

CHAPTER 4

AGATHA ONWUEKWE: THE LIVING MUSIC LEGEND

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Abstract

Music, be it traditional, neo-traditional, popular or academic, runs through the hands of many in form of composition, performance, musicology, music technology and ethnomusicology. The difference is always clear depending on how it is handled. There are quacks and professionals, but the beauty lies in the proper handling of it and its production. Agatha Onwuekwe is an outstanding academic musician and composer who has proven to the world that she is a living music legend. Qualitative method, historical approach and other extant literary materials were used in the research. This paper seeks to discuss and document the outstanding achievements of a committed academic who has made it to the top creditably in her chosen career, music. Discussing the achievement of this great musical icon will ginger many to wake up from their sleep and slumber, and seek to fulfil their passion and calling on earth in any chosen profession.

Keywords: Music, legend, achievement, motivation, and goal-setting.

Introduction

Professor Agatha Ijeoma Onwuekwe is a virtuous lady of letters who devoted and still devotes, her time to the growth of music in Nigeria and human development. She is, of truth, a living music legend. The word "legend" has many definitions. In this context, "legend" means **celebrity**; somebody famous, and admired for a skill or talent. It is a person of extraordinary

accomplishment. "Achievement" is the act of accomplishing, for example, the accomplishment of an enterprise; completion; fulfilment. This research is on a music icon that has creditably and famously made it to the top of her profession. It is all about a living music legend in the person of Agatha Onwuekwe. The zeal of Agatha Onwuekwe can be compared to that of Martin Luther King Jr. which propelled him to achieve his plans and goals. As recorded by Barnes III (2018), Martin Luther King Jr. said, "If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward." This was an example of a man with a purpose, plan, and vision. And so it is with Onwuekwe – a woman with purpose, plan, and vision that propelled her to the top of her profession. Martin Luther King Jr. stood for social justice and the freedom of the masses, his people. Martin Luther King Jr. soared above negativity. For example, many people said his speeches, actions and marches wouldn't change the law. However, he continued to *fly* in the face of those that doubted him. Martin Luther King ran against all odds. After being arrested over 20 times for protesting, he continued to fight for equal treatment. He was treated very badly. For example, his house was bombed and set on fire. He was even stabbed. Yet, he continued to *run* the race for justice. In his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, Martin Luther King stated that white and black children would one day walk hand in hand and that one day sons of former slaves and sons of former slave owners would be able to agree to live together. Look around, go ahead look – we are examples of his dream coming to life. Together, we all can continue walking hand in hand to keep his dream going on. According to Barnes III (2018), many attempts were made to bring Martin Luther King's mission for equal treatment to a crawling stop when he was jailed. However, even though he was slowed down, he still moved forward. Martin Luther's statement is also a question 'If you can't *crawl* with me, can you agree to keep *moving forward* with me? Agatha Onwuekwe had this word in her early enough through hard work that propelled her to start from crawling to walking, from walking to running, and from running to flying. She is today at the apogee of her profession – a coveted height. It is not just being at the top of her profession, but with outstanding achievements in the field of music, and human and national development. Her publications can attest to this.

The Bible clearly states in Proverbs 22:29 (KJV) 'Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.' 'Man' in this context refers to both genders – male and female. Or simply re-phrased, 'Seest thou a woman diligent in her profession? She shall stand before kings, people of proven integrity; she shall not stand before mean men, mediocrities.' Today, Prof. Agatha Onwuekwe stands before academic, political and societal kings.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

To climb to the top of one's profession needs some level of preparation arising from goal-setting and timelines. The goal-setting may not be without proper motivation. Therefore, the theoretical and conceptual framework is based on the Goal-setting Theory of Motivation. According to Gordon (2022), the goal-setting theory was proposed by Edwin Locke in the 1960s. It states that goal setting has an effect on task performance. Goals provide direction to employees about what

needs to be accomplished. Goal-setting theory is linked to improved performance, increased output, increased commitment, feelings of self-efficacy, and organizational culture. There are premises of goal-setting theory as shown below (Gordon, 2022):

Clear and Challenging - Goals should be specific and challenging. Such goals relate to higher performance in completion. Clear, unambiguous goals avoid misunderstanding.

Realistic - Goals should be realistic and capable of being achieved. It is not building a castle in the air. It should not be based on assumptions but on realities.

Feedback - Employees should receive feedback that directs their behaviour.

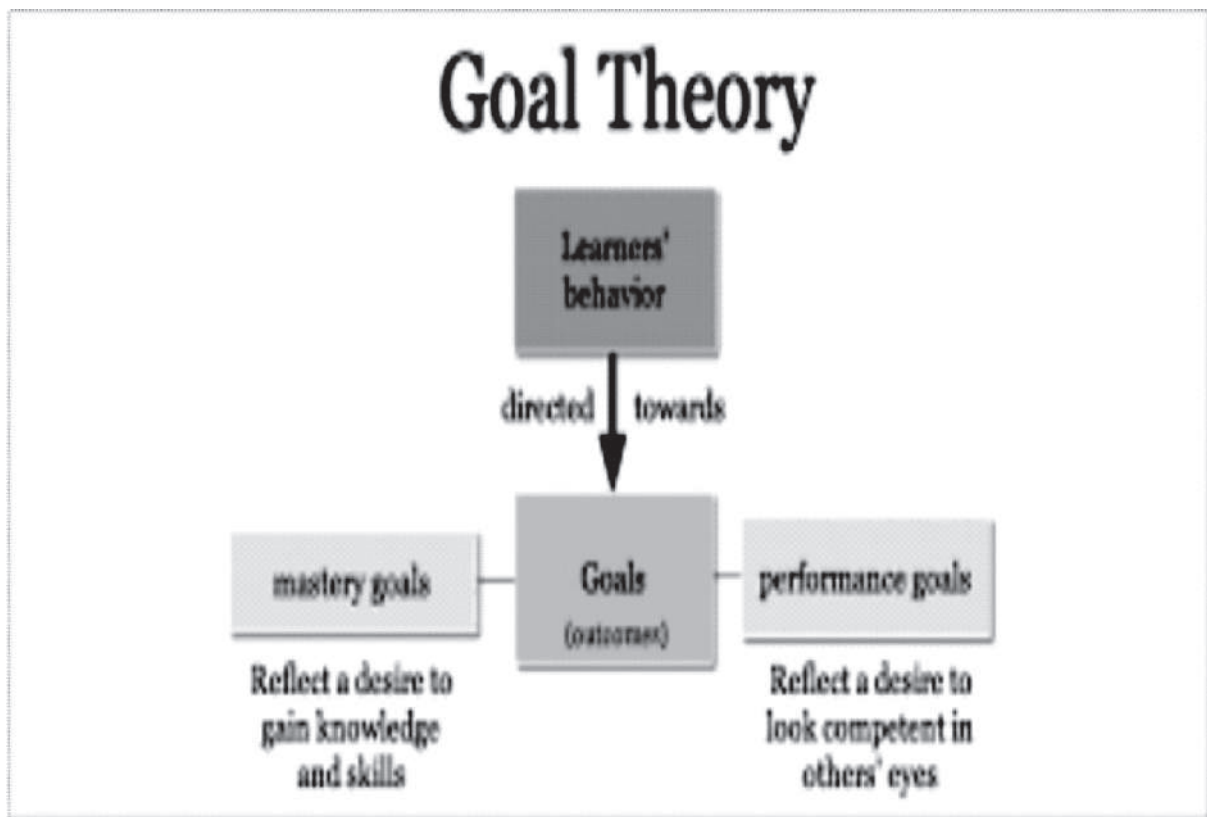
Participation - Employee participation in goal setting facilitates acceptance and increased involvement.

There are also anticipated results of goal setting, which include:

Self-Efficacy - This concerns an employee's self-confidence in a performance task. Generally, self-efficacy leads to higher performance through increased effort.

Goal Commitment - This assumes that individuals will become committed to the goal and be reluctant to leave it without achieving it. This is true for goals that are openly communicated, self-set by the employee, and consistent with organizational goals.

This illustration curled from Gordon (2022) summarises goal-setting theory.



Source: Gordon, 2022.

Though this theory talks about employee and organizational goals, anybody who wants to succeed should see themselves as an employee in any organization with clear and challenging goals. Goal-setting theory helps to achieve set goals through hard and clear vision devoid of any barrier, and it is not without motivation.

Background Information

The background information about this erudite scholar is found on Nnamdi Azikiwe University's official website, <https://profile.unizik.edu.ng/nau2573>. Prof. Agatha Onwuekwe is a Professor in the Music Department, Faculty of Arts at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State. She is currently teaching in the Department of Music, at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. She is the first female Professor in that department with track records of forward ever and backwards never in music and in human development.

Prof. Agatha Ijeoma Onwuekwe, is a native of Uga in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State and married in Ekwulobia in the same Aguata L.G.A. She was born in the famous Saint Luke's Hospital Anua-Uyo in Akwa Ibom State on the 15th day of March 1953 when her parents Chief Eugene U. Onyemaobi and Mrs Annastasia A. Onyemaobi were living at Ifuho in Ikot Ekpene. Her father was a registered contractor in the then Eastern Region of Nigeria while her mother was a trader at Ikot Ekpene main market. She attended her primary school at Holy Child Convent School Ifuho and secondary school at Loreto Girls' Grammar School, Eriam, Afagha Obong, Abak. She obtained her West African School Certificate in the year 1973 at Aguata High School in Ekwulobia in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State. She proceeded to The Teachers' Training College, Adazi and obtained her Teachers' Grade Two Certificate in 1975. She furthered her education at Anambra State College of Education Awka and the University of Nigeria Nsukka where she obtained her First Degree, B.A. Hons in Education/Music. She obtained her M.Ed. in Educational Administration, Planning and Supervision in 1994 at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka and her M. A. Music Theory and Composition at UNN in 1999. In 2007 she obtained her PhD in Music Theory and Composition at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka and in 2008, she obtained another PhD in Educational Management and Policy at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.

Her Works

Professor Agatha Onwuekwe has many published articles in both national and international journals. She also has many compositions to her credit. She has composed instrumental works and has arranged many works for chamber orchestras and solo instruments. She has successfully supervised more than 20 PhD candidates, 15 Master's Degree candidates and numerous First Degree students. She has over 45 articles in both local and international Journals. Her specialization cuts across two areas – Music Theory and Composition and Educational Management and Policy.

Agatha Onwuekwe's works are numerous. Some of them are: The interrelationship of Nigerian music with other arts (2004); The composer: A force to be reckoned with in music education of the Nigerian child (2007); The Socio-cultural implications of African music and dance (2009); The tonal inflexion of Igbo language and its influence on indigenous music composition (2011); *Ekelebem* music education in Uga culture: A socio-cultural perspective (2014); Strategies for effective music education and Nigerian musical practices: A pedagogical approach (2019) and Ezegbe's philosophy on analysis of African vocal music composition, using Onwuekwe's Jehovah bu onye na-azu m di ka aturu as a musical example (2019). Others are: Archival retrieval, analysis and documentation of Felix Nwuba's Billie Nwube (Arise and shine for thy light is come) (2020); Form in Nigerian art music: A contemporary approach (2021); Bracing music education through music technology (software) in tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria (2021); Indigenous music and allusively in the promotion of African values: The Igbo experience (2021); Musical arts education in early childhood education: A study of pre-schools in Oshimili South Local Government Area, Delta State (2021); The life and works of a great Nigerian (2022).

Her other works include: Voice performance education in Nigerian universities: The current state (Onyeji et al, 2021); Effects of hip-hop music on students of Delta State University, Abraka, and College of Education, Warri (Chwukuma et al, 2021); Exploring entrepreneurship opportunities of studio music production in tertiary institutions in South East education zone (Kalu *et al*, 2021); and Ethos and Pathos in Music Technology: A Study of its challenges for music education in tertiary institutions in Delta and Edo States (Nmadu, *et al*, 2021).

The researcher wishes to discuss one of her publications bordering on composition and one on education. One such composition (Agatha, 2011) is "The Tonal Inflexion of Igbo Language and Its Influence on Indigenous Music Composition." In this article, Prof. Agatha Onwuekwe points out that the African language is a tonal language and the Igbo language is not an exception. Although the advent of Christianity had much influence on the language of the Igbo as regards indigenous church music, composers seem to make some efforts towards bringing the meaning of the language as near as possible to the music. However, in spite of the efforts, there are still glaring and nagging problems that face the Igbo language as a means of communication in the area of composition. The writer discusses some compositional techniques with a view to highlighting some of the nagging problems of tonal inflexion of the language in the area of composition.

She went further to discuss the effects of tonal Inflexion of the Igbo language on music composition. According to her, the rising and falling tones of the Igbo language in no small way affect the meaning of the words. A sentence in the Igbo language might have one meaning, but when set to music, a totally different meaning is obtained. This can cause a lot of embarrassment to both the composers and the audience listening to the music. Agatha Onwuekwe again brings to light the implications of tonal Inflexion of the Indigenous words to the Composer. Tonal

inflection of the indigenous words has a lot of implications for the composer. In the first place, the composer should understand the language of his music before he sets out to compose. He should know the rising and falling tones of the words so that they can also be reflected in the music. Otherwise, he might want to say one thing but finds himself saying another thing through his music. If a composer is not used to a language but is faced with the necessity of composing or setting music to the words of a language he does not really understand, he should find out the meaning of the words from one who understands the language. He should also find out the rising and falling tones of the words he wants to set to music.

She summarizes that the tonal inflection of the Igbo language has a lot of influence on Indigenous music composition. The paper highlighted the importance of any language in relation to music composition. The origin of the Igbo as an ethnic group was discussed. The relationship between music and language was discussed. The compositional techniques employed by composers were pointed out which include call and response, call and refrain, augmentation and diminution among others. The effects of tonal inflection of the Igbo language on music composition were given. Some musical examples to illustrate the wrong application of the music to the words were given. The implications of tonal inflection of the indigenous words to the composer were also highlighted. In all the above, the composer is regarded as a creative individual who should make use of his initiative as he composes his music. Emphasis should be laid on the meaning of the words before setting it to music since the meaning of the words will send the message across to the people the music is meant for.

One of Agatha Onwuekwe's works on education (Agatha, 2018) is "Strategies for effective music education and Nigerian musical practices: A pedagogical approach." In this paper, Onwuekwe discloses that education is the life wire of any society in that it is a process by which young people in the society acquire cultural ethics, knowledge, norms and values, in fact, ways of life of the people. It helps the individual to contribute meaningfully towards the growth and development of society. To bring home the definition of education, she accepts the definition of Igwe (1990);

The process of developing the individual physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially for his own welfare, and for the welfare of the society to which he belongs. It is the process of inculcating the cultural heritage of acquiring knowledge and ideals, of acquiring the civilization of the past so as to be able to take part in the civilization of the future (p. 4).

Igwe (1990) further explains that education is not an ornament, but a functional instrument for developing the entire person to enable him to live effectively and efficiently in society.

Agatha Onwuekwe discusses problems militating against the effective application of the

strategies to a classroom situation.

i. One of the problems stems from the fact that not all music teachers went through Teacher Training Colleges and Colleges of Education where methods of teaching and learning are acquired. Obviously one cannot possibly give what one does not have.

ii. Some of the teachers who went through these institutions where pedagogical strategies are acquired do not have the patience to sit down and plan their lessons.

iii. In some of the institutions, well-qualified and trained music teachers may be available but they lack adequate facilities to do their work effectively.

iv. Lack of incentives from the government also impedes the application of these strategies. These problems and many more militate against the effective implementation of these laudable strategies in the classroom situation.

In her conclusion, one of her recommendations is that the government and other institutions of higher learning should from time to time organize seminars and workshops to take care of the teaching staff that did not have the opportunity to go through training in music pedagogy.

Her Achievements/Contributions

In summary, Prof. Agatha Onwuekwe has contributed to the development of music and humanity in the following ways:

- i. She is an academician of letters who is not found wanting in her chosen field. She is an academic force to reckon with.
- ii. She is an academic pillar and has a shoulder for others, including the weak, to lean on.
- iii. Her scholarly works stand the taste of time both in Nigeria and outside Nigeria and are worth learning from and referencing.
- iv. She is a pacesetter in academic research and an inspiration to many.
- v. Her works contribute to both human and national development.
- vi. She is a first-class mentor who knows how to bring up her mentees in discipline and in love.
- vii. She is a woman of nerve and strength, a guru, and a voice when it comes to music education and music composition.
- viii. Prof. Agatha Onwuekwe is a product of hard work and dedication to duty and has remained a challenge to the lazy and procrastinators.
- ix. She is a woman of action who is not given excuses; but takes the bull by the horn.
- x. She is an academic bridge. Many have crossed from dry land to the land of promise and fulfilment.

Challenge

In September 2022, during an appraisal exercise, the researcher had a discussion with a Senior

Lecturer at one of the Nigerian universities who lamented that he was not promoted to another rank for seven years. He stayed in the position of a Senior Lecturer for seven good years. The researcher wanted to know more about the problem – whether the Lecturer was victimized or what? The Lecturer simply answered, “I am too lazy.” He was the architect of his problem. The challenge is 'how many academics are serious in the area of research and teaching? How many lecturers are promoted when they are due for promotion without a lack of one or two needed papers – whether local (onshore) or foreign (offshore)? How many lecturers write impactful and well-researched papers that others can reference? These and many more questions beg for answers.

It is time to wake up from sleep and imbibe the principles of hard work. To rise to the top of one's profession, one must work seriously for it, and set clear achievable goals. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, an American poet and educator, said "the heights by great men reached and kept were not attained by sudden flight, but they while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night ()." Hard work, goal-setting and working with timelines can catapult one to the desired height. Use the goal-setting theory and challenge your challenges.

Conclusion

Time and space will fail the researcher in discussing the works of Prof. Agatha Onwuekwe one by one. To know more about her contributions and greatness, read her publications. The discussion on this great woman and her works has truly revealed that the height she reached and kept was not attained by sudden flight, but she while her companions slept, was toiling upward in the night. She became a professor of repute with astute qualities worth emulating in the academic sphere and beyond. It is the desire of the researcher that people should rise to greatness in their chosen field through hard work and dedication to duty; all things being equal. The researcher wishes to conclude this research with a famous portion of the Bible, James 2:26 (KJV). It reads "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without work is dead also." Let your work speak for you.

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