

# CHAPTER 6

## AGATHA ONWUEKWE'S CONCEPT OF THE ART OF CONDUCTING IN MUSIC AND PERFORMANCE

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### **Abstract**

Music is considered the most important of the arts which deal majorly with human factors as the executant agents of its pedagogical contents and precepts. Thus, from Prof. Onwuekwe's view and concept of music and its relationship with performance, it is recognized as the performing aspect of art in schools, colleges, tertiary institutions and other organizations. This article discusses Prof. Agatha I. Onwuekwe's view on the art of conducting music and performance. The highlights of this article include performance concept, the art of conducting in music and performance, levels in conducting preparation, conducting techniques, stages and methods of conducting, conductor's attributes and duties, performance problems and conclusion. These musical concepts align with Prof. Agatha's legacy of serious and conscientious pedagogical training which culminates in effective musical performance.

**Keywords:** Musical art, Performance, Conducting techniques, Pedagogical training and Prof. Agatha Onwuekwe.

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### **Introduction**

“Music is the art of combining different sounds in a manner agreeable to the ear. It is the art of combining sounds or tones for reproduction by the voice or by the various kinds of musical instruments in rhythmic, melodic and harmonic forms to affect the emotions” (Onwuekwe, 2017: 2)). Music is a form or work of Art that expresses human feelings through performance.

Performance in music is the art of showcasing or demonstrating the musical knowledge acquired through theoretical studies, aural and sight reading, technical studies and general musicianship before the audience with the combined effect of gesticulation, vocal or instrumental expression or combination of the trio. It is the climax of musical training through a thorough rehearsal that culminates in the performance itself. It is an expression of the psychomotor domain in music pedagogy which emphasizes human feelings through singing, dancing, playing a musical instrument, conducting and the compositional aspects of music education.

In performance, the duty or the service of a seasoned conductor cannot be overemphasized. No matter how good a choral or an instrumental group is without a competent conductor, the success of such group will be limited or marred by poor officiating (conducting). Consequently, with a competent conductor on the ground in charge of an amateur ensemble either as a choral or an instrumental ensemble, success is guaranteed during such outing.

### **Performance Concept**

Performance means "the act of performing a play, concert or some other form of entertainment" (Hornby, 2010: 1089). Also, a performance act is an art form in which an artist performs, rather than producing a physical work of art. The term "performance" refers to the practical aspect of musical training which emphasizes the psychomotor domains of music education. Musical expression through psychomotor could be by human gesticulation through dancing, conducting, the use of human vocal instrument (singing) or through the manipulation of other musical instruments (artificial instruments). Music as a discipline plays a major role in societal education and in enhancing societal norms and values. In this regard, its use and practice thus attract more attention globally. Also, it is readily available for cultural expression due to its wide coverage and universal acceptance as the most acceptable and the best means of dissemination for all without racial discrimination.

According to Onwuekwe (2017)

Different cultures are associated with different types of music, for example, the indigenous music of a Yoruba man is different from the music of an Igbo or Hausa man. African music is different from Western music in terms of the language, and the material for constructing the musical instruments; however, there are also elements of similarity. In Nigeria, the Owambe or Ekombi dance is associated with the Yoruba culture, and the Atilogwu or Npokiti is associated with the Igbo culture with particular reference to the riverine areas while, the Abang dance is associated with the Efik, Ibiobio and Anang cultures. The Allemande is a dance of German origin; the Courante is a French dance. The Sarabande is a Spanish dance while the Gigue is a lively dance of English or Irish origin (p.2)

The above assertion by Onwuekwe attests to the fact that musical expressions through performance by singing, dancing or conducting can be performed by any musician of any culture or origin. The performance of music in any culture especially by dancing or singing can be easily identified with the particular tribe depending on their musical styles and languages. Generally, music is associated by all and sundry with an exclamation of joy, happiness and pleasant moods. In this regard, Williams Shakespeare in Okafor (2005) proclaims:

The man that hath no music in himself nor is not moved with concord of Sweet sound, is fit for treason stratagem and spoils; the motion of his spirit is dull as night and his affection dark too as Erebus. Let no such man be trusted.

The above assertion shows that music is readily available as a medium of expression in events of the daily life cycle. In this regard, appropriate illustration indicates how music expresses the good, the bad, the pleasant and the unpleasant mood of life. Okafor (2005), in his view on the musical performance concept, argues that music is at a vantage position of centrality to many activities in our traditional society because of its integral nature to life activities. Likewise, Mbanugo (2005), corroborates that music education and music making are universal cultural categories among children and even among adults in Nigeria. In this regard, music through the vocal presentation in songs, and instrumental presentation through the use of artificial mechanisms (musical instruments) or the combination of the duo is readily accessible to both the younger and the older generations in societal functions.

According to Agu (2000):

All musical creation serves specific purpose and performances are carefully chosen to serve specific functions and activities appropriately. For example Ceremonies and activities like birth rites, marriage, title taking, initiation into cults and societal organizations, religious worship, funeral rites and so on have specially designed and well-chosen songs, music and dance to enrich and glorify them (p.79).

From the above assertion, it is quite obvious that the versatility of music in social function shows that every occasion has appropriate music to march, be it choral or instrumental that is well suited for each occasion. Hence, the re-occurrence slogan that music is the life wire of society. Therefore, there is a need for appropriate application of the musical concept and available materials to achieve the desired educational objective through proper expression and stylistic analysis. According to Ekwueme (2008); music has certain elements or what some people may refer to or regard as ingredients. These include melody, rhythm, harmony, form, texture, dynamics etc. The above-listed elements are the features that characterized a piece of music or composition.

### **Onwuekwe's Concept on the Art of Conducting in Music and Performance**

Onwuekwe's concept of the art of conducting in music and performance ensemble aligns with Nnamani's view of Conducting as the communication using gestures or an interpretation of a musical work to a group of musicians performing it (Nnamani, 2009). The group may be a choral or an instrumental ensemble, orchestral, band, chorus or choir and orchestra. In corroboration to this assertion, Kennedy (1980), sees conducting as the art or method of controlling an orchestra or an operatic performance using gestures and control involving the beating of time, ensuring correct entries and the shaping of individual phrasing.

A conductor is likened to an army commandant in control of a battalion of soldiers. In his capacity as the superior head, he gives commands which every soldier is duty-bound to be subject to such command to ensure success in battle. Likewise, in the same vein, a conductor simply means the music commandant or the music director. In this regard, Onwuekwe, 2011 and Nzewi, 1981 on presentational form in musical performance explain that the provision of clap score (conducting style) is intended to enhance the cultural musical interest of the songs and to underscore (for both the performer and the audience). The inherent rhythmic potential of each song especially for movement purposes is usually guided by good conducting during the presentation. Somebody's movement, short of outright dancing, is strongly recommended as a visual aesthetic compliment to the meaning and character of the song. The aforementioned musical expression aligns with Onwuekwe's view and philosophy about the musical concept that engenders good performance.

### **The Origin of Conducting**

The term "Conducting" was first used during the Renaissance period when motets and madrigals were composed. In the early periods of the Baroque and Classical eras, the harpsichordists who were also known as the concertmaster were in charge of conducting. The concertmaster also played the continuo part. At this period, no one was assigned the role of a conductor but, any of the players could be assigned the role of conducting during the performance.

Later on, the leader of the first violinists usually played the melody lines thus assisting the harpsichordists. Subsequently, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, conducting gradually became a full-time virtuoso's profession. This was partly the result of the effort by a composer who also, was a conductor to achieve a higher standard of performance. Early conductors of the Romantics include Carl Maria, Von Weber, Felix Mendelssohn, Richard Wagner etc. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Modern period), further progress was attained as the composers and conductors of the period such as Bernstein Boulez, and Connoy were able to improve upon the conducting techniques of the earliest periods. Furthermore, the Modern conductor had been described as a virtuoso whose instrument is the orchestra (Nnamani, 2009). A virtuoso person is an individual who is very skilful and extremely good at putting up a superlative performance in any musical activity toward a positive impression and the delight of the participating audience or the spectators.

### **Levels in Conducting Preparation**

Conducting preparation refers to the procedural stages of the conductor's preparation before putting up a performance or showcasing himself during a performance either in the company of singers or instrumentalists or a combination of the duo as a choir and an orchestra where the conductor oversees the conduct of the performers in such performances. The art of conducting transcends the practice of just stepping on the complex and demanding activities in the realm of music which comprises both the visual public performance and constant application of a technique that is, the method employed in training the performers and in the performance itself. An accomplished conductor is expected to function in three major levels, each dependent upon others and all culminating in the performance itself. These levels include personal study, rehearsal and performance.

- i. Personal Study** – It is the level at which the conductor prepares himself privately both technically and artistically. He develops himself instrumentally and methodically as a musician, historian, stylist, and orchestrator. He ensures his proficiency in all fields of music which include harmony and counterpoint, theory, history and literature, analysis, acoustics, aural training, and sight reading ( that is, the cognitive, the affective and psychomotor aspects in music education). The conductor is expected to know each composition from the standpoint of every minute and all its details as well as from overall perspectives.
- ii. Rehearsal** – It is the process in which a group whether a choral or an instrumental prepares itself musically through regular training or practice. The Conductor has major roles to play during rehearsal as he determines the group's rehearsal procedure. Before the rehearsal proper, the first task of the conductor is to choose a rehearsal venue at a central and strategic location for his group's regular contact.
- iii. Performance** – The duty or the service of a seasoned and well-trained conductor cannot be overemphasized. The performance level is the level at which the conductor functions during a choral or instrumental ensemble's performance either in an indoor or an outdoor programme. It is the climax of his function as the leader of the group. In this regard, it is expected that he prepares adequately with his group for a successful outing. The service of a seasoned conductor is required during a performance on such occasions which include performance stress during trainees' examinations, recital programmes, concert shows and other ceremonial and important occasions in schools, colleges, universities, churches etc.

During the performance, it is required that proper standing arrangement be maintained such that the conductor stands at the central position a little distance away in front of the choral or instrumental ensemble. Precisely at a close range of 5ft facing the choir while each member of the

choral or instrumental group stands at a position where he or she sees the conducting. To flow along with the conducting styles employed by the choral or instrumental director (conductor), every focus should be on the conductor who is expected to display a high degree of musical accuracy in the interpretative demands of the performance piece(s).

### **Conducting Techniques**

Conducting technique is the required procedure and process for good conducting. First and foremost, before becoming a good and competent conductor, the person involved has to undergo serious musical training in music schools or training institutes or musical organizations that encourage professionalism, especially in the art of conducting. In this regard, conducting techniques must be studied and practised during the entire career of a good conductor. In this regard, it is expected that a good conductor regularly upgrades his musical knowledge in conducting. However, many who are saddled with the responsibility of directing the affairs of any ensemble today are ignorant of their shortcomings that is, the inability to meet the required standard in conducting in our contemporary time.

According to MC Etheram (1966), & Nnamani (2009); "Many conductors fail to realize the importance of conducting technique itself. They accept irregular entrances or legatos, blaming the poor quality on their musicians, whereas the trouble probably is caused by their own right hands". The reasons for these poor performances were due to the obvious fact that many conductors thus fail in their onerous task of self-development through prior - practice aside from the studying of the music scores before stepping on stage to perform the duty of a conductor during the choral or instrumental performance.

### **Conducting Stages**

The stages in conducting include the following amongst others;

#### **Time beating**

The different times and metres of music are observed during conducting with appropriate beat patterns. The most important and frequently used pattern is the down or up (last) beat. This conducting pattern is illustrated as followed;

#### **Duple-time conducting pattern (2 beats pattern)**

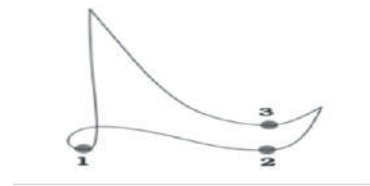
This is applicable for time values such as 2/2, 2/4, 2/8

Two (2) beats patterns



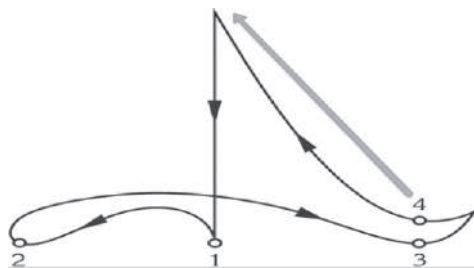
Other conducting patterns include the down, right, and up patterns

### **Triple Time (Three beats) Conducting Pattern**



And down, left, right, and up patterns

### **Quadruple Time (four beats) Conducting Pattern**



In a choral or an instrumental conducting, three important things which must be conscientiously observed include the following among others;

- Good sense of rhythm
- Muscular relaxation that permits the free swing of the hand, arm or baton.
- readable pattern in shaping the beat.

Every time beating gesture has three parts which include; the preparation that is, the motion leading to the beat point. The beat point itself that is, the ictus and the rebound or reflex after the tip of the stick has tapped the beat (Nnamani, 2009).

### **Conducting Method**

The method of conducting is in two folds, these include the use of bare hands and a baton (conducting stick). The use of bare hands in conducting involves the combination of both the right and the left hands during conducting. Time beating is primarily the business of the right hand while the left hand lends necessary support. On the other hand, the baton is an elongation of the right hand during conducting. It is recognized as the conductor's major instrument, it is made of wood of about 3 meters in length. It is used by the conductor in time beating and expression. It is light and thin with an attractive colour of white to attract the performers' eyes.

### **Conducting Instrument (Baton)**



### **Plate 1: Showing the Conducting Instrument (Baton)**

The qualities of a good baton include the following among others.

- I. It is very light
- II. It is made of strong material.
- III. It has a good handle usually pear-shaped hands of a size that fits the particular hand.
- IV. It has a bright and attractive colour to the eye.
- V. It is not too long or too short.

### **Conducting Guiding Principles**

While conducting on stage the conductor must be guided by the following principles in corroboration with Pro. Onwuekwe's philosophical ideas

- During the performance, the conductor should always stand erect.
- Do not stretch your whole arms toward your performers.
- Always look at the musician (the choir) not at the score during the performance.
- Maintain good eye-to-eye contact with your performers (choir) to achieve a good start.
- Eliminate knee action and excessive body movement while performing.
- Communicate to the choral or the instrumental performers the essential details that are required for the performance while on stage.
- While on stage during a performance, the conductor guides the performers on the required expressions and gesticulations before the audience to attract their attention and drive home the message.

**Source: Nnamani (2009); Falusi (2021)**

### **Conductor's Attributes in Ensemble management**

According to Ekwueme (1993), the attributes of the conductor include both musical and extra-musical qualities. The musical qualities of a choral and instrumental director (conductor) include the following concepts among others: Good hearing, general musicianship, relative pitch, knowledge of the music literature, basic knowledge of the music fundamentals, singing techniques, practical knowledge of the keyboard, music appreciation, choral and instrumental conducting etc. Furthermore, the extra-musical qualities of a seasoned conductor include regularity in attendance, punctuality to the meeting, discipline, industry and mental alertness, sense of humour and friendly attitude, audible voice and clarity of instruction, general education etc. The cumulative effect of these attributes in display in the life of a seasoned conductor makes him an enviable example of a professional musician to his ensemble group and other musicians in his community. The aforementioned concept aligns with prof. Onwuekwe's view on conductor's requirements for good performance.

### **The Duties of a Conductor in Ensemble Management**

According to Falusi (2021), the term “Duty” refers to what one is obliged to do by morality, law, trade or profession. It is the responsibility that an individual is expected to carry out as a daily routine or activity. Consequently, an Ensemble means a small group of musicians, dancers or actors who perform together (Hornby, 2010). When it involves voice, it is called a choral ensemble, likewise, if it involves the instrument, it is recognized as an instrumental ensemble, Furthermore, if it involves large or many instrumentalists performing on instruments of the woodwinds, the brasses, the strings and instruments of the percussion family, it is generally recognized as the orchestra. Other instrumental ensembles that involve the combination of a few instruments either of the same family of the orchestra or a combination of different families in small proportion, it is recognized as a chamber orchestra e.g. string trio, brass quartet, woodwind quintet, brass sextet etc.

The vocal ensembles include children's choir, Youth choir, male choir, female choir, mixed choir etc. To ensure the proper management of the above-mentioned ensembles, the conductor or the music director who is recognized as the overall leader of the group has some duties to perform for the success of the choral or the instrumental ensemble. However, the role of a conductor as a leader of any choral, instrumental or choir and orchestra group cannot be overemphasized. The duties of a seasoned conductor are many which include the following as summarized by Falusi, (2012 & 2021);

- Recruitment and auditioning of new members into the choral or instrumental group.
- Searching for and organizing the teaching of music to a group.
- Training members to be proficient in musical performance.
- Organizing concerts and taking the group on an outing.
- Overseeing the general welfare of the group members.
- Maintaining good human relations.
- Creativity
- Serves as Liason officer between the organization's management and his Group
- Performance

### **Performance Problems in Music Art and Performance**

Over the years, performance in music art/pedagogy has not lived up to the desired expectation in the achievement of the educational objectives in schools, colleges, churches and other reputable organizations that cherish the exploitation of serious music. Due to discovered lapses on the part of the conductor and the respective choral or instrumental group and the combination of the duo, many organizations or ensembles in the community had made a frantic effort in the past to sponsor their trusted personnel for training as resource persons. However, the progress of this noble venture is usually hampered due to the inability of some of the trainees to continue in the training until the finishing stages. These shortcomings had lingered over the years due to the

following reasons and challenges which are highlighted as follows;

- **Lack of funds** – There is a general lack and paucity of funds to enhance the effective implementation of music programmes through serious and result-oriented performance in schools, colleges, polytechnics, universities and other organizations.

- **Shortness of time for performance training** - The allotted time in the timetable or the programmes of most schools and organizations for training and proficiency in musical performance and creativity is grossly inadequate.

- **Lack of prior knowledge of music** – many who offer music as the last result in tertiary institutions today lack prior – knowledge of music at either primary or secondary and also, due to lack of interest on their part usually find it difficult to cope with the demands of serious music which is the performance aspect. Such students always fall victim to under-performance which leads to failure (carry over) in the examination of some courses' requirements for certification in music education.

- **The problem of Single major courses** – In most of our schools, colleges and tertiary institutions where music is offered as a single major subject that is, music is combined with other subjects as elective. This development does not encourage serious musical training in the practical aspect of music and as such in institutions where music is not offered as a double major course, due to distraction can only perform averagely or below average in the musical training and performance because such students are not always ready for serious musical training.

- **The problem of teaching aids** – Lack of well-equipped library, instruction materials and musical instruments are part of the factors that impede the progress of performance in music pedagogy. Music is not learnt in the abstract because, the gaining of knowledge and acquisition of skills in music education requires the use of real objects such as musical instruments e.g. piano, flute, trumpet and other instruments as instructional materials. Where these materials are not available as this is a regular occurrence in many elementary and secondary schools especially public institutions, the progress of performance will be hampered.

- **Government and School Authorities' Apathy** - The apathetic behaviour of the heads of educational institutions and government which include federal, state and local councils toward music education is a major setback. Because, their failure in this regard had not given the implementation of music education in most of our schools and institutions the necessary backing, encouragement and required incentives that will assist the training of students in music education.

- **Lack of qualified personnel** – Many institutions today do not have qualified personnel or resource persons with current or up-to-date requisite experience in general

musicianship. In this regard, many graduates who had finished a training course in music programmes either in conventional institutions or privates today cannot even sight sing and are deficient in the practical application aspect of the curriculum except in theory.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Prof. Agatha I. Onwuekwe strongly upholds the view and concept that Performance is the climax of musical training and creativity. And, it showcases the worth of any trained musician of the musical knowledge gained through classroom studies and experiments in theory, composition, aural perception and sight reading, technical studies, conducting and ensemble management, musicianship and general education. She affirms that performance is an aspect of musical training which emphasizes the psychomotor domain in music pedagogy. From the study, it was discovered that the conductor occupies a vantage position that is, the centre stage during the performance. And as a conductor, he is supposed to function on three levels which include personal study, rehearsal and performance. Therefore, the role of a conductor during a performance cannot be overemphasized. However, to proffer solutions to the problems of performance due to the aforementioned challenges as highlighted in the previous paragraph, the following recommendations which express the view and concept of Prof. Onwuekwe as an advocator of effective teaching and learning that enhances good performance, will be of immense help as pointers to the way out.

**Funding** – There should be adequate funding of music programmes that is, adequate financial resources should be made available by the government, school authorities, and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) for the implementation of music training and programme in schools, colleges and tertiary institutions to enhance efficiency, proper implementation and serious musical performance in music pedagogy.

**Time** – Enough time should be allotted to music theory and practical for proper learning, musical practice and creativity and music performance in applied music, ensemble studies and music technological practice such as constructing commonly used African instruments.

**Double major courses** – The enforcement of double major courses in colleges and tertiary institutions is a must for the efficiency and proper implementation of music curricular programmes that include both the theory and practical aspects of music education. The implementation of the curriculum which emphasizes double major courses in music and educational courses is to be encouraged in most colleges and tertiary institutions. If implemented, it will afford the students more time for practice which is the performance aspect of music.

**Laboratory** – There should be a well-equipped laboratory with modern facilities to enhance the

effective implementation of music programs in all schools which include the primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions etc.

**Curriculum** – There should be the inclusion of music in the elementary curriculum and its separation from the cultural and creative arts (CCA) curriculum of the basic schools. It should be made to stand alone as a subject for studying and certification and not as an elective as it is being currently implemented as a subject in the integrated curriculum of the basic school comprising primary and junior secondary education. The inclusion and learning of music in the curriculum of basic schools and other institutions should be enforced and made compulsory for all categories of learning. This will further enhance serious musical practice and creativity.

**Qualified Personnel** – Government should employ qualified music personnel and post them to all public institutions which include primary, secondary, tertiary institutions etc. They should also organize a symposium, workshop, and in-service training for music teachers and instructors under government employment and private institutions for upgrading knowledge.

**Music competition** – Government should also create an avenue for music competition between schools in certain education zones with incentives and monetary rewards for the music teachers and students of such institutions who can distinguish themselves or prove their worth in musical performance and creativity.

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