

# [Article] The Use of Indigenous Musical Instruments in Traditional Christian Worship of the Yoruba, Nigeria



EMMANUEL OLUSOLA FASIPE

Emmanuel Olusola Fasipe (Ph.D.) is a lecturer of church music and Christian worship at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS) in Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Nigeria. He has served as a music minister in several Nigerian Baptist churches and earned his master's degree in church music from the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS) in Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Nigeria. He completed his Ph.D. in Christian worship at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, USA.

## Introduction

Historical analysis and study of the musical acculturation process which has taken place in Yoruba traditional Christian worship since the early nineteenth century, along with the understanding of the evolution of indigenous musical instruments in traditional Christian worship among the Yorubas of Nigeria, is necessary for those who are considering leadership in worship among Yoruba Christians. Music was an important tool used by the early missionaries and indigenous preachers in Yorubaland to communicate the good news and facilitate worship. The use of musical instruments in addition to the word of God, therefore, has played a significant role in the life and worship experience of Yoruba converts. Having a deeper understanding of the transformation process of indigenous musical instruments and the verbal messages they communicate can facilitate their appropriate use in Christian worship. It is significant that the indigenous musical instruments that have become prominent today in traditional corporate Christian worship were once regarded as sacrilegious and inappropriate for worshiping the triune God of the Bible. Therefore, using indigenous musical instruments in worship means that some people in the church must have mastered the verbal art and techniques of the instruments in much the same way as singers who use indigenous hymns and songs in Christian worship.

This article examines the process of the adoption of indigenous musical instruments in traditional Christian worship and how the instruments have enhanced corporate Christian worship in Yoruba land. The article concludes with suggestions about the benefits of blending Western and indigenous musical instruments in Christian worship among the Yorubas. A critical examination of the transformation of Yoruba Christian musical practices will reveal the contextualization that has taken place through a slow process of change, from almost a complete rejection of indigenous Yoruba music and musical instruments to their acceptance, over-estimation, and diffusion of Western and indigenous Yoruba music, leading to the prominence of the use of the talking drum in Christian worship. To gain a deeper understanding of the process, we shall examine who the Yorubas are and the advent of Christian missionaries in Yorubaland.

## An Overview of the Dawn of Christianity in Yorubaland

The Yoruba are found in the Southwestern part of Nigeria, West Africa. In addition to Nigeria, Yoruba communities can also be found in the Republic of Benin, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Cuba, Brazil, the Caribbean, and the United States. But the paper focuses on the Yoruba of Nigeria. The Yoruba belong to Osun, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Lagos, and parts of the Kwara and Kogi states of Nigeria. Yoruba people speak the Yoruba language but in different dialects (Awolalu and Dopamu 2005, 2). The Yoruba are one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria; the other two are the Hausa and Igbo (see Eades 1980, 2; Bascom 1984, 1). The Yoruba people are a singing people. In almost every sphere of life, the Yoruba have employed songs, usually accompanied by drumming and dancing (Awolalu and Dopamu 2005, 31–32).

### **The Advent of Christianity in Yorubaland**

Christian missionaries and other white travelers were unable to penetrate the interior of Yorubaland until after the collapse of the Old Oyo empire ruled by the then Alaafin (the king of the land) (Peel 1968, 36). According to Peel, Christian missionaries entered the interior of Yorubaland by 1820 (1968, 36). By 1840, not only Christian missionaries but also other white travelers had gained access to the area (Biobaku 1973, 15).

The first missionary to bring Christianity to Yorubaland was Thomas Birch Freeman, a Methodist missionary who visited in 1842. The next year, the Anglican Church Mission Society (CMS) arrived. The Southern American Baptist Society came in 1850, with the Society of African Mission following in 1860 (Ajayi 1965, 13-15).

In addition to the efforts of the European missionaries, the arrival of returning ex-slaves, called Saro, from West Indies and Brazil, and European businessmen, missionaries, and colonial administrators contributed to the success of the advent of Christianity in Nigeria, especially in Yorubaland (Mbiti 1969, 231). In 1807 Britain passed an act that made it illegal to trade slaves (Berman 1975, 3). About the same time, freed slaves from the West Indies were settling in Freetown, the capital of Serra Leone. Many of these formerly enslaved people were descendants of the Yoruba people of western Nigeria, and a number of them chose to return to their original homelands (Mbiti 1969, 231). The emigrants introduced the missionaries into the country and were essential to the movements of the missionaries. These repatriated people brought not only new religious ideas to their tribes but also bits of European society to the Yorubas (Ajayi 1965, 51–52).

Before the advent of the Christian missions, musical activities in Yorubaland were mainly traditional. The arrival of the missionaries, and the return of formerly enslaved people who were descendants of the Yoruba people, brought major changes to the musical life of the Yorubas. New converts were trained in how to interpret and appreciate the new Western musical culture. It was not difficult for the educated Yorubas to embrace Western musical idioms, as the Western culture was used in the churches and taught through established mission schools (Adegbite 2001, 77–82).

The advent of Christianity had an enlightening effect on the Yoruba people. Christianity changed the lifestyle of the people. Christianity brought Western education, technology, and social change. Christianity set the converts free from idol worship (Ayandele 1966, xvii). Evidence suggests that Yorubas were receptive to Christianity and ready to give up their traditional religions and become Christians.

We should note that not everything presented by the missionaries was accepted by the Yorubas. When the missionaries came to Yorubaland, Christianity was presented and clothed in the culture of the white man. Converts were taught new ways of dressing, and it seemed that the way the white man dressed was the Christian way. The adoption of European culture appeared to be an outward sign of the inward transformation from paganism

(Ayandele 1966, 243). The early missionaries gave the impression that Yoruba ideas, customs, and institutions were worthless, and in some respects unchristian, even when most of them did not involve idol worship. Yoruba traditional practices were interpreted as unchristian, and converts had to give them up to prove their new way of life. The new way of life was opposite of the traditional ways of religion, which the indigenes were accustomed to (Berman 1975, 9).

Christianity appeared to have brought with it a new “set of rules to be observed” (Mbiti 1969, 233). Missionaries expected the converts to simply conform, the way people did back home in Europe. According to Webster, “By 1891, the policy of conformity had triumphed in dogma and episcopate” (Webster 1964, 43). It seemed that a superiority complex also accompanied the works of the early missionaries. As Dyrness observed, “In order for the new converts to accept Christianity, they must also accept the ways of the West” (Dyrness 1990, 39).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the Black community in Lagos began to question the Europeans' dominance. Within various Christian denominations, tension was beginning to develop in the hitherto cordial relationship between Africans and Europeans (Ayandele 1966, 243; Omoyajowo 1982, 9). The greatest challenge to European power took place in the church, since it was the most important focal point for educated Nigerians. One of the most important issues that engaged the converts and early leaders' attention was the extent to which European elements dominated worship. Traditional music and musical instruments had been banned in churches, since they were said to carry pagan connotations and be unfit for Christian service (Yankson 2007, 3). According to Webster, “In 1891 African music was used in the church by United Native African Church, they were prosecuted in the court for performing a holy edifice” (Webster 1964, 2). The indigenes could no longer express themselves freely, as they used to clap hands and dance as a religious expression. As a result, they began to reassess their relationship with the Europeans. As they became more self-assured, they demanded a more positive approach to traditional African culture from European colleagues (See Lawal, Sadiku, and Dopamu 2004, 126). In 1881, a pamphlet advocated for the establishment of an African church, the Native Baptist Church (Ayandele 1966, 197). The Native African churches began to form, following the precedent set by the First African Church. According to Webster, “The precedent set was repeated in 1891, 1901 and 1917 until every mission in Lagos—the CMS, the Wesleyan Church, the Baptist, and the Catholic had been fragmented” (Webster 1964, 62). The Orthodox churches began to lose converts to the new African churches, which allowed African traditional instruments in their churches. Music and traditional practices became the chief means of propaganda among the churches. Most African churches encouraged the use of African songs and indigenous musical instruments in their worship services and reformed the elements of colonialism, replacing them with Yoruba substitutes (See Lawal, Sadiku, and Dopamu 2004, 127). Meanwhile, the mission churches continued to use hymns accompanied mainly by organ, harmonium, or piano in their worship services.

### **The Advent of Indigenous Musical Instruments in Corporate Christian Worship**

While the African churches allowed indigenous songs and instruments in worship, mission churches discouraged their use. Instead, they encouraged their converts to burn the instruments. Early missionaries believed that engaging in the singing and playing of indigenous songs and instruments might bring back the images of traditional gods and goddesses that Yoruba people had disowned for the true God of the Christian faith (Sadoh 2009, 3). However, Western hymns were translated into the Yoruba language. Because the translated hymns did not accommodate the tonal character of the Yoruba language, some Yoruba words carried different meanings when sung with the original English tune, because of the tonal inflection. The action, however, created more division than

harmony. European musical culture never really influenced the musical tastes of the local people, especially the traditional Yorubas. Anthony King explains this division:

The initial separation of a mission-educated elite from the rest of the community (the Yoruba natives) caused a widening division of Christian church music and school church music and its teachers from Yoruba music as a whole. The division acted as a barrier behind which Yoruba music as a whole was able to flourish unaffected by the music introduced by the missionaries, the commercial entrepreneurs, and finally, the colonial administration. In fact, it was not the Yoruba musicians who had to come to terms with the music of the invading culture but the musical among the new elite who in time found that they had to adapt to traditional music. (King 1980, 1)

Yoruba converts did not enthusiastically patronize European musical forms. Translated hymns could not provide the desired result, because most of the songs could not be danced to. Unfortunately, native worshipers could not easily relate to or embrace singing songs without movement. They were used to dancing, handclapping, and all manner of bodily movements. The singing of European or indigenous hymns that excluded the dance experience created a major hindrance to congregational singing.

There was a need, therefore, for the church to compose music more relevant to Nigerian culture. Yoruba indigenes could not do away with their indigenous music idioms, but both European missionaries and educated African elites were limited in providing sufficient African musical elements to meet the needs of the indigenes. European musical activities suffered, and traditional Yoruba music began to find its way into the mission churches. As indigenous Christian songs were allowed in worship services, it was evident that musical instruments such as organ, piano, and harmonium needed to be supplemented with indigenous musical instruments such as drums and shakers for a meaningful rendition (Vidal 1986, 70–82).

Yoruba Christians were initially allowed to dance to the music of indigenous drums only outside of the church. Whenever a Christian was celebrating, they were allowed to be accompanied by a band of drummers (Alayan) who usually stayed outside the church till the end of the service. At the end of the service, the drummers accompanied the celebrant back home with singing and dancing. Gradually, indigenous drums and other local instruments were allowed to be used in church during Thanksgiving and other Christian celebrations.

In Yorubaland today, indigenous musical instruments are employed to accompany congregational singing, both in African independent churches and in mission churches such as Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Methodist (Sadoh 2008, 29–33). Concerning Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) in Yorubaland, Bode Omojola notes, “As in the other Aladura churches, the adaptation of traditional Yoruba performances and musical instruments, notably the dundun ensemble, represents a most distinguishing feature of the music of the CCC. The incorporation of traditional cultural forms of expression helps members of the CCC to connect Christian worship with traditional Yoruba life” (Bode Omojola 2012, 146). A few other churches in Yorubaland conduct services exclusively in the English language. Such churches might not employ the use of indigenous musical instruments in their worship services. According to Godwin Sadoh, at the Cathedral Church of Christ Lagos, Nigeria, hymns are still accompanied only by pipe organ and piano. The European worship traditions of the Cathedral Church of Christ Lagos are kept intact (Sadoh 2008, 31). Church services have changed over the years in Yorubaland to reflect more of the culture of the indigenes as more indigenous music and indigenous musical instruments are employed.

### **A Survey of Indigenous Musical Instruments Used in Yoruba Traditional Christian Worship**

Typical of African musical instruments, Yoruba indigenous musical instruments can be grouped into idiophones, such as *agogo*, *sekere*, rattles, and clapper stick; aerophones, such as flutes; chordophones, such as *goje*; lamellaphones, such as *agidigbo*; and membranophones, such as *ogido*, *bembe*, *sakara*, and the talking drums (*dundun*, *gangan*) (Nketia 1974; Agordoh 1994; Akpabot 1986). It is significant to note that not all Yoruba indigenous musical instruments are used in Christian worship. The usual indigenous musical instruments employed in Christian worship include *akuba/agbamole*, *agogo*, *sekere*, *omele ako* and *omele abo*, *agidigbo*, *seli*, and *gangan* (Oye 1998). These are instruments that have been adapted for indigenous worship. It is believed that the instruments no longer have any association with traditional indigenous worship. Most indigenous musical instruments that have not been allowed to enter the church and included in Christian worship are known to have strong associations with idol worship. Such instruments include *bata* drum, played for *Sango* the God of thunder, and *igbin* drum played for *Obatala*, the God of purity (Euba 1988, 7–8). Such instruments are still forbidden in Christian worship.

Almost all indigenous musical instruments can function as rhythmic instruments—that is, they are used to supply rhythmic accompaniments to the songs. The talking drum, however, can function both as a rhythmic and melodic instrument. When a song is played on the talking drum, listeners automatically conceptualize words. The talking drum is a double-headed hourglass-shaped drum. The two heads of the drum are covered with animal hide, and the drum body is made of wood. The drum has leather straps from one head of the drum to the other. The drummer squeezes the straps to change the pitch of the drumhead. The harder the player squeezes the straps, the higher the pitch of the drum. The player can use the drum to imitate the pitch level of human voices. The concept of talking with an instrument in Africa is not based on a coding system. An African talking drum simulates speech. The talking drum of the Yoruba, for example, is played to mimic Yoruba words. I am a master drummer trained in the talking drum language. I have played in many Yoruba ceremonies and Christian gatherings, such as weddings and church services.

Whenever the drummers speak with their drums, anyone who has ears for the drum can understand what the drummers are saying. Although the sound produced is that of the drum, the drum has the ability to emulate the sounds of the Yoruba language. This is possible because the properties of speech rhythm and intonation can be easily produced on African talking drums (Euba 1990, 10). The talking drum has become an important musical instrument in Yoruba traditional Christian worship. It is expected that a talking drummer be skilled in the art of drumming and have a great repertoire of drum poetry. The drummer must be able to discern when to punctuate a song with appropriate proverbs and drum poetry. There are different drum patterns and poetic utterances that are culturally appropriate for ceremonies like naming, marriage, burial, or birthday that are permitted in Yoruba traditional Christian corporate worship but might not be permitted in Western churches. For each context, the drummer must know what to play. The drummer does this by reproducing different drum patterns and proverbs and poetry he has memorized that are suitable for the occasion. The following are examples of proverbs that may be played with the Yoruba talking drum:

## Awa Lagba

Emmanuel Fasipe

<b>Yoruba</b> A wa l'agba Adie funfun l'agba adie Awa l'agba	<b>English</b> We are superior A white rooster is superior to other roosters We are superior
---	---

## Ma gbemi

Emmanuel Fasipe

Ma gbe mi      ma gbe mi      o - no - fun ko      gb'e - gun - gun e - ja      ma gbe  
5  
mi      Ma gbe mi      ma gbe mi      o - no fun ko      gbe - gun - gun e - ja      ma gbe

### Yoruba

Ma gbe mi

Onofun ko gb'e gungun ejá

Ma gbe mi

### English

Don't swallow it

The throat does not allow the fish's bone.

Don't swallow it

## OLORUN OBA NI MO GB'OJU LE

Emmanuel Fasipe

O - lo - run O - ba ni mo gbo - ju le      -      O - lo - run O - ba ni mo fe - hin ti - a ki i  
5  
fe      hin      t'o      -      lo      -      run      k'o      -      ju      o      ti      ni

### Yoruba

Olorun Oba ni mo gbojule

Olorun Oba ni mo fehin ti

A ki I fehin t'Olorun

Koju o ti ni

### English

In God I put my trust

In God the King I depend

One does not depend on God

And be put to shame

Indigenous musical instruments are usually played in combination, and a complex rhythmic pattern may result. When instruments are combined to communicate verbal expressions, only trained ears can decode the messages of the instruments. That is the reason Yoruba Christians should be taught to interpret the language of the instruments. It is not enough for a Yoruba Christian to dance to the music of the instruments; it is also important for worshipers and worship leaders to learn whether the instruments communicate spiritual messages, because the player can say anything with their instruments.

### **The Challenges of Using Indigenous Musical Instruments in Worship**

The use of indigenous musical instruments in Yoruba traditional Christian worship is not free of problems and challenges. Although musical instruments play an important role in the life and worship experience of the worshipers, a consideration of the problems and challenges it has brought to Christian corporate worship might be helpful to worship leaders. Some of the problems:

1. Most skilled indigenous instrumentalists are unbelievers, and some of them play both at hotels and beer parlors in addition to playing at churches. As a result, they tend to carry over some of what they have played to entertain at such places to the church service. Many of them are hired based on their skills. As a participant and observer, I've performed alongside other talking drummers in some Yoruba Christian worship gatherings and ceremonies. Among the drummers I have performed with and observed, some were not Christians but were hired because of their skill. From my observation, most talking drummers who played proverbs that are not befitting Christian worship gathering happened to be unbelievers.
2. There is a greater risk of playing unscriptural drum poetry in worship. Because only those who have trained ears for the sounds of indigenous musical instruments can decode the message that is being communicated, worshipers can dance ignorantly to what they are not supposed to, because they cannot interpret what the instrumentalist is saying with his instruments. In Yoruba cultural belief, only the drummer can adequately interpret what he says with his drum. The message of the drum may be ambiguous. As a result, drum messages may be misinterpreted because some Yoruba words share common tonal inflection.
3. Instrumentalists might turn a worship service into a concert. Most church instrumentalists have turned worship services to music concerts or talent shows where they can display their skills or talents and show off. As a result, the church or worship space can become a theater where people watch individual artists rather than worshiping God.
4. The same types of indigenous musical instruments used in other African religions and traditional functions are used in Christian worship. Although it is believed that the indigenous instruments used in the Christian worship context are redeemed from their indigenous use, there is no difference in some of the patterns played on the instruments for traditional and religious functions.
5. Some denominations believe in stimulating worshipers with the sound and rhythm of musical instruments to the extent that such worshipers might enter into a kind of spirit possession. Since, as Barry Liesch asserts, "Music urges people in worship" (Liesch 2001, 65), some churches use background instrumental music to accompany virtually most of the worship activities.

### **Benefits of Indigenous Musical Instruments in Worship**

In my research, I have observed that indigenous musical instruments used in Christian worship are very beneficial to both the worshipers and the instrumentalists. Some of the blessings that worshipers and instrumentalists enjoy when indigenous instruments are used in Christian worship might include the following:

1. God will be glorified through the playing of indigenous musical instruments. The instruments belong to God. It was a mistake for ancient Yorubas to devote any of the musical instruments to the worship of cultural deities. The Bible talks about the use of musical instruments for the worship of God (Psalm 33:2–3; 98:4–6). As God gave musical instruments to the Israelites, so he has also given indigenous musical instruments to the Yorubas. No piece of wood or metal can be made sacred or secular by human beings; God has given them to be used for his glory (Psalm 150:3–6). One obvious point is that although these instruments are being used in secular contexts, they are now coming back to the church. The instruments can add much to the worship service.
2. The introduction of indigenous musical instruments in Christian worship has encouraged participation in worship. In an African context, music is almost naturally associated with movement, and as worshipers sing, they also dance. Among the Yoruba, dancing is a common activity, and it is natural for the Yoruba to respond readily to the rhythm of songs and musical instruments (Ajayi-Soyinka 1998, 1). I have observed that singing and dancing provide an opportunity for worshipers to participate physically and emotionally in worship. Although one might argue that worship is more than singing and dancing, dancing is one way African Christians express their thanks to God. Whenever indigenous instrumentalists play their instruments in worship, they play in combination to express thanks to God and speak with their instruments, emphasizing the truth that has been sung in a song. Drums, especially the talking drum, can be used as a communication medium and expression in worship. Because the instrument can be used to express verbal messages, indigenous musical instruments are used to sing praises to God and communicate messages of comfort, prayer, and words of encouragement to the worshipers through drum poetry. Therefore, the use of indigenous musical instruments can make a worship service lively, as worshipers respond joyfully to the sound of the instruments and use it as a vehicle for worship.
3. The instrumentalists who play the indigenous musical instruments are also being ministered to. Some indigenous instrumentalists who were once unbelievers have testified to being converted while playing in the church. When most instrumentalists had the opportunity to listen to sermons during worship service and saw the difference between playing to praise men and playing to praise and worship God, they were touched and were converted. Further, the introduction of indigenous musical instruments in Christian worship has provided an opportunity for many to be serviceable to God and to participate in worship activities. Most church musicians who could have been using their gifts elsewhere can serve in the church and use their instruments to worship and praise God.

### **The Relevance of Indigenous Musical Instruments Used in Christian Worship**

Indigenous musical instruments are relevant to the corporate worship service of Yoruba Christian worship for numerous reasons. First, the production of indigenous musical instruments by the Yorubas evidence God's gift of creativity in them. God has gifted the people in making the instruments. We can expect that God will be delighted in the sound of the instruments because the maker of the instruments is the bearer of the image of God, the creator of everything (Gen.1:1). As Yoruba Christians use local instruments to worship God, it shows the unbelievers around that the God they are worshiping is not only for Westerners but is also the God of the Yorubas who inhabits the praises of his people (Psalm 22:3). As Brian Schrag observes,

Our work as God's subjects is to do things with God that will result in His kingdom becoming more visible and extensive on earth, working toward its complete realization in heaven. Every Christian's role then is to fix what is broken and strengthen what already looks like the kingdom. We act to change contexts where Jesus is unknown, where there are no accessible Bibles, and where there is a disease, human trafficking, and death (Krabill et al. 2013, 50).

It is the duty of Yoruba Christians to prove to indigenous worshipers that the indigenous musical instruments belong to the true God of the Bible and for the advancement of his kingdom. The more Yoruba Christians use their God-given indigenous instruments, the more they proclaim God's sovereignty and supremacy over all traditional gods.

Second, the use of indigenous musical instruments has brought great change to the Christian church service in Yorubaland. There began a new adventure for the church, the Yorubas, and the local instruments. Initially, African churches were having more converts than the mission churches, but now that mission churches have incorporated indigenous musical instruments into their worship services, and mission churches reflect more African culture, Christianity has become more relevant to the Yoruba converts in their own terms. As Yoruba people were converted to worship the true God through Jesus Christ, their musical instruments also serve to worship and praise God.

Third, indigenous musical instruments and Western musical instruments blend well and complement each other when played together in Christian worship. Experience has shown that whenever Western musical instruments are combined with indigenous instruments, there is always an outflow of the worship experience. For example, Western musical instruments are good at playing melody and harmony, and they still serve well for that purpose. This has been my observation of worship services in traditional Christian worship in Nigeria and African Christian Fellowship in Louisville, Kentucky. Yoruba indigenous musical instruments, on the other hand, are not as good at melody and harmony, but they are good at supplying rhythmic accompaniment.

Fourth, indigenous musical instruments speak the language of the Yorubas in worship. Skilled talking drummers are able to play on their drums whatever is spoken. Western musical instruments might not be able to play the Yoruba proverbs that indigenous instruments can play in worship. Indigenous musical instruments, therefore, can touch the emotions of the Yoruba and enhance their worship experience. Yoruba might not be able to express their range of affection without the use of indigenous musical instruments in worship which is part of their heart language. Tom Avery says the heart language is the "musical system that a person learns as a child or youth and that most fully expresses his or her emotion" (Avery 1996, 5–6). It is evident that Yoruba Christians need to learn how to nurture their heart language.

### **Implications for the Future**

There is no reason why indigenous musical instruments should not be used in worship, if they are used properly. The question that faces every Yoruba church musician and all worship leaders is how to use musical instruments properly. Every Yoruba Christian should be concerned about what it means for indigenous musical instruments to be allowed in Christian worship. There is a greater risk in exercising the freedom of playing God-given indigenous musical instruments in worship. It is hoped that worship leaders and pastors will benefit personally and minister more meaningfully with indigenous musical instruments if they carefully learn how to use indigenous musical instruments in worship.

No type of musical instrument is alone sufficient for the worship of the triune God. Neither European musical instruments nor African musical instruments are sufficient, and God can be worshiped without musical instruments. Musical instruments are used only for support in worship. Therefore, they should be used with reverence, humility, discipline, and obedience to the word of God. Musical instruments themselves are not problematic rather, the way in which an individual plays an instrument is essential.

It is no surprise that most contemporary Yoruba Christians are ignorant of the meaning, function, and role of indigenous musical instruments in worship; they seem not appropriately equipped to be able to interpret and decode the attached musical meaning and the messages of indigenous musical instruments. Therefore, there is a need for worship leaders to provide training for understanding and interpreting the messages of the instruments, especially the talking-drum poetry.

Let there be a combination of Western musical instruments and indigenous Yoruba musical instruments in worship. Instead of replacing Western musical instruments with Yoruba indigenous musical instruments, a blend of both will yield a good result and add color to the music aspect of worship. However, where a local church cannot afford the cost of Western musical instruments and where skilled players of Western musical instruments are not available, indigenous worshipers should be allowed to freely use their God-given songs and instruments to worship the triune God of the Bible. As Vida Chenoweth observed, "Indigenous worship does not need English or singing in parts or pipe organ, or a guitar in order to be valid worship. Observing European and American worship services often suggest to those who have been evangelized that this is a corrected way to do things" (Krabill et al. 2013, 120). There is nothing sinful or barbaric in using Yoruba indigenous musical instruments in Christian worship.

Further, the church should ensure that those who play musical instruments in the house of God are born-again Christians who know why they are in the presence of God. The spiritual requirements for an indigenous instrumentalist in worship should not be lower than the standard laid down in the scriptures; they should be set aside and be consecrated for the service (II Chronicles 29:34; Ezra 6:20), and they should live a life that will glorify God, for whom they play (Ezra 10: 19-24; Nehemiah 10 28-31).

God deserves the best of everything, including the sound of the indigenous musical instruments. When musical instruments are used in worship, they should be played in such a way that they will sound good (Psalm 33:3). God has made humans to be affected by the sound of musical instruments, whether positively or negatively. The sound coming from a musical instrument can move the people of God to do a lot of things in worship. Worship leaders and church instrumentalists should be reminded that God himself appreciates beauty. Before any musical instrument is used in worship, the players should ensure that they are in good condition.

## **Conclusion**

We have discussed how Yoruba indigenous church music and musical instruments grew from the activities of the early European and American missionaries who brought Christianity to Yorubaland around the nineteenth century. That indigenous musical instruments are used freely today in Yoruba Christian churches during worship is the result of the resilience of history.

In spite of discouragement from early missionaries and the frustrating circumstances of the early years of Christianity in Yorubaland, the indigenous converts did not give up. The zealous Yoruba Christian leaders, as Webster asserts, "were in no sense anti-white" (Webster 1964, 256) but those who actually hold the missionaries

in high regard (Webster 1964). Although their actions led to the split and division of churches, which one can consider undesirable, they contributed greatly to the extension of the gospel and growth of churches in later years among the Yorubas.

Today, traditional musical instruments have been incorporated in Christian worship in various indigenous churches and established mission churches. Even European and American hymns are accompanied by both indigenous and Western musical instruments in most churches. One can argue that there are neither godly nor ungodly musical instruments. God has given people and each culture the ability to construct musical instruments to be used for his glory. Worship should proclaim the superiority of the true God of the Bible above every other god.

It should be emphasized that God has given every people group a musical heart language with which they can freely worship him. There is no reason why a people group should not use their local musical instruments or indigenous worship songs freely as their worship language. Gospel messages should be framed in the language of local culture. Sherwood Lingenfelter corroborates this in his explanation of contextualization: "The idea of contextualization is to frame the gospel message in language and communication forms appropriate and meaningful to the local culture, and to focus the message upon crucial issues in the lives of the people" (Lingenfelter 1992, 15). Contextualizing indigenous musical instruments in Christian worship will yield a good result, but the question remains: how does one handle freedom without misusing it? Yoruba Christians should be mindful of the grace they have in using indigenous musical instruments in worship so as not to misuse it. Everything done in Christian worship should be done in the worship of God. Indigenous musical instruments are God's gift and can be used to enhance the worship experience of Yoruba believers.

## References

- Adegbite, Ademola. 1988. "The Drum and Its Role in Yorùbá Religion." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 18, no. 1: 15–29.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2001. "The Present State of Development of African Art Music in Nigeria." In *African Art Musician Nigeria*, edited by M. Omibiyi-Obidike: 77–82. Ibadan, Nigeria: Stirling Horden.
- Agordoh, A. Alexander. 2005. *African Music: Traditional and Contemporary*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. *Studies in African Music*. Ho, Ghana: New Age Publication.
- Ajayi, Jacob Festus Adeniyi. 1965. *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841–1891: The Making of a New Elite*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Ajai-Soyinka, Omofolabo. 1998. *Yoruba Dance: The Semiotics of Movement and Body Attitude in a Nigerian Culture*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Akpabot, Samuel Ekpe. 1986. *Foundation of Nigerian Traditional Music*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books.
- Avery, Tom. 1996. "Music of the Heart: The Power of Indigenous Worship in Reaching Unreached People with the Gospel." *Mission Frontier* 18 (August): 5–8.
- Awolalu, J. Omoṣade, and P. Adelomo Dopamu. 2005. *West African Traditional Religion*. Rev. ed. Ibadan, Nigeria: Macmillan Nigeria.
- Ayandele, A. Emmanuel. 1966. *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842–1914: A Political and Social Analysis*. London: Longman Group.
- Bascom, Russell William. 1984. *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.
- Bebey, Francis. 1975. *African Music: A People's Art*. Translated by Bennett Josephine. New York: Lawrence Hill.
- Berman, H. Edward. 1975. *African Reaction to Missionary Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Biobaku, Saburi Oladeni. 1973. *Source of Yoruba History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Blacking, John. 1995. *Music, Culture, and Experience*. ed. Reginald Bryon. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Brennan, Vick L. 2013. "Up above the River Jordan: Hymns and Historical Consciousness in the Cherubim and Seraphim Churches of Nigeria." *Studies in World Christianity* 19, no. 1: 31–49.
- Chernoff, Miller John. 1979. *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cherry, Constance M. 2010. *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Clarke, Peter B. 1986. *West Africa and Christianity*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Corbit, J. Nathan. 1998. *The Sound of the Harvest: Music in Church and Culture*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. "Christian Music in Africa." *Ethnodoxology* 1, no. 2:10–24.
- Dyrness, A. William. 1990. *Learning about Theology from the Third World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

- Eades, Seymour Jeremy. 1980. *The Yoruba Today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eileen Southern. 1983. *Music of Black Americans*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Euba, Akin. 2000. "Concept of Neo-African Music as Manifested in the Yoruba Folk Opera." In *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective*, edited by Ingrid Monson. New York: Garland Publishing.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990. *Yoruba Drumming: The Dùndún Tradition*. Bayreuth: E. Breitinger.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. *Essay on Music in Africa*. Bayreuth, West Germany: IWALEWA-Haus, Universität Bayreuth.
- Hustad, P. Donald. 1993. *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal*. Carol Stream: Hope Publishing Company.
- Idowu, Bolaji. 1965. *Towards an Indigenous Church*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Oxford University Press.
- Isichei, Elizabeth. 1995. *A History of Christianity in Africa from Antiquity to the Present*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Kalu, Ogbu. U. 1980. *The History of Christianity in West Africa*. London: Longman.
- King, Anthony. 1980. "Nigerian Music." In *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 13. London: Macmillan.
- King, Roberta Rose, Jean Ngora Kidula, James R. Krabill, and Thomas Oduro. 2008. *Music in the Life of the African Church*. Waco: Baylor University Press.
- Kofie, N. Nicholas. 1994. *Contemporary African Music in World Perspectives: Some Thoughts on Systematic Musicology and Acculturation*. Accra: Ghana Universities Press.
- Krabill, James R., Frank Fortunato, Robin P. Harris, and Brian Schrag, eds. 2013. *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Kubik, Gerhard. 2001. "Africa." In *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. Edited by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrell. London: Macmillan.
- Lawal, Nike, Matthew N. O. Sadiku, and P. Adelomo Dopamu. 2004. *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Liesch, Barry. 2001. *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
- Lingenfelter, G. Sherwood. 1992. *Transforming Mission*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Mbiti, John S. 1975. *Introduction to African Religion*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1969. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann Pub.
- Miller, Terry E. and Andrew Shahriari. 2009. *World Music: A Global Journey*. New York: Routledge.
- Nketia, Kwabena J. H. 1974. *The Music of Africa*. New York: Norton.
- Olupona, K. Jacob. 1991. *African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Society*. St. Paul: Paragon House.
- Omojola, Bode. 2014. *Yorùbá Music in the Twentieth Century: Identity, Agency, and Performance Practice*. 2014 ed. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

- Omoyajowo, J. Akinyele. 1982. *Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church*. New York: Nok Publishers.
- Oye, T. D. 1998. *Indigenous Music in Churches in Yorubaland*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan.
- Peel, John David Yeadon. 1968. *Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Sadoh, Godwin. 2009. *Thomas Ekundayo Phillips: The Doyen of Nigerian Church Music*. Bloomington, NY: iUniverse.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2008. "Thomas Ekundayo Phillips: Pioneer in Nigerian Church Hymn Composition." *Diapason*, 99:3 (March): 29–33.
- Spencer, M. John. 1988. "Rhythm in Black Religion of the African Diaspora" *Journal of Religious Thought* 44 (Wint/Spr.): 67–82.
- Turner, W. Harold. 1967. *History of African Church: The Church of the Lord Aladura*. Oxford: Clarendon Pres.
- Vidal, Tunji. 1986. "The Westernization of African Music: A Study of Yoruba Liturgical Church Music." *Ife: Annals of the Institute of Cultural Studies* no. 1: 70–82.
- Webster, J. B. 1964. *The African Churches among the Yoruba, 1888–1922*. Oxford Studies in African Affairs. Oxford: Clarendon Press.