

The Relevance of Music in Nollywood

Philo Igue Okpeki*

Abstract: The paper examines the relevance of music in Nollywood, the Nigerian home video film industry. There is a dearth of critical works on music studies in Nollywood. Film critics and scholars engage themselves more on socio-political, economic and technical issues when Nollywood is discussed as a means to promote cultural art form. It is against this backdrop of the neglect of sounds, especially music in Nollywood in critical discourses, that this paper attempts to examine the relevance of music in the realization of the composite sense of realism in the Nigeria film practice. Also, this research uses content analysis method to investigate how music facilitates the easy communication of the cineaste's message to the film audience. The research reveals that while music and actions are complimentary, they are also imperative for the audience to fully decode the meaning of the film.

Keywords: Nollywood, film, realism, music, audience

INTRODUCTION

The video film industry in Nigeria, labeled as Nollywood, is arguably the most popular platform for cultural expression in Nigeria today. It is produced at a rate that makes Nigeria the hot sit of the genre across the world. However, because of certain technical flaws and the peculiarities of the economy of screening, critics and scholars continue to doubt the possibility of its development at the level of technicalities. However, regardless of its limitation Nollywood remains the best media of retelling the Nigerian story.

Nollywood remain Nigeria's most formidable film industry in the 21st century. This film enterprise makes available to its enthusiastic public the drama of everyday life in a post-colonial space. The audience watch their lives being played out on silver screen what Okuyade (2006, 2) describes as "the realities of life staring at them

* Philo Igue Okpeki (✉)

Department of Music, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria
e-mail: okpekiphilo@gmail.com

screen to face”. Nollywood provides most Nigerians dreams, especially those who are scared of having one. Although, video film in Nigeria is still a nascent phenomenon, scholars and critics have linked its emergence to Yoruba popular theatre and serial narratives. The trail blazing film in Nollywood tradition is Kenneth Nebue’s living in Bondage 1 and 2. Lasode (2004), Adesanya (2002), Ogundele (1997), Haynes (1998), Okome (1997) accentuate the above assertion. The aim of this study is to examine the relevance of music in Nollywood; specifically, to evaluate the application of music in Nollywood to ascertain the effect it has on films in Nigeria.

MUSIC AND FILM: THE INTERSECTION

Music serves several significant roles in the film industry; amid them, it helps to shape emotional responses, creates rhythm to scene as segments and comments on the action of actors. Music is crucial to the experience of scene and sometimes as iconic as the movies themselves. This is typical in films in Nigeria such as ‘Living in Bondage’, ‘Dumabi the Dirty Girl’, ‘Kings of Boys’, ‘Oma the Village Girl’, amongst others. Music serves many purposes that are relevant to emotion and enhances the storytelling. According to Adam (2020), music is not only helpful to film making, but also essential for any director and producer to keep it in mind when planning or shooting the movie. Music therefore adds so much to the experience and emotional drives of film making.

Music can put a judgment on certain movie scenes; it can state that a certain battle is heroic or a certain dialogue is sad. In the early days of film making, the function of music was to comment on the images; but presently, music serves many purposes in film. It can portray emotions, develop a character, and create social, cultural and geographic references (Hoffmann 2020). Emotional music is used to create the perfect atmosphere in film scene by setting the right tone and mood for the scene movement and the characters. Music also help to understand and develop character through the texts of the song used. For example, in the ‘she loves me’ in *kiddiswink*, Oghenerugba from an interview discussion, revealed that he was able to learn and understood the sad story of the character of ‘Jesse’. Music in film likewise creates and reveals reflections on the cultural heritage and geographical setting of the characters. According to Irorovvwo Eguridu, the kind of music heard during a certain scene can enable one

to tell where it is taking place without the need of establishing the location.

THE APPLICATION OF MUSIC IN NOLLYWOOD

Although the Nigerian video film has provoked a robust scholarly attention, Nollywood is usually appraised from the cultural perspective, the economics of production and distribution, and most occasions criticism on it bothers more on its socio-political dynamics without much discussion on the use of music. It is against this background that this study attempts a reading of the film tradition in Nigeria in order to foreground the place of music in popular cultural practice designated as Nollywood. The study does not insist on the utilitarian function of music in the film, but its significance.

Oscar Brockett in his magisterial work, the *Theatre: An introduction*, distinguishes total theatre sound into three categories: the actors' voices, music and abstract sound and realistic noises. In the realization of film production, numerous sounds are deployed to create effect in film. For the purpose of our study, we shall only address one of the categories of sounds Brockett distinguishes above. The study, therefore attempts to appraise the relevance of the application sound, or music in Nollywood films. Music is not used arbitrarily in film production; its function is specifically to make the meaning of the message of the film clear to the viewers. Ejeke (1994, 46) contends that "the audience may get glued to a film if music is recorded to function as an adjunct in realizing its composite meaning: "the sound crew must find the appropriate type of music for a suitable musical piece when and where it is needed in the production even if it is live music that is needed".

Classical Greco-Roman dramatic and theatrical tradition was dominated by songs and dances, not because they were whole in themselves, but as an ancillary which leads the audience to the subject of the play. Thus, in the classical production the dancers were reduced to movement with musical accompaniment especially the chorus in ancient Greek drama sang choral odes with appropriate dance movements. Music was an important part of classical drama. Bowskill (1979) remarked that music can help the audience retain, the mood, meaning and atmosphere of a play long after the last word has been spoken. It can quietly pursue their thoughts and feelings until they are outside the theater. Invariably, the audience of Nollywood does not watch the action of the films which are usually protected by the

rhythmic pattern of the sound track, they equally place premium on the development of sounds, especially music. Music remains undoubtedly, the most potent weapon in filmic production which creates amazing effect on the audience if properly articulated to correspond with the thematic thrust of the film. The visual element of films is ordered towards achieving maximum dramatic filmic impact. The auditory complements are the human voice and speech. Consequently, music in film production functions to indicate the locale, to advance the plot, to create and sustain audience or anticipate the thematic thrust of a film. This is so because the visual elements and the musical are not at variance; they are what make films a composite whole.

It becomes glaring that music is deployed in films because it appeals to our sense of listening as it creates an appeal which helps us reconcile the technicalities of screening and the act of filming. This will in turn place the audience at a vantage position to appreciate the finesse of production. Thus, Akpan (2020) insists on the synergy of visual and music and explains that the musicians must be able to combine the video and audio. She also explains that we must structure a video-audio gestalt that is rather a production than a mere sum of pictures and sounds. Akpan's argument aptly captures the complementarity of both in the realization of the total wholeness of filmic production. Music can equally be used before, during and after the enactment as functional, supportive and decorative element. Our discourse so far covers the significance of music as background in film production especially sound effect. On some occasions, music can supplement action in film; a good example of this is the use of music in ushering in a character by creating rhythm to fit a character's behaviour. If properly deployed, music can equally help the audience to predict character's intention, creating an atmosphere whereby the audience becomes a participant in the entire filmic process. Music in Nollywood mostly performs the function of the chorus in classical drama. At this level, music functions as a means by which the filmmaker makes philosophical commentaries. This function is strictly a direct address to the audience so that they do not get carried away by the action of the film realized through music. This function is popular with Christian video films.

This study attempts an analysis of a religious film in order to make lucid our argument about the relevance of the use of music in film production. Helen Okpabio's *Highway to the Grave* will be briefly analyzed to make practical our argument. Of the four recognizable

genres in the Nigerian video film, the religious film seems to be the only genre that makes music function as part of a composite whole in film production. The Christian video films are not screened for mere entertainment purpose; they function beyond mundane bondage created by the devil. Hence, Oha (1997, 94) describes the struggle between the just and the forces of evil or darkness as “the war paradigm”. The films help men to realize their spiritual potentials and return to God. Thus, it is because of this utilitarian function of the film, that filmmakers offer their audience a significant proportion of sound track as gospel music.

Nollywood prioritizes heavily on music, even on occasions when the plot structure is shoddy. The deployment of sounds in films is usually magnificently organized. Music as an integral part of film production arouses the imagination of the audience and creates aesthetic pleasure. Beside the function of entertainment it performs during and after the production, music is like a compass which gives action and dialogue direction. By this function, music helps to sustain and articulate the changing mood of a film. Music sometimes has an effect action, if the gulf between silence, dialogue and music is bridged.

THE RELEVANCE OF MUSIC IN *HIGHWAY TO THE GRAVE*

In *Highway to the Grave*, music functions as the pulse of the film. It helps to sustain and adjust the tempo of the film. The music which introduces the film does not only function as prelude, it equally functions as prologue especially as the characters do not use speech to express their emotion, but action. The music gives the film its threnodic essence. Through the deployment of music in the film, a conscious audience would no doubt come to understand that the film is not only grotesque in temper; it equally has a tragic subject matter which is signified in the sound. The film details how the marine spirit from the water world torments man on earth. A large chunk of the film eloquently demonstrates how man has been totally subdued to the supernatural world and it appears there is no rescue from this spiritual existential impasse.

As noted earlier, it is through music that this atmosphere of fear is sustained and asserted. The music equally demonstrates the powerlessness of mere mortals because they seem hunted and as such they are terrified and always on the run. When the scene changes to the supernatural world, the music that activates the scenic switch carries the

tone of celebration, where we see the supernatural forces dancing and celebrating their destruction of the human world. The importance of music in creating and sustaining the filmic atmosphere and scenic switch cannot be over stated. It functions as a guide which replaces the popular role of narrator on stage. The film aptly performs this role albeit unconsciously. Music in the film equally functions to prepare the audience for a dramatic action, to reinforce it or elongate its impact. This is obvious, hence the inclusion of music in the film.

The function of music in the film becomes easily discernible, when the world of the supernatural is eventually destroyed by a man of God through the resources of the power of God. Before the eventual triumph of the pastor, the music equally demonstrates the change of the direction of the film, signifying that God will certainly triumph over the forces of the darkness no matter how long it takes.

Another very formidable utilitarian function of music in Nollywood is its moralistic agenda. Every artistic piece usually has didacticism as an important message to the audience. This function of music in Nollywood is not strictly peculiar or particular to religious film. It runs across the other genres. According to Okuyase (2006, 18) “the soundtrack of the film *Highway to the Grave* is very functional; it does not only propel the film to an evangelical standard, it unequivocally articulates the message”.

Music in Nollywood helps to accentuate the sense of realism in films. Life is music and music is life. Mankind relies on memory for existence especially on issues of documentation. Music on the other hand gives man the opportunity of capturing the essence of life in melodious form. Man expresses his joys, pains, anger and triumph in songs; invariably, music in films helps to communicate the realities of existence, it adds plausibility to film, thereby making it look realistic. Music does not function in isolation in the realization of realism in a film, but its sound is amplified for the benefit of the audience.

CONCLUSION

The undue emphasis paid to dialogue and action in films has made the place of music in Nollywood to seem subordinate. A critical examination of the Nigerian video film will not only establish the fact that filmmakers have excelled basically in deployment of the resources of sounds, especially music in the articulation of their message to the audience. The major concern of this paper has been to establish the fact that music is part of the compound and composite whole in film

production. However, because of the undue emphasis on action and dialogue, the audience continues to fail to recognize the singular indisputable fact that music is important and it is a recognized aspect of the total process in the realization of realism in film production. On the whole if we consider the manifold importance of music in film production, we will realize that music is not only an important auxiliary in film production, it could equally function as a map which can lead the audience to the heart of the message. Our argument is therefore a vindication that music is by no means a peripheral prop, if its potentials are holistically engaged in film production, bringing to bear Paz's contention, that music is not indefinite, but a concrete item which give movement and rhythm to action and dialogue.

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