western classical music, the new syllabus of the West African Examination Council includes the study of African music, Western music and the music of people of African descent in the United States and the Caribbean."<sup>32</sup>

### **Institutions of Higher Learning**

In the 1960s, the University of Nigeria at Nsukka established the first college of music in Africa, while the Alvan Ikoku College of Education at Owerri began producing music teachers for secondary schools and teacher training colleges.<sup>33</sup> At the teacher training colleges, which supplied most of the personnel for the Christian missions, the music curriculum was comprised of theory, Western music, and harmonium playing. It is not surprising that educated Nigerians from such schools would deprecate their own music since they had not been exposed to it in school. At the university level, music was absent from the curriculum during the colonial era. Music was used, rather, as an entertainment and as an extra-curricular activity.<sup>34</sup> Students at this level were exposed to

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<sup>31</sup> Akin Euba, *Essays on Music in Africa* 1 (Bayreuth: Iwalewa-Haus, 1988), 108.

<sup>32</sup> (Kwami 1994, 552)

<sup>33</sup> (Kwami 1994, 553)

<sup>34</sup> (Omibiyi 1989, 30)

music through the musical productions organized by social clubs within the university campus.

Starting from the 1960s, departments of music were created within Nigerian universities. Prominent among these are the departments of music at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, the University of Lagos, and the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University). A critical look at the current curricular of these institutions presently reveals the dominance of Western classical music over traditional music. The curricular consist of Western orchestration, history, counterpoint, harmony, and studies in Western instruments, particularly the piano and orchestral instruments. Performance majors or minors were made to study mostly works by Western European and American composers such as Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn etc.

Bode Omojola<sup>35</sup> observes that the music curricula at both federal and state levels in Nigeria tended to focus mainly on the study of European music. Although efforts are now being made in institutions such as the Universities of Nigeria, Ife, Ilorin, and The Polytechnic, Ibadan, to incorporate traditional music in the curricula, the teaching of traditional Nigerian music has yet to take its rightful place within the educational system in the country. Omojola further explains that the teaching of traditional instruments tends to come and go as yearly budgets allow. For example, although traditional Igbo instrumental instructors were hired on a part-time basis to teach at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in the 1977-78 academic sessions, they were not available in the 1978-79 and 1979-80 sessions. Thus, while the university recruited teachers both within and outside the country to teach European music on a regular basis, it did not consider the

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<sup>35</sup> (Omojola 1995, 167)



recruitment of instructors of traditional music as equally important.<sup>36</sup> The same trend continues today.

### **The Nigerian Elite**

The British Colonial Administration in Nigeria produced the new Nigerian elite with a taste for Western ideas. Some of the members of the new elite were returnees from Brazil where they had been introduced to Western culture.<sup>37</sup> The word ‘elite’ describes a small but powerful dominant group within a particular society. The modern elite of Nigeria are made up of a few Europeanized, educated, and politically and/or economically powerful people. Some of the people in this class have played a major role in the development and establishment of local contemporary art music. Though they may be few in numbers, members of such an elitist group can often be very influential both culturally and ideologically. In modern Nigerian society, one can observe various types of elite groups according to special interests: economic and business, cultural expression (the media and related institutions), sports, military, education, and various professions.<sup>38</sup>

The origin of elitist taste in Nigeria can be traced to early slavery and missionary activities. Regarding the latter, the European missionaries intended to introduce Western civilization by stratifying the society into three major groups: the lower class, middle class, and wealthy.<sup>39</sup> A small segment of the society was chosen to be sent to European countries such as Great Britain for training in professional skills and thereby acquire the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Akin Euba, “Neo-African Music and Jazz: Related Path,” *International Jazz Archive Journal* 1, no. 1 (1993) : 4.

<sup>38</sup> (Sadoh 1998, 20)

<sup>39</sup> Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria: 1841-1891* (London: Longman, 1965), 1-23.

European custom and culture. This segment of the society constituted the upper middle class and the affluent.

The missionaries intended these Nigerians to return with European tastes and reform the Nigerian masses into a Western-style society. Thus, they were being used as instruments of social change: the Europeanization of Nigeria. Fela Sowande underscores the attitude of the elite when he writes that:

the attempt by the great majority of so-called 'educated Africans' whose sole claim to being educated seems to be that they are literate to draw the line at a limited identification with their traditional past, so that, in music, to dance to 'highlife' bands in night clubs is synonymous with love for African music.<sup>40</sup>

In a related article 'Why Do They Want to Get Away From Their Roots?' by Donal Henahan, Sowande sadly states that "The elite just want to forget the past. This so-called sophisticated class tends to have a limited identification with the old Nigeria. A person who is locally schooled is far more likely these days to become seriously involved, to want to know who he is . . ." <sup>41</sup>

The other source of Nigerian elitism emerged from the slave returnees. According to Biodun Jeyifo, from about the 1860s, concerts and other forms of Western-derived entertainment were presented in Lagos by members of a new social elite made up of educated or professionally trained returnees (former slaves and their descendants) from Sierra-Leone, Brazil and Cuba. The principal forms of entertainment were the variety concert and the operatic drama.<sup>42</sup> Most of the returnees had some prestige and social

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<sup>40</sup> (Sowande 1966, 32)

<sup>41</sup> Donal Henahan, "Why Do They Want to Get Away From Their Roots?" *New York Times*, 8 October, 1967, D23.

<sup>42</sup> Biodun Jeyifo, *The Truthful Life: Essays in a Sociology of African Drama* (London: New Beacons Books, 1985), 41.

status because of the Western education they had received. Thus, they were intermediaries between European and Nigerian culture.

As a result of the European taste they had acquired, the elite favored and nurtured European styles of music, particularly Western classical music. This was achieved by organizing regular public concerts and performing as instrumentalists or singers in them. Today, some of the Nigerian elite even have personal choirs that give regular concerts in their private mansions. Those who do not have private singers occasionally invite individual choral groups and instrumentalists to perform in their mansions at festive occasions such as Christmas, Easter, and the New Year.

Margaret Peil describes elite musical activities in the early twentieth century in Lagos as imported from Europe. Rev. Robert Coker and Ekundayo Phillips, the first Nigerian musicians trained in Europe at professional levels, concentrated on oratorios and organ music for the churches.<sup>43</sup> Alaja-Browne discusses some of the early musical activities by the Nigerian elite. He writes that Rev. Coker was said to have trained a large number of Nigerian women in the performance of Western classical music between 1880 and 1890. Furthermore, he organized a number of public concerts known as the Coker concerts which became the center of social life in Lagos. Other notable Nigerians in the musical life of the nineteenth century were Agnes Richards, a contralto singer; Herbert Macaulay, an engineer and violinist; Dr. King, medical practitioner and musician; and Adolph Williams, a singer.<sup>44</sup>

Omojola writes about the musical activities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Lagos. J. L. Davis, a native of Sierra-Leone, who happens to be

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<sup>43</sup> Margaret Peil, *Lagos: The City is the People* (London: Mulhaven Press, 1991), 126-127.

<sup>44</sup> Afolabi Alaja-Browne, "A History of Intercultural Art Music in Nigeria," *Intercultural Music* 1, no. 29 (1995) : 80.

one of the wealthiest business men in Lagos, was a member of the Academy, a cultural and philanthropic society which organized the first European concert in Lagos in 1861.<sup>45</sup> The concert programs mirror the Victorian English type of concerts featuring songs, vocal duets and quartets, religious plays and musicals, arrangements of English folksongs and excerpts from cantatas and oratorios, especially the works of Handel and Mendelssohn. Instrumental works were mostly performed on the harmonium, piano, and the violin, with occasional appearances of the police band.<sup>46</sup>

The warm relationship among the various cultural groups in the nineteenth century in Lagos soon waned. Towards the end of the century, many Lagos citizens began to resent the dominance of European music. There was an upsurge of interests in the revival of indigenous cultural heritage including Nigerian traditional music which had been enjoined by the missionaries and the colonial administration.<sup>47</sup> Although the church initially provided the avenue for the introduction of Western classical music, it later constituted the channel for the emergence of Nigerian nationalist composers who sought to replace European liturgical music with a more culturally relevant idiom. Some of the pioneers of the Nigerian 'school of composition' were Thomas Ekundayo Phillips, Rev. Canon J. J. Ransome Kuti, Akin George, Rev. T. A. Olude, Emmanuel Sowande (father of Fela Sowande) all in the western province of Nigeria, and Nelson Okoli and Ikoli Hacourt-Whyte from the eastern region of Nigeria.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> (Omojola 1995, 12)

<sup>46</sup> (Omojola 1995, 14)

<sup>47</sup> Bode Omojola, "African Pianism as an Intercultural Compositional Framework: A Study of the Piano Works of Akin Euba," *Research in African Literature* 32, no. 2 (summer 2001) : 154.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

The efforts of incorporating traditional Nigerian music into the Christian liturgy experienced a greater boost when in 1918, the African Church Choir was established. Its main objective was to promote the performance of indigenous music in the Yoruba churches. The cultural revival in the church soon spread to the public concert auditoriums. Herbert Macaulay, one of the founding fathers of the Nigerian nationalist movement for independence, founded a society known as the Melodramatic Society. Indigenous music was frequently featured at its concerts in Lagos.<sup>49</sup>

In the latter part of the twentieth century, the activities of elitist organizations such as the Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON) have contributed immensely to the growth and nurturing of art music in Nigeria. Since its inception in 1983, MUSON has organized regular concerts of both Western and Nigerian art music at Lagos. The patrons and audiences of MUSON concerts are the cream of the Nigerian elite such as expatriates, international business men and women, members of the diplomatic corps, professionals and intellectuals. These people have a taste for art music and support its activities morally and financially. Indeed, these music enthusiasts have laid the foundation for Nigerian art music through their musical activities. They have not only pioneered the art of public performance, but have particularly fostered the culture of European classical music in Nigerian society. Hence, their efforts have contributed inordinately to a thorough Westernization of the Nigerian society.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 19

## **The Military Bands**

Another means of early contact with Western classical music were the military bands of the army, police, and navy. These bands were established by the colonial administrations in various parts of Africa around the early nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> In Nigeria, all sectors of armed forces had schools of music where members of the bands received formal training in music. From the beginning, the curricula of such schools were predominantly Western-oriented until the latter part of the twentieth century. Some of the musicians were even sent abroad periodically, especially to London, to receive intensive training in Western music.<sup>51</sup> The performance repertoire of such bands included works by Baroque, Classical, and Romantic composers.

The realization of Nigeria's independence in 1960, coupled with the activities of the nationalist movements, inspired the Nigerian military bands to begin employing traditional source materials in their compositions. Prior to this time, they had been encouraged by the colonial officials to perform exclusively European music. The best attempt to Africanize their repertoire was the arrangement of folksongs based on Western harmony for the orchestra. Bode Omojola advocates that the existence of regimental bands in Nigeria, especially following the establishment of Lagos in 1861, and the transformation of cities such as Lagos, Calabar and Onitsha into cosmopolitan urban centers coupled with the rapid expansion of European and indigenous church music, provided a conducive atmosphere for the emergence of syncretic music.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> (Nketia 1974, 16)

<sup>51</sup> (Sadoh 1998, 24)

<sup>52</sup> (Omojola 1995, 24)

Presently in Nigeria, a typical military orchestra would consist of clarinets, trombones, trumpets, tubas, saxophones, and other Western musical instruments. Traditional instruments may include rattles, wood clappers and local drums. The colonial legacy in the Nigerian military is typified by a combination of more Western musical instruments and fewer indigenous instruments in the orchestra.

The creation of military bands by colonial officials was intended primarily for recreational purposes. The training of the musicians and the type of music they were made to perform represent one of the early contacts by Nigerians with Western music. The performance of European music shaped the taste of the elite for Western culture.

### **Economical and Political Factors**

Kwabena Nketia<sup>53</sup> and Akin Euba<sup>54</sup> both agree that Western instruments were introduced to Africa through trade with Europe. Before their commercialization, Western musical instruments were found mainly in the church and in the military. The adoption of such popular instruments like the guitar and the piano by local musicians in most parts of Africa followed this trend of commercialization. These developments were fostered and strengthened through the efforts of the Christian church and the colonial officials. The church and the colonialists worked closely together to eradicate traditional practices while promoting Western cultures and value systems. However, the imposition of Western cultural values was restricted to certain parts of Nigeria. For instance, European life styles were not totally forced on northern Nigeria.

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<sup>53</sup> (Nketia 1974, 14)

<sup>54</sup> (Euba 1993, 4)

The colonial policy partly excluded Christian missions and Western education from the Muslim emirates. Although the colonialists encouraged literacy in Arabic characters, there were some Christian missions in the north such as the Sudan Interior Mission.<sup>55</sup>

Sowande recalls that Islam had arrived in the north from about the twelfth century, but it had adopted a tolerant attitude towards the indigenous faiths of the north, with the result that Hausa Kings were able to rule as Moslems, while not being thereby precluded from taking their rightful place in the rites and ceremonies required by tradition.<sup>56</sup> Sowande also states that the north had secured from Lord Lugard prior to amalgamation, the promise that missionaries would not be allowed in any Emirate in the north without the Emir's consent.<sup>57</sup> Political and economic policies favored the flourishing of Western trade in Nigeria. Policies that favored local trade were to the advantage of European government. Atta Annan Mensah summarizes early economic activities and the effect of Western imperialism in Africa:

Unprecedented growth of trade led to the growth of urban centers and the establishment of significant levels of industrialization, yielding in turn the rise of proletarian groups wrenched from traditional roots and the domains of traditional institutions of socialization and social control. These groups left behind the lodges of transition, the secret societies, the hunters associations, and their extensive artistic lores. There also occurred some democratization of cash within a newly established economic system that produced a new rich group from whose ranks the arts and their practitioners, especially those with new talents, enjoyed sustaining patronage. In some places, new bands and orchestras and new musical and dance idioms were established along with the instruments. The traditional courts acquired musical instruments and maintained artists and craftsmen. The newly rich, sometimes including lesser chiefs, bought Western musical instruments and found players to use them at private celebrations and local festivals. Church and classroom educational centers were established to provide the commercial and industrial enterprises, as

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<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Isichie, *Varieties of Christian Experiences in Nigeria* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), 441.

<sup>56</sup> (Sowande 1966, 26)

<sup>57</sup> (Sowande 1966, 30)



well as the new colonial administration, with suitable basic and middle level personnel.<sup>58</sup>

The missionary activities, colonization and trade all combined in the Westernization of Nigeria. The voices of dissent from the Nigerian elite coupled with the activities of the nationalist movements in and outside of the church commenced the revival of Nigerian traditions including music. However, experimental works by pioneering church organists and choirmasters produced compositions that were neither entirely Nigerian nor entirely Western. These works could be best described as a synthesis of Nigerian and Western musical idioms. Thus, the syncretization of the two musical idioms began in the church.

Nigerian composers, like natives of most colonized third-world countries, are raised bi-cultural. That is, they are exposed to European and African cultural influences from childhood to adulthood, be it political, social, educational, religious, or musical.<sup>59</sup> The independence of Nigeria in 1960 further strengthened the escalation of indigenous cultural revival and the compositions of experimental musical synthesis.<sup>60</sup>

The historical sketch given above clearly suggests the procedures of the Westernization of Nigeria. Nigerians fostered their aspirations of becoming performers and composers of Western classical music through the educational training they received at churches, Christian mission schools and colonial institutions. European values remain vividly manifest in modern Nigerian art music and its patrons.

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<sup>58</sup> Atta Annan Mensah, "The Arts of Africa: Dawn or Twilight? Music," Chap. in *African Musicology: Current Trends vol. 2* (Atlanta, GA: Crossroads Press, 1992), 20.

<sup>59</sup> Godwin Sadoh, "Music at the Anglican Youth Fellowship, Ile-Ife, Nigeria: An Intercultural Experience," *The Hymn* 52, no. 1 (January 2001) : 19.

<sup>60</sup> Godwin Sadoh, "The Creative Process in Nigerian Hymn Based Compositions," *The Diapason* 93, no. 1113 (August 2002) : 15.

In the following chapters, I will explore the impact of Nigerian Westernization on the life and music of Fela Sowande. Sowande's life typifies the experience of an average Nigerian which has been shaped by a 'bi-cultural' environment.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE BIOGRAPHY OF FELA SOWANDE

Modern African composers grew up bi-cultural and bi-musical. 'Bi-cultural' signifies a cultural phenomenon analogous to bi-lingualism. Africans often find themselves living simultaneously in two different cultural worlds, modernized Western and traditional African, and bi-culturalism is most pronounced in those regions subjected to colonization. Music, language, religion, education, socio/political institutions, as well as food are more obvious manifestations of bi-culturalism. Bi-musicality refers specifically to the intuitive understanding of and/or trained skills in two or more musical traditions.<sup>1</sup> In Sowande's case, it infers the knowledge of Western, Nigerian/African and African American musics. In other words, he has become equally competent in the articulation and usages of the tripartite musical idioms--scales, structural forms, rhythmic and tonal organizations.

#### The Formative Years

Fela Sowande was born at Lagos, in 1905 into a musical family. His father, Emmanuel Sowande, was a minister of the Gospel and one of the pioneers of church music in Nigeria. Sowande received his first lessons in music from his father.<sup>2</sup> He credits his first contact with Western music to his father:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Godwin Sadoh, "Joshua Uzoigwe: An Introduction to the Life and Music of a Nigerian Composer" (M.A. Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1998), 29.

<sup>2</sup> Godwin Sadoh, "A Profile of Nigerian Organist-Composers," *The Organ* 82, no. 323 (Feb-March 2003) : 19.

<sup>3</sup> Bode Omojola, "Style in Modern Nigerian Art Music: The Pioneering works of Fela Sowande," *Africa* 68, no. 4 (1998) : 456.

My father was a priest who taught at St Andrew's College, Oyo, the mission's teacher training institute. Music was all around, and I suppose some of it rubbed off on me.<sup>4</sup>

Another influence on his early musical training was Thomas Ekundayo Phillips. Under the tutelage of Phillips, as a chorister at the Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos, in the 1920s and 1930s, Sowande was exposed to various European sacred music and indigenous church music. He received private lessons in organ playing from Phillips while singing in the Cathedral Choir. Indeed, Phillips' playing on the organ, the choir training and the organ lessons he received had a major impact on his aspiration of becoming an organist-composer.<sup>5</sup> He regularly listened to Phillips' playing of Bach, Rheinberger, and others.<sup>6</sup>

According to Soji Lijadu (former Assistant Choirmaster at the Cathedral Church), Sowande demonstrated his outstanding talent before leaving for the United Kingdom to study organ. On one occasion prior to his departure for London, "Thomas Ekundayo Phillips had to raise an eye-brow once when the choir was rehearsing a major work, and Phillips wanting the choirboys to master a phrase in a more comfortable pitch, directed that the key be lowered. Fela lowered the key as required. The rest of the voices joined in and Fela just carried on regardless of the modulations usually present in such works. Dr. Phillips was noticeably amazed."<sup>7</sup> Being a son of the clergy, it was not surprising that he gave to the church much of the benefits of his musical talents. Beginning from his

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<sup>4</sup> Eileen Southern, "Conversation with Fela Sowande: High Priest of Music," *Black Perspectives* 4, no. 1 (1976) : 92.

<sup>5</sup> (Sadoh 2003, 19)

<sup>6</sup> (Omojola 1998, 456)

<sup>7</sup> Soji Lijadu, "Write-Up On Professor Fela Sowande," Order of Thanksgiving Service Bulletin, in Commemoration of the Eightieth Birthday of Professor Fela Sowande, at the Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos, Nigeria, on Friday, 27 September, 1985.

own church at the Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos, he blossomed into a notable organ virtuoso, a fact which was witnessed by frequent invitations to play at the Colonial Church at Race Course (St. Savior's Anglican Church), where the African presence at the time was a rarity.<sup>8</sup> Sowande sang in the Choir of the Cathedral Church of Christ throughout his childhood and received his early education at C.M.S. Grammar School and King's College in Lagos.<sup>9</sup> It was Sowande who harmonized the School song of the C.M.S. Grammar School. Sowande taught briefly at a public school for about three years and later joined the government service after completing his education at King's College.<sup>10</sup>

### **Musical Training**

Examining the fact behind African composers' training and musical experiences in Europe and America, John Baldacchino comments that:

a European may find it hard to appreciate and understand how an African composer needs to go beyond the shores of his continent in order to find a better and universal understanding of African music . . . He needed to go beyond Africa for a wider perception. He had to subscribe to some extent to the source of stereotypification in the European and American traditions in order to demystify the same stereotypes which distorted any proper notion of African culture.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> John Wesley Hildreth, "Keyboard Works of Selected Black Composers" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1978), 96.

<sup>10</sup> Janet Loretta Laidman, "The Use of Black Spirituals in the Organ Music of Contemporary Black Composers as Illustrated in the Works of Three Composers" (Ph.D. dissertation, Teachers' College, Columbia University, 1989), 8.

<sup>11</sup> John Baldacchino, "An Analytical Review of Akin Euba's *Modern African Music* and Joshua Uzoigwe's *Akin Euba: An Introduction to the Life and Music of a Nigerian Composer*," in *Commonwealth Music* (1996) : 2-3.

In support of Baldacchino's statement, most of the well-established modern African composers received their musical training at conservatories of music in Europe and the United States. Sowande is a forerunner of this idealistic pattern.

At the age of 27, Sowande decided to become a civil engineer and went to London to study in 1935. After six months, he changed his mind and decided to study music because he could not afford to pay the tuition for civil engineering. At this point, his only means of livelihood was playing jazz at London nightclubs. Sowande later enrolled as an external candidate at the University of London and received private lessons in organ playing with George Oldroyd and George Cunningham.<sup>12</sup>

Sowande became a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists in 1943, and he is the first African to receive the prestigious British FRCO diploma, the highest British qualification for organ playing. Sowande was awarded the Harding Prize for organ playing, the Limpus prize for theoretical work, and the Read prize for the highest aggregate marks in the fellowship examination. He also obtained the degree of Bachelor of Music at the University of London and became a Fellow of the Trinity College of Music.<sup>13</sup>

Sowande's interest in jazz led him to listen to such pianists as Art Tatum, Earl Hines, and Teddy Wilson, who greatly influenced his style of jazz playing. He studied jazz piano with Jerry Moore. His reputation as an outstanding jazz performer spread throughout London, and he frequently played jazz on the Hammond organ. He met and performed with African American visiting artists such as Fats Waller, J. Rosamond Johnson, Paul Robeson, and Adelaide Hall, with whom he became a recording artist. As

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<sup>12</sup> (Sadoh 2003, 19)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

her accompanist, and with his own jazz group for Decca, Sowande organized a jazz band and served as its leader.<sup>14</sup> He recalls his first encounter with jazz:

One day in 1932, when Fela Sowande was a 27 year old student in Nigeria, he and some friends sat around a short wave radio set and heard Duke Ellington playing from the United States. “That kind of experience excites you,” Said Mr. Sowande.” “It pulls you away from your own roots.” Before long, he and his friends had formed the Triumph Dance Orchestra, in which Mr. Sowande played the piano.<sup>15</sup>

Sowande became an authority in jazz orchestration and was frequently called on to lecture on the topic. He was featured as a guest artist and speaker on BBC World of Jazz in November 1952,<sup>16</sup> becoming the first organist in Britain to play jazz on the Hammond.<sup>17</sup> Clare Deniz, one of the reputable black European jazz singers and pianists, sang in Sowande’s choir for the 1954 television series Club Ebony.<sup>18</sup> Val Wilmer writes about Sowande’s relationship with Rita Cann, an accomplished pianist who led her own Latin-American band in London society circles in the 1940s:

At Hall’s Florida Club, Cann danced with pianist Fats Waller while resident bandleader Fela Sowande played organ. Sowande, a formidable Nigerian, gave her the confidence to sing with his Jubilee Singers.<sup>19</sup>

Sowande also came in contact with several other African-American musical personalities in London. This includes the Nicholas Brothers, Peg-Leg Bates, Valaida Snow, and comedian Tim Moore, who later became famous for his portrayal of “Kingfish” in the *Amos and Andy* radio series. Sowande performed with J. Rosamond Johnson, who conducted the choir for Lew Leslie’s *Black Birds of 1936* and who

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<sup>14</sup> (Laidman 1989, 9)

<sup>15</sup> Donal Henahan, “Why Do They Want to Get Away From Their Roots?” *New York Times*, 8 October, 1967, D23.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> (Southern 1976, 95)

<sup>18</sup> Val Wilmer, “Obituary of Clare Deniz,” *The Guardian*, 3 January, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Val Wilmer, “Obituary of Rita Cann,” *The Guardian*, 10 May, 2001.

introduced him to the works of Nathaniel Dett. In the late 1930s, he accompanied the cabaret show of the African-American singer and dancer Adelaide Hall. He also recorded with Hall, who had a flourishing career in London and was recognized for her rendition of Duke Ellington's song "Creole Love Call."<sup>20</sup> Sowande did not leave out homegrown singers from Nigeria either. People like Fola Ejiwunmi and Ore Fagbemi were incorporated into performances with Jack Smith and Mike George at Kingsway Hall.<sup>21</sup>

Sowande had a well rounded musical experience in England. He was a solo pianist in a performance of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* in 1936 and was appointed Organist and Choir Director at the West London Mission of the Methodist Church from 1945 to 1952. It was during this period that he began composing for organ. The influence of his participation and exposure to church music during his formative years could be seen in the abundance of works written for organ. His organ compositions at this time included *Kyrie*, *Obangiji*, *K'a Mura*, *Jesu Olugbala*, *Go Down Moses*, *Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho*, and *Yoruba Lament*.<sup>22</sup>

Some of these pieces are based on borrowed themes from the Yoruba culture of Nigeria. Indigenous songs are employed in Sowande's music for three reasons: (1) As a symbol and mark of national identity; (2) to classify the works under the umbrella of modern Nigerian art music, and (3) to arouse the interest of Nigerian/African audiences in performing, studying and analyzing the music. Apart from rhythm, the indigenous songs are the most audible elements of Nigerian culture clearly apparent to the audiences

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel A. Floyd jr., ed. *International Dictionary of Black Composers* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1999), s.v. "Fela Sowande," by Christopher Brooks.

<sup>21</sup> (Lijadu 1985)

<sup>22</sup> (Sadoh 2003, 19)



and performers. Hearing those songs enabled them to compartmentalize the works as Nigerian musical heritage.<sup>23</sup>

During the Second World War, Sowande enlisted with the Royal Air Force, but was released at the request of the Ministry of Information to go to the Colonial Film Unit as a Musical Adviser of the British Ministry of Information in London. He was designated to provide background music for a series of educational films geared towards Africa. Sowande also presented several lectures titled *West African Music and the Possibilities of its Development* for the B.B.C. Africa Service, and he collected a substantial amount of indigenous folksongs during this period. The songs were later to be employed in creating large works such as *African Suite* and the *Folk Symphony*.<sup>24</sup> The *Folk Symphony* was commissioned by the Nigerian government in 1960 to mark the nation's independence. Although the work was not accepted, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in Carnegie Hall eventually premiered it in 1962. During his days in London, Sowande experimented with a musical synthesis of indigenous Nigerian and European idioms (intercultural music):

When the Nigerian tribal Chief, Fela Sowande, moved to London, he brought with him a rich background from his culture which he juxtaposed with stimuli from his many British contacts. Over the next few years he was deeply absorbed in the musical life of London.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> (Laidman 1989, 9)

### **Professional Career in Nigeria**

When in the 1950s the foundations of the Nigerian Broadcasting Service were being laid, the group of B.B.C. experts who were charged with establishing the service had as their leader Tom Chalmers. Chalmers, a broadcaster himself and an organist knew of, and appreciated the versatility of Sowande's musical talents. He did everything to persuade Sowande to go back to Nigeria and help in establishing the Department of Music for the then Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. Back in Nigeria as the founder and Head of Music at the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, he created the N.B.C. Choir, expanding it in terms of size and repertory. He also established the N.B.C. Orchestra, through which he imparted not a little of his musical experience to many younger Nigerian musicians who were fortunate enough to come in contact with him, not only as members of the N.B.C. Orchestra, but also as performing artistes for the Radio Station.<sup>26</sup> He was also appointed as Honorary Organist at the Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos.<sup>27</sup>

At the radio station, he produced weekly radio programs based on materials gathered from field research. In these programs, he promoted aspects of Yoruba folklore, mythology, legends, and oral history. He used traditional priests in the presentation of materials.<sup>28</sup> Between 1962 and 1965, Sowande was a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He was later appointed Professor of Musicology from 1965 to 1968 at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan.<sup>29</sup> In March of 1966, the Federal government of Nigeria provided Sowande with funds for a program

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<sup>26</sup> (Lijadu 1985)

<sup>27</sup> (Sadoh 2003, 19)

<sup>28</sup> (Hildreth 1978, 97)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

aimed at coordinating and placing on record the activities of Nigerian musicians and/or composers who had been neglected during the colonial administration and missionary era.<sup>30</sup> The results of his research activities include the following:

1. "Ifa" (Booklet)
2. "Oruko A Mu T'Orun Wa" (Book)
3. "The Yoruba Talking Drum" (Manuscript)
4. "Children of the gods among the Yoruba" (Manuscript)
5. "The Mind of a Nation: The Yoruba Child" (Book)
6. "Aspects of Nigerian Music" (Book)
  - a. Nigerian Traditional Music
  - b. The Teaching of Music in Nigerian Schools
  - c. The Philosophy of Music
  - d. The Catholic Church and the Tone Languages of Nigeria
  - e. The Development of a National Tradition of Music
  - f. Nigerian Music and Musicians: Then and Now
7. "The African Child in Nigeria"

### **Professional Career in the United States**

In 1957, Sowande received a United States Department Leaders and Specialists Grant to travel to America, playing recitals of his original compositions for organ in New York, Boston and Chicago, and delivering lectures on African music based on his research materials. During this visit, he conducted the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in Carnegie Hall featuring his own works; among them was *Nigerian Folk Symphony*.<sup>31</sup> Sowande presented lectures on Nigerian traditional music at colleges, universities and

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<sup>30</sup> Fela Sowande, "The African Musician in Nigeria," *The World of Music* 9, no. 3 (1967) : 34-35.

<sup>31</sup> (Laidman 1989, 11)

other educational institutions. The Rothschild Foundation sponsored his New York lectures.<sup>32</sup>

From 1961 to 1962 under a Rockefeller Foundation Grant, Sowande served as a visiting scholar in the Anthropology Department of Northwestern University. His desire to expand his musical training led him to study modern compositional techniques with Dr. Roger Sessions at Princeton University. Sowande's involvement with religion resulted in a Ford Foundation Grant (1962-1965) in research at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. With this endeavor, he advanced his study of Yoruba Traditional Lore with special reference to Yoruba traditional religion.<sup>33</sup> Sowande also accepted guest conductor engagements in London with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, where he performed and recorded his original works. During this period, Sowande School of Music at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, was named after him, in honor of his outstanding contributions to music and to his country.<sup>34</sup>

For several years, Sowande collected traditional musical materials and placed them in repositories where they could be studied.<sup>35</sup> From 1968 to 1971, Sowande produced a series of tapes and recordings including secular, traditional and contemporary Nigerian music, proverbs, poetry, and language, for distribution by the Broadcasting Foundation of America throughout the United States as educational material.<sup>36</sup> He placed forty eight of his most valued tapes of folk and original music of Nigeria in the archives

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> (Hildreth 1978, 100)

<sup>36</sup> (Laidman 1989, 12)

of the Broadcasting Foundation of America located in New York.<sup>37</sup> Other materials are held within the Dartmouth College Library, New Hampshire.

Sowande continued to teach, joining the African Studies and Research Program as a Professor at Howard University, Washington, D.C. from 1968 to 1972. In 1972, he served as Professor of Black Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, and later in the Department of Music and Higher Education in the School of Education at the same university. Sowande applied for a permanent American visa in 1972 and was granted citizenship in 1977.<sup>38</sup> He and his wife Eleanor moved to Randolph Township, Ohio, in 1976. He taught in the Department of Pan-African Studies at Kent State University, from 1976 until his retirement in June 1982.<sup>39</sup> On Friday March 13, 1987, Chief Fela Sowande died of a stroke at a nursing home in Ravenna, Ohio.<sup>40</sup> In 1965, he expressed the desire that his setting of “Bury Me Eas or Wes” be played at his funeral. Eugene Hancock, organist and personal friend, honored this request at the memorial service. Hancock also performed other works by Sowande; this service took place at Saint James Episcopal Church in New York City, on May 3, 1987.<sup>41</sup>

### **Honorary Awards**

Sowande’s contributions to the development of Nigerian music, through research, teaching, broadcasting and composition, have been well acknowledged. Among his numerous awards are Member of the British Empire (MBE) from Queen Elizabeth II for distinguished services in the cause of music (1956); the Member of the Federal Republic

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<sup>37</sup> (Hildreth 1978, 100)

<sup>38</sup> (Laidman 1989, 12)

<sup>39</sup> “Olufela Sowande,” *Beacon Journal*, 15 March, 1987.

<sup>40</sup> “Olufela Sowande Taught of Roots,” *Plain Dealer*, 25 March, 1987.

<sup>41</sup> (Laidman 1989, 12)

of Nigeria (MFN) in 1956; the Traditional Chieftaincy award, the “Bagbile of Lagos” in recognition of his research in Yoruba folklore (1968), and an honorary doctorate from the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in 1972. In 1996, the first Fela Sowande Memorial Lecture and Concert was organized and hosted by Professor Mosunmola Omibiyi at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. The event featured performances of his works and lectures, including a keynote address by Professor Kwabena Nketia of the University of Ghana, Legon.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> (Omojola 1998, 457)

## CHAPTER THREE

### CLASSIFICATION OF FELA SOWANDE'S ORGAN WORKS

The seventeen pieces that Fela Sowande wrote for organ solo may be broadly divided into three main categories for functional purposes in the church: liturgical pieces, preludes and postludes, and concert pieces. Some of these works could be placed in more than one group due to their stylistic characteristics. *Fantasia in D*, *Festival March*, *Plainsong*, and *Choral Preludes on Yoruba Sacred Melodies* are not included in this classification because the scores were not available to the writer at the time of writing this thesis.

#### **Liturgical Pieces**

There are nine organ works that are suitable for divine services, either for the offertory, communion or any meditative aspect of worship. The contemplative elements in these pieces include slow tempo, short duration, and simplicity. The thematic materials of these works are mainly borrowed indigenous hymn tunes from Nigeria and African American Spirituals; this aspect makes them more appropriate for playing within worship.

The pieces are:

1. *K'a Mura*
2. *Pastourelle*
3. *Yoruba Lament*
4. *Kyrie*
5. *K'a Mo Rokoso*
6. *Supplication*
7. *Via Dolorosa* (from the Sacred Idioms of the Negro)
8. *Bury Me Eas' or Wes'* (from the Sacred Idioms of the Negro)
9. *Vesper* (from the Sacred Idioms of the Negro)

### **Preludes and Postludes**

Six pieces fall within this category and are generally characterized by moderate or lively tempos, and are of moderate difficulty. These pieces are loud, short or moderate in length, sectional, and are mostly based on sacred themes from the Yoruba church hymns, and folksongs, as well as African American Spirituals. They include:

1. *Yoruba Lament*
2. *Joshua Fit De Battle of Jericho*
3. *Obangiji*
4. *Prayer* (Oba A Ba Ke)
5. *Supplication* (from the Sacred Idioms of the Negro)
6. *Jubilate* (from the Sacred Idioms of the Negro)



## Concert Pieces

Sowande wrote most of his organ works for concert performances. Ten pieces are in this category. These pieces are vividly distinct from others because of the high level of difficulty, and they are virtuosic, showing the technical ability of the performer. These are large multi-sectional works, loud and lively. The thematic materials are derived from Nigerian folksongs, African American Spirituals and also hymn tunes composed by local organists and choirmasters. Some compositional forms include fugue, three part form, and theme and variations. The titles are listed below:

1. *Jesu Olugbala*
2. *Kyrie*
3. *Joshua Fit De Battle of Jericho*
4. *Obangiji*
5. *Go Down Moses*
6. *Oyigiyigi: Introduction, Theme and Variations*
7. *Gloria*
8. *Prayer (Oba A Ba Ke)*
9. *Laudamus Te (from the Sacred Idioms of the Negro)*
10. *Jubilate (from the Sacred Idioms of the Negro)*

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF FELA SOWANDE'S ORGAN WORKS

In chapter one of this monograph, the background of the emergence of Western classical music in Nigeria was clearly discussed, while chapter two illuminated the historical milieu of Fela Sowande with specific focus on the imprint of the formal education he received in the institutions created by the early missionaries and colonial administration in Nigeria and in Great Britain. By studying Western classical music at the mission schools and the Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos, Sowande developed a keen interest in composing for the organ. He wrote seventeen solo organ works in which he copiously employed thematic materials and other musical elements from the three major cultures that had come to shape and define his creative experience—Nigerian/African, Afro-American and European.

The task of analyzing the entire organ works by Sowande is beyond the scope of this thesis since his organ works, based on Black Spirituals, have been studied and analyzed by Janet Loretta Laidman,<sup>1</sup> Myron Munday,<sup>2</sup> and John Wesley Hildreth.<sup>3</sup> The discussion of his music in this study will be restricted to those pieces that are inspired and based on traditional source materials from Nigeria. In this regard, a discussion of Sowande's selected organ music will hinge upon three salient characteristics of

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Loretta Laidman, "The Use of Black Spirituals in the Organ Music of Contemporary Black Composers as Illustrated in the Works of Three Composers" (Ph.D. dissertation, Teachers' College, Columbia University, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Myron C. Munday, "A Selected Bibliography of Solo Organ Works by Black Composers" (D.Mus. Thesis, Florida State University, Tallahassee, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> John Wesley Hildreth, "Keyboard Works of Selected Black Composers" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1978).

indigenous music from Nigeria: (1) elements of musical communication; (2) elements of dance; and (3) elements of musical conception.

### **Elements of Musical Communication**

Sowande argues for and justifies the importance of communication in African music when he asserts that:

Whatever African music may or may not be, one thing about it is that it communicates. It is for this reason that we find, on the social levels, that we do not have performers and listeners, but performers and participants; we do not fix time, date and place for making music, it “happens” when the spirit moves us. We must also note that on the more serious levels, i.e. the ritualistic and the religious, African music still communicates. . . On the social level, it communicates with the men and women in the society, on the ritualistic and religious levels, it communicates with the gods and the goddesses of the group’s pantheon, with the forces of nature. . .<sup>4</sup>

At the level of creative imagination, Sowande’s utmost intention is to communicate his music with the African/Nigerian audiences. He was very sensitive to the reactions and responses he received from those who listened to his music. John Miller Chernoff gives a concise summary of this view, “music is a means for tradition itself to be organized and communicated.”<sup>5</sup> In an interview with Eileen Southern, Sowande illustrates his sincere opinion about writing music that communicates:

In that church the organ was placed so that my back was to the auditorium, with a curtain around it, but I could see the congregation through a mirror above the organ console. Now, when I was practicing and I thought I had a good idea, I used to wait until I knew there were Africans in the church. As I played the music, I would watch them (Africans) closely to see what their reaction was. If they kept walking out, I knew that I wasn’t getting to them. But if I was able to communicate my

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<sup>4</sup> Fela Sowande, “The Development of a National Tradition of Music, 1965” TMs [photocopy], p. 55, Courtesy of Dartmouth College Library, New Hampshire.

<sup>5</sup> John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 34.

ideas to them, they would sit down and listen, and I would say, “O.K., I got them”. . . I have to communicate; otherwise I feel I am doing nothing.<sup>6</sup>

The theoretical framework of such compositions takes into account the worldview of its listeners and performers alike. The composer uses materials that are well-known to his African audiences in Nigeria, Great Britain, and the United States to attract their interest and attention. These materials have affiliation with the past, present and future of the African cultural heritage.

As Atta Annan Mensah clearly states, “the new artists of Africa simultaneously depict a new quality of issue consciousness and strike many bonds with the arts and themes of the past. The picture emerges clearly through the use of idioms, imageries, and at times, structural elements derived from past heritage.”<sup>7</sup> John Blacking explains further that musical performance is only able to communicate to the audience because they have learned to make links between different kinds of knowledge and experience.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the Nigerian listeners of Sowande’s music would be familiar with the music and will certainly enjoy hearing what they already know, while listening to the subtle creative nuances in the work. On the other hand, the audience may shout in appreciation when something in the music strikes them, or indicate at a particular point their satisfaction.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Eileen Southern, “Conversation with Fela Sowande: High Priest of Music,” *Black Perspectives* 4, no. 1 (1976): 97-98.

<sup>7</sup> Atta Annan Mensah, “The Arts of Africa: Dawn or Twilight? Music,” Chap. in *African Musicology: Current Trends vols 2* (Atlanta, GA: Crossroads Press, 1992), 14.

<sup>8</sup> John Blacking, *A Commonsense View of All Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 35.

<sup>9</sup> Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 32.

John Baldacchino further explicates on this point when he admits that “this cyclic attitude between idiom-audience-performer-audience-idiom is reminiscent of the best musical traditions north and south of the Sahara. Like Arab music, Yoruba and African music are representatives of a participatory process.”<sup>10</sup>

Alan Lomax describes a song style as a pattern of learned behavior, common to the people of a culture. He further argues that the main function of folksongs is to express the shared feelings and mold the joint activities of some human community.<sup>11</sup> Sowande uses folksongs in most of his organ compositions because the songs present an immediate image of a culture pattern. A man’s favorite tune recalls to him not only some pleasant memory, but the web of relationships that makes his life possible. Popular indigenous songs bring a rush of feeling to the heart and tears to the eyes of a traveler,<sup>12</sup> such as the African congregation at the Methodist church in England where Sowande was the organist and choirmaster when he wrote some of these works. The songs remind the Nigerian listener of how his branch of the human family has stayed alive, loved, and perpetuated a culture on a particular terrain. According to Lomax, immediacy of recall is a normal symbolic function, but it is raised to a peak of rapidity and potency in song because of the condensation of, and the congruency among all its levels.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John Baldacchino, “An Analytical Review of Akin Euba’s *Modern African Music* and Joshua Uzoigwe’s *Akin Euba: An Introduction to the Life and Music of a Nigerian Composer*” in *Commonwealth Music* (1996): 5.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Lomax, “The Stylistic Method,” Chap. in *Folksong Style and Culture* (New Brunswick (USA) and London (UK): Transaction Publishers, 1994), 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 6

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

Samuel Akpabot elucidates on the value of folksongs:

In African music, song texts can act as historical commentaries or culture indicators. For instance, the *Oriki* music of the Yoruba is a form of historical commentary. . . Like rhythm, the complexity of a song also reflects a complex society; song texts are an adaptation of the traits of a given society and they have been known to diffuse from the cultures of one society to that of another. The social structure of a society can affect the style of a song; and this structure can either be stratified or egalitarian.<sup>14</sup>

Sowande was very meticulous in choosing popular well-known songs from the southwest region of Nigeria as the basis of his musical framework. He had a foreknowledge of the efficacy of familiar tunes on Nigerians and Africans alike, either at home or abroad. He knew that the aural reception of the songs would inevitably create emotional and psychological images in their minds. The hearers are drawn to their cultural roots through the familiar songs embedded in the music.

As mentioned earlier, traditional songs transcend the sweet melodic sounds heard when played; they are a cultural conduit, as enunciated by Nketia, “for the African, music and life are inseparable, for there is music for many of the activities of everyday life as well as music whose verbal texts express the African’s attitude to life, his hopes and fears, his thoughts and beliefs.”<sup>15</sup> Lomax, in support of this aphorism, concedes that folksongs might yield crucial information about a society’s principal concerns and unique world-view.

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel Akpabot, *Foundation of Nigerian Traditional Music* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1986), 42-43.

<sup>15</sup> Kwabena Nketia, *African Music in Ghana* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), 4.

He expounds on the potency of folk song text, which if analyzed in a systematic fashion, could give clear expression to the level of cultural complexity, and a set of norms which differentiate and sharply characterize cultures.<sup>16</sup> John Chernoff corroborates these assertions:

African song lyrics . . . are especially concerned with moral and ethical questions and attack pride and pretension in whatever form these unsociable qualities appear . . . such songs serve as vehicles for the mobilization of authoritative community values. In many African societies, someone with a grievance may hire a songwriter to prepare a song which states the problem: a song may exceed the boundaries of social propriety without giving undue offense, and at the same time, people attracted to the song will be more accessible to its argument and may help induce a miscreant to make amends.<sup>17</sup>

Although, the songs employed by Sowande in his organ works are without text, nevertheless, in the mind of the listeners from the Yoruba culture of Nigeria who are well acquainted with these songs, the texts come alive as if they were being sung. They will certainly sing the text in their subconscious as the sound resonates from the pipes. Thus, the songs convey the same messages to the indigenous performers and audiences as if the texts were inserted in the music. Without any doubt, the local audience in Nigeria hears both the monophonic lines of the melody and the texts of the songs simultaneously. The image of the text in their mind, coupled with the auditory perception of the sound, creates a monolithic musical experience. Consequently, their culture, history, life, beliefs, philosophies, and aspirations create a pleasant memory and even remind them of some of the forgotten cultural values that are ingrained in the texts of the songs.

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<sup>16</sup> Alan Lomax and Joan Halifax, "Folksong Texts as Culture Indicators," Chap. in *Folksong Style and Culture* (New Brunswick (USA) and London (UK): Transaction Publishers, 1994), 274.

<sup>17</sup> (Chernoff 1979, 70-71).

Sowande expects his hearers to react in a positive way to these works either by listening attentively or showing great respect and admiration for the music through various forms of expression. Akin Euba observes that, “an audience in the strict sense seldom exists since all people congregating at a performance are potential performers and if they are completely prevented from joining the performance, it is usually because of a lack of knowledge of the repertoire.”<sup>18</sup> This means that Sowande deliberately excluded unpopular tunes in his compositions so that he could imbibe a participatory experience in the performance of his music. Perhaps if he had chosen uncommon songs, his audience would have had a hard time relating to the music and consequently would have generated a negative reaction from them rather than a positive one.

Indigenous thematic materials employed in Sowande’s organ pieces are two kinds, (1) folk or traditional songs and (2) indigenous church hymn tunes composed by local organists and choirmasters in Nigeria. To further support the argument that Sowande had his Nigerian audience in mind when writing these pieces, it is interesting to note that nine out of the seventeen works are built upon indigenous source materials from Nigeria. The remaining eight works are based on African American Spirituals and original themes.

Works based on Nigerian melodies include, *Jesu Olugbala* which is constructed on a Yoruba church hymn tune “Jesu Olugbala mo f’ori fun” (I dedicate my head to Jesus, the Savior); *K’a Mura* is built on a Yoruba church hymn “K’a mura ka le pade l’oke” (Let us prepare, ye bands of Christians, to meet above); *Yoruba Lament* is based on an indigenous folk melody; *Kyrie* uses a

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<sup>18</sup> Akin Euba, “An Introduction to Music in Nigeria,” *Nigerian Music Review*, no. 1 (1977): 15.



Yoruba church tune on the Ten Commandments. See Example 1 for the theme of *Yoruba Lament* and Example 2 for the theme of *Kyrie*.



Example 1. Sowande, Indigenous Folk Melody in *Yoruba Lament*.



Example 2. Sowande, Yoruba Church Tune in *Kyrie*.

In *Obangiji*, Sowande borrows a Yoruba hymn tune originally written by Rev. J. J. Ransome-Kuti. Its text “Obangiji wo l’o to sin” translates, “Almighty God, thou art worthy to be worshipped;” *Oyigiyigi* is built on a popular Yoruba traditional song for the river goddess, titled, “Oyigiyigi, ota omi” (The sea pebble is immortal).<sup>19</sup> *Prayer* employs a Yoruba hymn tune “Oba a ba ke” (The King of heaven whom we should cherish); *Gloria* uses a hymn tune by Rev. J. J.

<sup>19</sup> Akin Euba, *Essays on Music in Africa 2: Intercultural Perspectives* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies, 1989), 131-132.

Ransome-Kuti titled “Gloria.” Example 3, illustrates the borrowed melody in *Prayer*.



Example 3. Sowande, Yoruba Hymn Tune in *Prayer*.

*The Sacred Idioms of the Negro* consists of six pieces of which five are based on indigenous songs from Nigeria. The first piece in this collection is called *Laudamus Te* built on a Yoruba hymn which translates, “Let us bow down and worship God;” *Supplication* is also based on a Yoruba hymn titled “God accept the gifts of our hands;” *Vesper* uses an evening hymn tune composed by Rev. A. T. Ola Olude which literally translates, “The day is all but gone.” Example 4 shows the borrowed melody in *Vesper*.



Example 4. Sowande, Yoruba Hymn Tune in *Vesper*.

*Via Dolorosa*'s theme was originally a free-rhythm Yoruba traditional song, whose melody was adapted for a Good Friday hymn.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, the last piece in this collection *Jubilate* is constructed on the melody of a Christian hymn "Oyigiyigi l'Olorun wa" (Our God is immortal) which had been adapted from a Yoruba traditional song for the river goddess Osun, entitled "Oyigiyigi, ota omi (The sea pebble is immortal).<sup>21</sup> The relations between the texts and the stylistic principles of the pieces will be explored in-depth under the sub-heading, "elements of musical conception."<sup>22</sup> Example 5 shown below, illustrates the borrowed melody in *Jubilate*.



Example 5. Sowande, Yoruba Traditional Melody in *Jubilate*.

In his monumental book on African musicology, *Foundation of Nigerian Traditional Music*, Samuel Akpabot gives a scholarly description of African melodies:

Very many African melodies make use of the pentatonic scale, which is a scale of music with five tones as opposed to the seven-note diatonic scale of Western music. But this is not the standard practice as we are liable to find music in tritonic, tetratonic, heptatonic and hexatonic scales. As a rule, African melodies are almost always short, many times fragmentary and very repetitive. They do not modulate to another key and the form can be described as *African ternary* which means that the first section of the melody is brought back with no modulation in the middle section. . . The idea of pentatonic scale is so strong in African music, that even when

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> The titles of the indigenous hymn tunes, folksongs and their translations have been taken from the composer's notes to each of the pieces.

an instrument, like the human voice or the one-string fiddle, is capable of producing a more flexible melody, a pentatonic melody is still instinctively preferred.<sup>23</sup>

Likewise, the borrowed indigenous melodies in Sowande's organ pieces have an affinity with the cultural theoretic framework as elucidated in Akpabot's book. The songs are generally short in length ranging from four to eight measures; the longer ones are twelve to sixteen measures in length. They are all based on a five-note pentatonic scale with the exception of the melody of *Jesu Olugbala* which is tetratonic (four notes) and the borrowed melody of *Via Dolorosa* that is heptatonic (six notes). The vocal range of the songs is consistent with that of indigenous folksongs in Nigeria; thus, they are within the compass of an octave. This is a very suitable range for singing traditional songs comfortably. The melodic shape of the songs is mostly disjunct, except for a few whose contours are conjunct.

By employing indigenous melodies from the Nigerian culture, Sowande has aligned himself with the efforts of ethnomusicologists world wide in preserving and saving traditional songs from extinction. This is what Bruno Nettl calls "the greying-out of musical diversity" in his monumental book, *The Study of Ethnomusicology*.<sup>24</sup> Nettl admits that ethnomusicologists have spent much time sorrowing inwardly at the evanishment of musics, of styles, genres and instruments.<sup>25</sup> Hence, Sowande's creative approach is a phenomenal one and coincides with the noble efforts of ethnomusicologists to preserve traditional

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<sup>23</sup> (Akpabot 1986, 4-5)

<sup>24</sup> Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty Nine Issues and Concepts* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 346.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

music all around the globe. He is not only saving the songs that are being eroded on a daily basis by foreign musical genres and in particular, popular music but he is also demonstrating some of the modern usages of indigenous music through artistic creativity, and he is more importantly responsible for preserving a decaying cultural heritage of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. We have earlier established the fact that these songs are loaded with the life, history and aspirations of the people. Therefore, Sowande is helpful in keeping the Nigerian culture alive through the creative process in his works.

### **Elements of Dance**

In his organ works, Fela Sowande is cognizant of one of the salient characteristics of African music, the dance that accompanies almost every aspect of music making in the society. At most performances of music in socio/political or religious events, the people involved have always responded to the singing, drumming or handclapping by dancing.

In his ethnographical work, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, John Chernoff describes how the average Africans may respond to music:

If you play a recording of American jazz for an African friend, even though all the formal characteristics of African music are there, he may say, as he sits fidgeting in his chair, “What are we supposed to do with this?” He is expressing perhaps the most fundamental aesthetic in Africa: without participation, there is no meaning. When you ask an African friend whether or not he “understands” a certain type of music, he will say yes if he knows the dance that goes with it. The music of Africa invites us to participate in the making of a community.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> (Chernoff 1979, 23)

Nigerians, like other Africans, relate more to a musical performance that allows and involves a participatory experience. There are very few performance practices in the tradition that dissuade audience participation.<sup>27</sup> Nketia explains that purely contemplative music, which is not associated with dance could be observed in some traditional rites, but the musical practice that is integrated with dance or music that stimulates affective motor response is much more prevalent. He asserts that musical experience is by and large an emotional one for an African. Sounds, however pleasant are meaningless if they do not offer the experience of movement.<sup>28</sup>

Generally, there is no such thing as a contemplative audience or spectators in most musical performances in traditional Africa. Kwabena Nketia elucidates that limited participation is extended to the audience. In some contexts, the audience may join the chorus. They may also enter the dancing ring either to dance or to give moral support to the dancers by placing coins on their foreheads or in their mouths, or by placing handkerchiefs around their necks, or finally by spreading pieces of cloth on the ground for the dancers to step on.<sup>29</sup> Chernoff recounts the experience of a traditional musician to further reinforce the interrelations of music and dance in African society:

If we go to a wedding house and the women are standing or sitting there, you will see a drummer go up to a woman and be singing and beating his drum. He is calling the names of her grandfathers who are dead. He can call them to the extent of his knowledge. . . When the woman knows that it is her grandfathers' names he is calling, sometimes it is sweet for her, and she laughs. And at that time she will come out and start dancing. And all the money she has brought, she will give it out to the musicians.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> (Euba 1977, 15)

<sup>28</sup> (Nketia 1974, 206)

<sup>29</sup> (Nketia 1974, 33)

<sup>30</sup> (Chernoff 1979, 69)

Adolphus Turkson makes it clear that dance in African culture is performed during happy occasions<sup>31</sup> as well as sad moments as illustrated above in Chernoff's book. In other words, the impetus for dance is not predicated upon the mood or atmosphere surrounding the event, but rather, the music propels the people to motion. The principle of composition as found in traditional music applies, to a large extent, to dance, whether it is the choreographically fixed and rehearsed stylized dances that are presented as specialized artistic creations, or the free medley dances which encourage free individualistic choreographic elaboration on a given dance theme and motif, during every performance occasion.<sup>32</sup>

Further, Nketia makes us aware that motor response intensifies one's enjoyment of music through the feelings of increased involvement and the propulsion that articulating the beat by physical movement generates.<sup>33</sup> The dance can also be used as a social and artistic medium of communication. It can convey thoughts or matters of personal or social importance through the choice of movements, postures, and facial expressions. Through the dance, individuals and social groups can show their reactions to attitudes of hostility or cooperation and friendship held by others towards them.<sup>34</sup>

Lomax describes the function of dance in a communal setting:

Dance is composed of those gestures, postures, movements, and movement qualities most characteristic and most essential to the activity of everyday, and thus crucial to cultural continuity. By treating these elements redundantly and formally, dance becomes an effective organizer of joint motor activity. Dance supplies the metronome to meter and becomes the regulator of the rhythm of social interaction. Dance captures,

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<sup>31</sup> Adolphus Turkson, "Contrafactum and Parodied Song Texts in Religious Music: A Discussion of Problems and Challenges in Contemporary African Music," Chap. in *African Musicology: Current Trends vol. 2* (Atlanta, GA: Crossroads Press, 1992), 70.

<sup>32</sup> Meki Nzewi, *Musical Practice and Creativity* (Bayreuth: Iwalewa-Haus, 1991), 111.

<sup>33</sup> (Nketia 1974, 207)

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

regulates, or orders the energy and attention of groups of people, and thereby acquires the weight of general community approval. Thus dance functions to establish and renew consensus at moments when a society, without further discussion or explanation, is ready to act in concert. . . If dance has a social function it should be to reinforce modalities of interpersonal and group organization that are most crucial in the main subsistence of a culture.<sup>35</sup>

Fela Sowande grew up in the African culture discussed by the scholar, Alan Lomax. He knew that in order for him to truly communicate with his audiences in Nigeria and Africa he had to incorporate the element of dance in his organ pieces. Without the flare and devices for movement in his organ works, Sowande knew that he would find it difficult to capture and sustain the interest of the average Nigerian audience. Consequently, he incorporated suitable dance devices in his work, which are notably borrowed folksongs, indigenous church hymn tunes and scintillating traditional rhythmic patterns with which Nigerians are familiar.

The idea of borrowing folksongs in modern compositions would inevitably stimulate dance in the listeners. The recognition of a familiar tune would first bring a smile to the faces of the indigenous listeners. These songs could then trigger the audience to tap their feet, tap their laps, or even sway their heads and bodies. The kinesics generates a form of patriotism and cultural identification.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> (Lomax 1994, 224)

<sup>36</sup> Godwin Sadoh, "Creativity and Dance in Joshua Uzoigwe's Music," *ComposerUSA* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 5.



Nketia illustrates how the movements are fixed to the rhythmic line of a song rather than the accompanying percussion among the Ijaw *eseni* of Nigeria. He emphasizes that many songs are sung at the same performance, each with its sets of stylized movements which are mastered by the dancers at rehearsals before public performance.<sup>37</sup> Alan Lomax takes the argument further:

The rhythmic or metrical aspects of song may be derived from dance and that the preferred meters in song are transferred across from the most common metrical patterns of the dance. Song can be defined as “danced speech.” Therefore, if one seeks to evoke the significance of musical meter, one must turn from song to the study of the rhythmic ordering of physical activity in dance. . . Both dance and song occur most frequently in ritual situations-during religious ceremonials and community festivals of birth, maturation, courtship, marriage, harvest, death and the like.<sup>38</sup>

The choice of specific well-known rhythmic patterns in Sowande’s organ works is the third and most perceivable element of dance in these pieces. Kofi Agawu identifies three distinct rhythmic procedures in African music: (1) the use of drum as speech surrogates, exemplified by the practice of talking drum; (2) the iconic and the symbolic dimensions of communication within the dance; and (3) the purely musical play of rhythms in dance, an autonomous mode with no necessary communicative obligations.<sup>39</sup> This study is concerned with the third type of rhythmic procedure. Agawu illustrates the meaning of the purely musical play of rhythms in dance:

On hearing a particular good drummer, they may show appreciation by pasting money on his forehead, shouting slogans, or dancing on the spot. The purely musical cultivation of rhythms is a viable mode of expression, one that is subject only to the impermanent constraints. . .<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> (Nketia 1974, 212)

<sup>38</sup> (Lomax 1994, 222-224)

<sup>39</sup> Kofi Victor Agawu, *African Rhythm: A Northern Ewe Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 105.

<sup>40</sup> (Agawu 1995, 107)

Four types of rhythmic patterns are commonly employed in Sowande's organ pieces to move the Nigerian/African audience to dance—polyrhythm, syncopated rhythm, *konkonkolo* rhythm and the ostinato rhythmic patterns. Polyrrhythm in Sowande's organ works is characterized by the simultaneous interplay of various rhythmic patterns assigned to each line of the music. The right hand may be playing the principal theme, while the left hand supplies accompaniment to the theme with a different but simplified rhythm, and the pedal could supply counter rhythms to the manuals. What makes repetition exciting is the simultaneous interaction of rhythmic variations and repetitions over a time span. The continuous repetition of specific rhythmic patterns in these works can influence the listeners to move their bodies.

The Yoruba *konkonkolo* rhythm consists of seven rhythmic beats and it is a cyclic pattern that is commonly performed repetitiously in traditional music. This rhythm is found in several traditional music in West Africa and also in the modern popular dance style, 'highlife.' It serves as a time line or metronome for the purpose of stabilizing tempo within an instrumental performance. Meki Nzewi describes "metronome instruments as time and tempo regulator that play a one-tone reiterative rhythm-figure, which is not allowed even the simplest form of internal rhythmic variation."<sup>41</sup> In addition, Nketia stressed that time line in African music came into existence as a result of the difficulty of keeping subjective metronomic time in actual performance; thus, Africans facilitate this process by externalizing the basic pulse.<sup>42</sup> This may be shown by hand clapping or through the beats of a simple idiophone such as maracas. The time line helps to maintain basic pulsation in musical performance. According to Sowande, the

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<sup>41</sup> Meki Nzewi, "Melo-rhythmic Essence and Hot Rhythm in Nigerian Folk Music," *The Black Perspectives in Music* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 24.

<sup>42</sup> (Nketia 1974, 131-132)

Yoruba refers to it as *konkonkolo* because, “with his propensity for translating percussive rhythms into words through his drums, the drummer says that the small drum in the Yoruba Drum Orchestra which beats out this rhythm regularly, and serves virtually as the ‘metronome’ of the orchestra, is in fact saying *konkonkolo, konkolo*.”<sup>43</sup> Example 6 provides the original version of the Yoruba *konkonkolo* rhythm, while Example 7, illustrates the variant of the *konkonkolo* rhythm and polyrhythmic construct in Sowande’s *Laudamus Te*.



Example 6. Original Version of the Yoruba *Konkonkolo* Rhythm.

Musical score for Example 7, showing a variant version of the *konkonkolo* rhythm and polyrhythmic construct. The score is written for piano and features complex polyrhythmic patterns across multiple staves.

Example 7. Sowande, Variant Version of the *Konkonkolo* Rhythm and Polyrhythmic Construct in *Laudamus Te*, p. 2, mm.23-29.

<sup>43</sup> Fela Sowande, “Sacred Idioms of the Negro,” Score, Iwalewa-Haus, University of Bayreuth, Germany.

Nketia explains that time line is sounded as part of the music, and it is regarded as an accompanying rhythm and means by which rhythmic motion is sustained. Hence, instead of a time line that represents simple regular beats reflecting the basic pulse, a more complex form may be used. It may be designed as a rhythmic pattern in additive or divisive form, embodying the basic pulse or regulative beat as well as the density referent.<sup>44</sup> A variant version of the *konkonkolo* rhythm of the Yoruba is assigned to the left hand in *Laudamus Te* from the *Sacred Idioms of the Negro*. It is acceptable to employ a modified version of the rhythm in the tradition. As a matter of fact, there are several versions of the original type to be found in the culture. The *konkonkolo* rhythm in *Laudamus Te* is Sowande's own variant of the original in which he infuses a music note before or after a rest to vary the original type. The rhythm is repeated almost throughout the entire piece in accordance with the traditional practice. The consistent repetition of this rhythmic pattern over a long period of time makes it an ostinato.

The ostinato, a persistently repeated melodic and/or rhythmic pattern, is commonly found in several organ works from Sowande's *Laudamus Te*, *Supplication*, and *Jubilate* (All from Sowande's *Sacred Idioms of the Negro*). In addition to these works, ostinato is also found in *Obangiji*, *Oyigiyigi*, and *Jesu Olugbala*. Sowande's predilection for repetition is directly influenced by the Yoruba culture. The Yoruba folklorist, Olatunde Olatunji, makes the following point as to why repetition is prevalent in the Yoruba culture:

Repetition is used to emphasize and intensify the theme of the repeated sentences. Through reiteration, the audience is made to pay attention to the content of the sentences repeated, or the target of the sentences is made forcefully aware of the desires of the speaker (or the composer or

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<sup>44</sup> (Nketia 1974, 132)

performer) or singer. When a group of sentences is repeated after some intervening ones, the idea contained in the sentences becomes a motif that draws attention to itself.<sup>45</sup>

Examples 8, 9, and 10 illustrate Sowande's use of ostinato in three of his organ works.

*Jubilate, Obangiji, and Oyigiyigi.*

The image displays two systems of musical notation for an organ piece. The first system consists of two staves. The upper staff is marked with 'Crisp: Rhythmic.' and 'Gt: Solo'. It features a series of chords and melodic lines. The lower staff is marked with 'sw to Ped' and '(Smile)'. The second system also consists of two staves, continuing the musical piece with similar notation and phrasing.

Example 8. Sowande, Ostinato in *Jubilate*, p. 11, mm. 9-25.

<sup>45</sup> Olatunde O. Olatunji, *Features of Yoruba Oral Poetry* (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1984), 8.

Andante cantabile  $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$  preceding

Sw. Sw. *mf* (Sw. to Pgd.)

*simile*

Example 9. Sowande, Ostinato in *Obangiji*, p. 4, mm. 14-24.

*mp*

8' Choir *p*

*p*

soft 8' Ped. uncoupled

Example 10. Sowande, Ostinato in *Oyigiyigi*, p. 7, mm. 55-75.

Sowande uses repetition in his organ works to communicate with his audience. There are instances when a folksong or rhythmic idea becomes very difficult to identify because it has been enmeshed in the Western harmonic sonority. Kofi Agawu notes the imperialistic imprint of Western harmony on African art music in his book, *Representing African Music*:

In terms of the three basic dimensions of European music--melody, rhythm and harmony--we may say that the one with the greatest colonizing power is harmony. . . . Of all the musical influences spawned by the colonial encounter, that of tonal functional harmony has been the most pervasive, the most far-reaching, and ultimately the most disastrous.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, one of the best ways to audibly recognize the indigenous melody or rhythm in modern compositions by Africans is through the art of repetition. In other words, persistent repetition brings such important elements of the culture buried in the music to the attention of the audience.

### **Elements of Musical Conception**

Titles given to Fela Sowande's organ works convey meanings that deserve critical investigation. The works that fall within the confines of pieces based on Nigerian source materials are given titles that express symbolic and imaginary ideas. In order to comprehend the underpinning factors behind such cultural phenomena, it is necessary to examine the cultural roots of the Yoruba people of Nigeria where Sowande was a native. Olatunde Olatunji writes about the names or titles given to a child or persons among the Yoruba:

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<sup>46</sup> Kofi Victor Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 8.

A child's name thus affects him for the Yoruba say 'oruko ni i ro omo' (A child's name affects him). This is why great care is taken before a child is named because the name is meant to reflect not only the circumstances of conception and birth of a child, but also its family history, fortunes and misfortunes, its family's hopes and fears. Therefore, when a child is being expected, the circumstances of its conception and the expectant mother's experiences during pregnancy and at delivery, and the circumstances of the child's birth are closely observed and encapsulated in one or other of the categories of the names which a Yoruba child bears. . . Parents belong to royal or titled families include in their children's names words like Ade (Crown), Ola (Honor), Oye (Chieftaincy, Royalty), as in Adeyemi (Crown befits me), Olaitan (Honor never ends), Oyedoyin (Chieftaincy has become sweet). . .<sup>47</sup>

Likewise, Fela Sowande's organ pieces must have been influenced by the titles of the folksongs and indigenous hymn tunes employed in creating them. Considering his knowledge and experience in Yoruba folklore and mythology, Sowande was certainly aware of the concept of naming a child and given titles to persons. Sowande knew that such names usually reflected imaginary symbols and had a great effect on the life, aspiration, character and total worldview of the person. Hence, when writing his organ works, Sowande's creative impulse must have been impacted by the titles of the songs that he used.

Although these pieces are meant to be played and performed in the Christian church, we can only have a better understanding of the music through a diachronic examination of the cultural underpinnings of the songs and their relations to the over-all structure and style of each individual work. An ethno-theory of the selected works will certainly embrace a contextual view and illuminate the specificity of African musical experience and intellection.

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<sup>47</sup> (Olatunji 1984, 68-69)



Therefore, Sowande's organ pieces have a cultural affinity with the Yoruba mythology, legendary, philosophy, and socio/political events. Titles such as *Gloria*, *Obangiji*, *Oyigiyigi*, *Prayer*, and *Via Dolorosa* convey significant ethno-centric imageries.

*Gloria* is based on a Yoruba hymn tune composed by Rev. J. J. Ransome-Kuti, who was being referred to as the "Singing Minister" by Fela Sowande. The hymn was popularly used in the congregation as a response to the reading of the Holy Gospel at Communion Services at St. Peter's Church, Ake, Abeokuta, Ogun State. The English translation of the Yoruba text of the hymn is as follows,

Glory be to Thee, Lord of Heaven, Glory be to Thee. We offer praises to Thee, Who ownest us. We praise Thee, Lord of the Rainbow; Glory be to Thee, Lord of Heaven, Glory be to Thee.

The influence of the title on this work is observed in the style of the music. The text of the original hymn is a song of praise; hence, Sowande's setting is virtuosic, lively, sectional, and majestic. The recommended bright registration displays the glory and power of God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Example 11, on the following page, illustrates how Sowande uses chords, dynamics, and bright registration to depict praising God.

**Allegro moderato**

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system is labeled 'MANUALS' and 'PEDAL'. The second and third systems show the full piano score with treble and bass staves for both hands and a separate pedal line. The music is in 4/4 time and features a steady accompaniment in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand.

Example 11. Sowande, Dynamics and colorful Chords Depicting the Praises of God in *Gloria*, p. 3, mm. 1-6.

*Obangiji* is another work that displays the majesty and power of God. The first line of the hymn text reads “Obangiji, wo l’o to sin” (Almighty God, you are worthy to be worshipped). The title is reflected in the strength of the piece which is very loud. It opens with a short fanfare introduction, but quickly goes into a moderate tempo when the main theme comes in the right hand with a steady ostinato accompaniment in the left hand. The steady tempo signifies a gentle walk toward the throne of God with shouts of

praise. The music reaches its climax towards the end with consistent rhythmic pedal points at the octaves over which is laid polychords in the manuals. The piece closes triumphantly with the last entry of the Yoruba hymn tune at a higher register which symbolizes a final repose in the very presence of God with jubilation and thanksgiving. Example 12 shows the opening short fanfare in *Obangiji*.

**Allegro con brio**

MANUALS *ff*

PEDAL

*rit.*

Solo  
Pedal Reeds

*Gent.* **Largamente**  
Gf. Reeds

*rall.* *fff*

CASSA

CASSA

CASSA

Example 12. Sowande, Short Fanfare Introduction in *Obangiji*, p. 3, mm. 1-8.

*Oyigiyigi* is a larger work with a distinct theme and ten variations. The composer's notes regarding the music give a better understanding of the total framework:

“*Oyigiyigi*” is known definitely to have been borrowed from the Yoruba Ifa worshippers. The great central figure of Yoruba mythology is Orunmila, and Ifa has sometimes been defined as the words of wisdom and of instruction which came out of the mouth of this great Priest-Prophet-King to whom God entrusted the ordering and the care of the universe. Arising out of one of their many stories about Orunmila, his devotees sing “*Oyigiyigi, ota omi o; awa d’oyigiyigi a o ku mo; oyigiyigi, ota omi*” (The sea pebble is immortal; we too as children of the god have become immortal; we shall never die). Some Yoruba Christian during the early days of Christianity in Yoruba land took over this Ifa melody and wrote Christian words to it, amending the melody to suit the demands of the tone-language that Yoruba is. The Yoruba Christian therefore sings, “*Oyigiyigi l’Olorun wa o; Oyigiyigi Oba aiku l’Olorun wa*” (God, our God, is great beyond comprehension; He is Immortal, the Ever-Living One; Our God is Immortal).<sup>48</sup>

This organ work is based on the Christian version of the song according to the composer, with an emphasis on the Immortal and the Ever-Living God. It is another work written specifically to display the glory and majesty of God Almighty through the use of polychords, bright registration, virtuosic passages in both the manual and pedal, and variable tempo markings ranging from fast to moderate and majestic. An inference could be drawn from the form of the music, which is theme and variations. Sowande uses diverse techniques within this form to create an imaginary scenario of different kinds of sea pebbles. As we generally know, sea pebbles come in different shapes and sizes and are usually found in large quantities by the sea shore or underneath the sea itself. Similarly, the composer uses various types of variations, bicinium, trio, and toccata, as well as varieties of compositional devices which have diminution and

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<sup>48</sup> Fela Sowande, “*Oyigiyigi*,” (New York: Ricordi, 1958).

augmentation, in order to create an illusion of various types, shapes and sizes of sea pebbles. The musical textures of the compositional devices in *Oyigiyigi* represent the various sizes of the sea pebbles. For instance, Example 13 shown below illustrates the diminution of the melodic notes in the top line of the toccata, representing the smallest pebbles. Bicinium and trio, consisting of two to three line textures, stand for the next size of sea pebbles, while Example 14, shown on the next page, exemplifies the augmented notes of the principal theme in the top line of the last variation, representing the largest size of the sea pebbles. Apparently, the text of the traditional melody must have informed the creative imagination of the composer.

**VARIATION VIII**

**Allegro con brio**  
*(rapide)*      add to Gt.

Ped. Solo stop coupled Gt.

Example 13. Sowande, Diminution of Melodic Notes in *Oyigiyigi*, p. 17, mm. 261-266.

**VARIATION X**  
**Maestoso**

Gt. coupled Sw.

Gt. to Ped.

Sw. Gt.

Example 14. Sowande, Augmentation of Melodic Notes in *Oyigiyigi*, p. 19, mm. 266-275.

*Prayer* is a very quiet piece in four distinct sections: (1) Andante sostenuto con dolore, (2) Andante con moto, (3) Andante Cantabile, and (4) Andante sostenuto e doloroso. The first, third and fourth sections are the gentle passages which carry the main theme of the piece. The second section of *Prayer* is a virtuosic passage which creates a sharp contrast to the other three quiet sections. Sowande gives us the background of the melody in his music notes:

This melody may have been borrowed from non-Christian sources. It is equally possible, however, that it may have been composed either by the late Rev. J. J. Ransome-Kuti of Abeokuta, or by one of the early Yoruba converts. Whatever its origin, the mind of the Yoruba Christian is far from his drum-rhythms as he sings “Oba a ba Ke, awa o ke, Olugbala a ba sin, awa o sin; Jesu a ba sin, l’aiye nbu o, Olodumare, dariji ni o. Tori Jesu, dariji ni o” which translates freely thus, “The King (of Heaven) whom we should cherish, we do not cherish. The Savior (of mankind) whom we should serve, we do not serve; Jesus whom we should worship, He is the very one the world derides and abuses; Lord of the Rainbow, forgive us our offences; for the sake of Jesus, grant us pardon.”<sup>49</sup>

We could draw meaning from this serene and beautiful piece through its title and the composer’s explanation at the beginning of the music. Sowande makes it clear that he does not intend to excite his listeners and arouse them to dance with this music when he admits that, “the Yoruba Christian is far from his drum-rhythms.” Consequently, the title justifies the inward imagination of the composer that this music is for devotional purposes and spiritual meditation like a prayer. The homophonic arrangement (solo and accompaniment) of the sections with the Yoruba melody depicts the presence of the priest interceding for the congregation all by himself with the support of the people, giving a solid backing with their gentle ‘Amen.’ Example 15, on the next page, shows the quiet opening of Sowande’s *Prayer*.

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<sup>49</sup> Fela Sowande, *Prayer* (New York: Ricordi, 1958)

**Andante sostenuto con dolore**  
Choir: 8' Solo soft Reed & Trem.

MANUALS *mp*

*p* Sw. soft 8'

PEDAL *p* (no stops: coupled Sw.)

Example 15. Sowande, Opening Section of *Prayer*, p. 2, mm. 1-10.

In the last piece for consideration, *Via Dolorosa*, from the *Sacred Idioms of the Negro*, Sowande has expressed the symbolic representation in the following comments:

*Via Dolorosa* supplies a classic example of Yoruba melody in speech rhythm. Here, the Yoruba Christian thinks back to the first Good Friday, and reminds us of the tragic events of that terrible day, when cruel and vindictive people crucified the Son of God upon the cross in Jerusalem. This type of Yoruba hymn, like the Gregorian chant, may well be termed “The sung prayer of the Yoruba Christian Church.” In its original home, this melody has a poignancy, yet withal a beautiful and dignity, that no composition can hope to catch in its entirety. How much of this that may be embodied in the present work reaches the listener will depend on the extent to which the organist himself is attuned to “the first Good Friday.”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Fela Sowande, “The Sacred Idioms of the Negro,” Score, Iwalewa-Haus, University of Bayreuth, Germany.



*Dolorosa*, a part of the title, means grief, mournful, pain, death or sorrow and Sowande's utmost goal in this music is to paint the picture of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on Good Friday. He captures the melancholy mood of this work with three musical ideas: (1) the borrowed principal melody from a Yoruba hymn sung on Good Friday services, (2) the expression mark at the beginning of the piece, 'Lento con dolore,' and (3) suggesting in his musical notes that the organist/performer reflect on the first Good Friday experience in order to give a more moving and meaningful interpretation. Sowande uses excessive chromatic passages in the music to express the anguish, sorrow, pain and eventual death of Jesus on the cross.<sup>51</sup> Example 16 illustrates chromaticism in *Via Dolorosa*.

Example 16. Chromaticism in *Via Dolorosa*, p. 9, mm. 24-36.

<sup>51</sup> The titles of the indigenous hymn tunes, folksongs and their translations have been taken from the composer's notes to each of the pieces.

The titles selected by Sowande reveal that these works were not conceived as 'absolute music,' but were influenced by religious and socio/cultural events. Such titles invariably create an imaginary picture of the music in the performers' minds as well as the Nigerian/African audiences, and they served as impetus for inspiration, imagination, and artistic creativity. Consequently, one could also assert that the titles of the works had a great influence on the shape and stylistic features of the music, and that the creative imagination of Sowande must have certainly been formed in one way or the other by the titles of the borrowed Yoruba melodies, irrespective of which one came first, the music or the title.

A cultural analysis of Fela Sowande's selected organ works elucidates the religious and socio/political milieu of the pieces. Similarly, a diachronic examination of the music puts the pieces in historical perspective. This gives a better understanding of the creative imagination of the composer and indeed highlights the traditional source materials in the works. This approach points out the implications of symbolism, imagery, and picturesque ideas on the over-all shape and style of the individual pieces.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

The study of Fela Sowande's life and music clearly demonstrates the imprint of early European missionary exegesis and colonization on the emergence of modern Nigerian art music. The missionary schools and colonial educational institutions introduced Nigerians to Western music notation, instruments, repertoires, and thereby equipped its citizens in the global creative process of modern art music. Therefore, these institutions represent the centers for the development, growth and dissemination of Western classical music in Nigeria. Consequently, the synthesis of indigenous Nigerian and Western musical idioms emanates from the church through experimental works by pioneer organists and choirmasters.

The selected works of Sowande in this study are based on indigenous source materials from Nigeria. The themes are derivations of Nigerian folksongs and indigenous hymn tunes composed by local organists and choirmasters. Works such as *Oyigiyigi*, *Obangiji*, *K'a Mura*, *Jesu Olugbala* and *Prayer*, are all based on Nigerian thematic materials. Sowande's concept of derivative materials is much broader than some of the younger generations of African composers, in that his themes reflect both African and African American idiomatic expressions as seen in his arrangement of Black Spirituals in *Bury Me Eas' or Wes' (from the Sacred Idioms of the Negro)*, *Go Down Moses* and *Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho*.

Fela Sowande, like other composers of contemporary African art music such as Ayo Bankole (Nigeria), Akin Euba (Nigeria), Samuel Akpabot (Nigeria), Joshua Uzoigwe (Nigeria), Bode Omojola (Nigeria), Ephraim Amu (Ghana), Kwabena Nketia (Ghana), Solomon Mbabi-Katana (Uganda), Gamal Abdel-Rahim (Egypt), and Halim El-Dabh (Egypt) is a modern interculturalist. His conjoining of Nigerian musical elements, African American themes and Western classical idioms justifies the works as intercultural. In this regard, intercultural phenomenon could be postulated from two perspectives: (1) the composer, an African writing in Western classical style and (2) the amalgamation of the tripartite cultural expressions—Nigerian, African American, and European.

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## APPENDIX A

### PRINCIPAL ARCHIVES

#### Musical Scores

University of Bayreuth  
Iwalewa-Haus  
D-95440, Bayreuth  
Germany

Telephone: 0921-608-250  
Fax: 0921-58-838

Library of Congress  
Music Division  
Washington, DC 20540

International Society-African to American Music (IS-AAM)  
c/o Mike Wright  
49 Waltham Avenue  
GU2 9 QF  
United Kingdom

Typed and Unpublished Manuscripts

Center for Black Music Research  
Columbia College Chicago  
600 South Michigan Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60605-1996

Telephone: 312-344-7586  
Fax: 312-663-9019

Dartmouth College Library  
Rauner Special Collections Library  
6065 Webster Hall  
Hanover, NH 03755-3519

Telephone: 603-646-2037  
Fax: 603-646-0447

Library of Congress  
Music Division  
Washington, DC 20540

## APPENDIX B

### DISCOGRAPHY

- Cooper, Nancy. *The Road Less Traveled*. Fela Soawnde's *Go Down Moses* in this recording. Pro Organo, POCD 7139, January 2002.
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## VITA

Godwin Sadoh was born on March 28, 1965, at Lagos, Nigeria, to a middle-class family. His mother enrolled him in one of the local church choirs, Saint Paul's Anglican Church, Idi-Oro, Lagos, in 1979. It was at this church that Sadoh was first introduced to European music.

Sadoh attended Eko Boys' High School, Lagos, from 1977 to 1982 where he received private lessons in theory of music and piano from Mr. Ebenezer Omole, the school's music teacher. Sadoh was appointed to the position of Organist and Choir director at Eko Boys' High School in 1981, at the tender age of sixteen. During his tenure, he coordinated musical activities for the school and directed a Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols in December, 1981.

In 1984, Sadoh was accepted to the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, to study piano performance. Between 1985 and 1986, he was appointed as the Director of the Unife Joint Christian Mission Choir (over 250 voices). Sadoh completed his Bachelor of Arts degree with a Second Class Upper-Division in 1988 and he was retained to teach in the same Department from 1988 to 1994 as a result of his diligence and academic excellence. He taught several courses including piano, voice, aural musicianship and African music. While teaching at the Obafemi Awolowo University, he founded and directed two major choral groups, the *Ile-Ife Choral Society* and the *Ile-Ife Junior Choral Society*.



With these two groups, he directed several public concerts of choral, vocal solos, and instrumental music within and outside Ile-Ife. Sadoh also played piano solo recitals on the university campus and other regions in Nigeria.

Between 1994 and 1998, Sadoh studied ethnomusicology and African music with Akin Euba at the University of Pittsburgh where he obtained an M.A. degree. As a Teaching Assistant at the institution, he taught several courses including world music, class voice, and class piano. During this period, he was privileged to be appointed as a guest/visiting lecturer at GoldenWest College, California, in 1995, and at Thiel College from 1995 to 1998. He presented several scholarly papers on Nigerian music at the national and regional conferences of the Society for Ethnomusicology in Los Angeles, New York, Baltimore and Wisconsin. Sadoh studied organ with Robert Sutherland Lord at the University of Pittsburgh for three years. While in Pittsburgh, he was also hired as the Organist and Choir Director at Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church, Wilkinsburg, from 1996 to 1998.

Sadoh continued his musical training in organ performance and church music at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln from 1998 to 2000. His teachers were George Ritchie and Quentin Faulkner. He created the African music program and taught the course from 1998 to 2000. During his two year sojourn in Nebraska, he was appointed as Organist at Christ Lutheran Church, Grace Lutheran Church, and Associate Director of Music Ministries at the First United Methodist Church. Sadoh obtained the M.Mus. Degree in May of 2000. He published his first scholarly article "Music at the Anglican Youth Fellowship: An Intercultural Experience" in *The Hymn*, in January 2001.

In the Fall of 2000, Sadoh was accepted to the Doctor of Musical Arts degree program to study organ performance with Herndon Spillman and composition with Dinos Constantinides at the Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. This admission made him the first African to study organ at doctoral level.

Wayne Leupold Editions published his first organ composition *Nigerian Suite No. 1 for Organ Solo* in 2003 and a hymn book *E Korin S'Oluwa Book One* in 2004. Sadoh's scholarly publications include "A Profile of Nigerian Organist-Composers" in *The Organ* and *The Diapason*; "A Centennial Epitome of the Organs at the Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos, Nigeria" in *The Organ*; "The Creative Process of Nigerian Hymn-Based Compositions" in *The Diapason*; "Music at the Anglican Youth Fellowship, Ile-Ife, Nigeria: An Intercultural Experience" in *The Hymn*; "Creativity and Dance in Joshua Uzoigwe's Music" in *ComposerUSA*; ; "A History of South Africa's Organ Builders" in *Organ Encyclopedia*; "Organ Building in Nigeria" in *Organ Encyclopedia*; and "Intercultural Creativity in Joshua Uzoigwe's Music" in *Africa*.