

# CHAPTER 47

## TRADITIONAL MUSIC IN AFRICA: THE NKEREFI EXPERIENCE IN NKANU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ENUGU STATE

Chukwu C. James

### Abstract

This work focused on traditional music in Africa as it relates to Nkerefi in Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. Music is a universal language of mankind. It is also a product of the creative genius in man. Good music makes this world a desirable place for all. It plays a significant role in shaping society, takes away sadness and gives us happiness. To this effect, this paper concerns itself with traditional music in Africa with a particular focus on the Nkerefi clan. This paper traces the origin of music in Nkerefi. Relying on both primary and secondary sources, this study further examines the significant role of traditional music as an agent of change in society. It also emphasized that music and musicians are not mere entertainers, but also instruments of social change. This paper is historical; hence, it adopts a qualitative method of analysis. A useful piece of information was obtained from important relevant documents, reports and an array of both primary and secondary sources.

**Keywords:** Traditional, Music, Africa, Nkerefi, Experience.

---

### Introduction

African music is one of the cultural indices that make Africans Africa. It is a cultural identity that has to do with singing, playing of instruments, dancing and use of various artefacts. Music, over the ages, “has proved to be one of the indispensable arts cultivated by man for growth, nurture and transfer of his institution and value to future generations”. According to Bikeway, the growth and

development of any nation depend to a large extent on the ability of its citizens to harness its naturally imbued resources as well as put into good use other man-made features, skills, and talents. Traditional music in Africa and Nkerefi in particular is a complete institution, which is based on the societal phenomenon of the people. Its concept is based on societal facts and values through musical arts.

In Nkerefi, traditional music had its origin and identity before the pre-colonial era. Since then, it has been consistently practised and nurtured to sustain the values of the society it identifies. In the same vein, Isaac writes, "the society places a high premium on music and by extension musicians". This is born out of the fact that they are seen as tools for the preservation of their culture. Hence, the loss of traditional music in a society will be disastrous to cultural identity and the future well-being of the society, which may lead to cultural extinction of the society. It is on this note that we can see how important traditional music is towards the development of Africa. A continent, nation or society that has lost its traditional music practice has surely lost hope of building a viable future because, in the aspect of the moral upbringing of a child, traditional music plays a prominent role. A child can also be exposed to many other positive acts in society through music, which automatically prepares such a child to be an instrument for national development.

The paper is divided into seven parts. The first part is the introduction. This is followed by a brief history of Nkerefi the study area. The third discusses traditional music in Nkerefi, while the fourth part examines the origin and organisation of traditional music. The fifth part highlights the values of traditional music. The penultimate section analysis impact of music on society; this section highlights the social-cultural and religious impact of traditional music. The last part is the conclusion and recommendations. The argument tends to suggest that Lack of interest in traditional music; a Lack of adequate cultural studies in our institutions; Difficulty in learning how to play traditional musical instruments; little or no traditional musical instrument technology in our institutions. The work argues that it is imperative to address these issues because it will enlighten and expose Africa and Nigeria in particular to the values and contributions of traditional music towards the development of a Nation. It will also create awareness of the need to include cultural and creative arts in schools' curricula.

### **A Brief History of Nkerefi**

Nkerefi is a clan in Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State in South Eastern Nigeria. It comprises four autonomous communities namely: Imeoha Nkerefi, Ohuani Amofu Nkerefi, Ishienu Amofu Nkerefi, and Enuogu Nkerefi. The pre-colonial history of Nkerefi was essentially that of the migration and fusion of people and rise and full of kindred and villages. Various people and claims point to the fact that the Nkerefi people are the descendants of Ezeokeuna – a cattle rearer from Edemberri. According to archival reports, "the people of Nkerefi being descendants of Ezeokeuna of Ezza at one time used to make a periodic sacrifice at their ancestor's shrine at Ezza, but this custom has ceased for many years".

Nkerefi traces her origin to Ezzakuna (Ezeoke-una) the founder of the Ezza, whose father Una Okpoto Okumeze was believed to have migrated from the Afikpo group of Igbo history. These people were known to have organised themselves into something like a vassal state by their possession of a common dialect (language) and culture, but in reality, there is no Nkerefi state or race. The word Nkerefi, therefore, refers more to the dialect and occupation than people. One particular legend and oral school of thought state that when 'Ezeoke Una', the father of Nkerefi, saw that his son – Ezeoke Una, Junior (Ogbonnaa) had grown into manhood, he gave him a few cows and some yams to start his own life and maintain his family. He received paternal gifts and blessings from his father and moved southwards in search of settlement and livelihood. He had acquired the art of cattle rearing and farming from his parents. As he moved, his cattle (Efi) multiplied and he started selling some through trade by barter (exchange of goods for goods), and people were happy with him for his clemency, industry and enterprise. Whenever a visitor said that he was going to the home of Ezeoke Una, people were confused if it was going to be the home of Ezeoke or his father, they called him Ezeoke Una – 'Nke-na-ere- efi' which means cattle seller or dealer. This was the genesis of the name Nkerefi.

Further evidence to show Ezeokuna of Ezekoha Ezza is the father of Nkerefi are: first, at the burial of Ezeokona, Chukwuma Ighudu of Obuno was among the representatives from Nkerefi that participated; second, Ezeokona was buried in a house with three doors each facing and directed to Ezza, Nkerefi and Onicha. The above three towns are brothers with Ezza as the eldest and Onicha as the youngest. Nkerefi then spread and constituted segments of other communities such as Atani in Ogbaru Local Government Area of Anambra State, some others in part of Ukwuani in present Delta State and Anambra State.

### **Traditional Music in Nkerefi**

The Nkerefi people have the art of making pleasing combinations of sound in rhythm and harmony the sound and composition so made is music. In Nkerefi, there are different kinds of music which are meant for a special class of people, occasions and ceremonies.

Some music groups like cultural groups, age grades etc. are some of the traditional or cultural music formed in all the parts of Nkerefi to promote both the cultural and social life of the people. The Ufie traditional music from Ihukulu, the Igede music, the Ikpa music from Ihuezeofia, Ihuakpu and other villages, the Abia and Oueke cultural music, Igheli music from Obuno village, the Ebe Ekwe Mgba (Ikwilikwo) from Umuogbii, Ihuezeofia and Onueke villages, the Odabala of Umuikaa, Oliko from Ihuawoke and Onueke, the Okanga of Ezinogu, Onueke and Obuno, Ikolo of Obodo Akpulu, Umuezeochie Mghanaocha, Umuogbii and Ihuakpu, and Ubo Nwuganzi from Onueke. Others are Evu Ichaka, Oke Ekwe, Igbolo Inyinya, Ubo, Achi Kolo, Opu Ike, Itu Aefa, Ode Mma and Ogee, and Ezza.

Much Nkerefi cultural music has featured in different parts of Nkanu, other parts of Igbo land and Nigeria displaying and manifesting the ingredients of our respective culture and heritage. For

example, the Ebe Ekwe Mgba of Umuogbii and Ihuezeofia has featured in several Federal and State Capitals including Lagos. The rhythmic pattern of these traditional dance groups consciously or unconsciously gives expression to the cultural identity of the performers and implicitly portrays the physical and material condition in which they live.

### **Origin of Traditional Music and their Organisation**

Traditionally, the highest respected and most sacred music in Nkerefí is "Ufie". Oral tradition attributed its origin to the divine spirit of the Almighty Creator – God. God sent the Ufie music through a virgin spinster "Ada Nwanyi" from Ihukulu village. She got these four gifted musical instruments of components from God and was directed how they should be used, beaten and the rules and regulations guiding the music thus: That no person not of Nkerefí citizenry would dance the music. That the music will feature only at the burial and funeral ceremonies of the highest Ozo title holder – the Ogbuzulu. And that the Ufie music would not feature outside the community.

Another highly respected music in Nkerefí musical institution (Ndi Aekwaa) is *Igede* music; it is the music of high-classed individuals or citizens of Nkerefí and other parts of Igbo land. The *Ufie* and *Igede* are the only music that creates social stratification. They are highly prohibited to the class of people like the slaves (*ohu*), the outcast (*Osu*) and the war captives *Egbeleje*.

The *Igede* music was formed by the four eminent men from the three regions of the old Nkerefí. They were Ozo *Igede*: Ogbuchukwu Njoku Odi (a.k.a Aenya hulu *Igede* Mbu) from Umodi, Igbokaocha village, Egbo Ekwe (Umunama Etiti), Egbo Nworiefi Njoku (Umuogbii) and Egboani Nwegbo (Ihuawoke Enuogo). Ozo *Igede*, Egbo Nworiefi Njoku later disposed of his own on an agreement to maintain one in Amofuland.

The Ebe Ekwe Mgba (Ikwilikwo) originated from Onu Nkwo Umuogbii village. The music for the wrestling competition was founded by an unbeatable and indomitable wrestler of his time known as "Ada Mgba". The music has a great social impact on the youths of Nkerefí.

The flute is a musical instrument in form of a wooden pipe with holes to be stopped by keys. "Opu" plays important role in Nkerefí musical institution. It was founded by the first flutist of the land popularly known as "Chukwu Opi). It is of pivotal significance during the war, at the burial and funeral ceremonies of warriors, aged men and other activities of heroic nature. It has a powerful invocation on the human spirit. This leads to the Nkerefí adage which says "Opu lafue onye ike, O naa-nka-nka Aekpa" – Flute deceived a brave man he will be beheaded and dumped in the tattered war bag of his enemy. The notable flurists of the land are Ogbu Orgbu Nwuneke (Ihuezeofia), Nwaejim Nwaigwe Chukwuegbo (Ihukulu), Onu Nwachukwu Ori (Umuogbii) and Emma Nwangene Ede (Umunuma Etiti) etc.

The Nkerefí music are:

- Ufie
- Igede
- Ikolo
- Oke Ekwe
- Ikpa Ike

- Abia (Ekwe Ji)
- Opueke
- Ubo/Achikolo
- Ebe Ekwe Mgba (Ikwili-kwo)
- Igbili
- Odabara
- Oriko
- Okanga
- Ubo Nwaoganzi
- Igbolo Inyinya
- Itu Aefa
- Opu Ike
- Evu Ogu

In the mid-sixties, many kinds of music were introduced by the Nkerefı in the diaspora. These were Samba, Koloma, Mambo and Agidigbo. This musical evolution had a lot of social influence on the Nkerefı people. The dancing of Nkerefı cultural music needs physical, mental and demonstrative involvement on the part of the performers. They are also rhythmical, melodious, artistic and intoxicating.

### **Organisation**

Cultural music is organised by people of the same cultural background. The organisation depends on interest and talent. Like other social organisations, cultural music has certain aims and objectives. People who join the group may use them to identify themselves with their home culture. Others may join such musical organisations to display their skill in the use of local musical instruments such as flutes, metal gongs, wooden gongs and the hallowed wooden musical instrument etc. Some people may also join them because they see them as the only way of portraying the physical and material conditions in which they live or the only way by which they will achieve peace and cultural stability of their people. There are, therefore so many reasons why people join or form cultural music in our past and present society.

The person who bears the idea of organising such cultural music is usually known as Organiser. He usually collects a group of talented young men, women, boys, girls and older people as the case may be to form the nucleus of the proposed cultural music. This group is matured on the rudiments of the dance or display. Others may be admitted in the long run after the first group must have mastered the styles of the dance and they can impart their knowledge to others. As the group grows in number, officers are elected. These include the patron "Papa Egwu", and matron "Mama Egwu", others are the financial secretary, treasurer and provost. The act of organising cultural music in Nkerefı is "Igba Evu". It is done in a hidden place until the outing day.

### **Values of Traditional Music**

Dejo states that the study of traditional music would on a wider view allow for cultural alignment and continuity in individual pedagogically speaking, an individual is what he is, (African, European, Arab etc.) by his or her background (Culture). Americans were more famous for this principle. They reflect this phenomenon in all facets of their life and educational philosophy. Suffice it to say that the study of African music will put students in proper orientation and perspective to the overall culture of their land since it is an emblem, courier, and carrier of their cultural practices.

Based on the foregoing, it could be summarized that the need to study traditional music is paramount. These include:

- a. To cultivate and understand the music of our land and thereby propagate it in its unadulterated (original) form.
- b. For other cultures of the world to know and appreciate the beauty of our music; in all its ramifications.
- c. To develop our music to the standard of the music of other civilized/ developed societies.
- d. For other music to accommodate and utilize modern preservation devices (print and electronics/ technologies e.g. recording).
- e. The future generations of our society to continue with the good legacies of their oral inheritance.
- f. The world to accept the reality that most musical traditions (songs instruments, costumes etc.) of the Americans and Brazilians, in particular, were reminiscences of legacies of the Africans in the Diaspora
- g. To retain cultural identity as black people/ that are naturally endowed with very rich musical tradition.

### **Impact of Music on the Society**

In African society, music is accorded great importance because of its uses, impact and achievement. Music could be used as a medium of information and communication, as a means of advertisement, a potent means of preserving history, as a means of admonishment and exhortation and lastly, as a medicine for the soul. Here, we will examine the basic impact of traditional music on society.

### **Socio-Cultural and Religious Impact**

According to Lasisi, music in Nigeria is always functional. It has been closely knitted with lots of social activities such as sporting activities, mass media, to mark ritual activities, like weddings or funerals and most importantly, for entertainment and artistic enjoyment. There are renditions for different occasions for stimulation. For instance, music helps to keep the rhythm of workers on the field especially farmers, mechanics, hunters, weavers, dyers, bricklayers, carpenters and even traders.

Nowadays music has been associated with sporting activities and it seemed music is the delicious soup with which the sumptuous dinner of sports is taken. Artists have produced works aimed not only at providing support but also to boost the morale of the national teams as well as restore confidence in the mind of both the spectators and the masses.

### **Conclusion**

Core issues such as the origin of traditional music in Nkerefi, the organisation of traditional music of the Nkerefi people, its usefulness and its impact were addressed in this paper. The origin has been traced to the divine spirit of the Almighty Creator – God. The paper established that God sent the Ufie music through a virgin spinster “Ada Nwanyi” from Ihukulu village. The study established that She got these four gifted musical instruments of components from God and was directed on how they should be used, and beaten and the rules and regulations guiding the music thus: That no person not of Nkerefi citizenry would dance the music. That the music will feature only at the burial and funeral ceremonies of the highest Ozo title holder – the Ogbuzulu. And that the Ufie music would not feature outside the community.

The paper highlighted the value of traditional music. The paper further examined the significant role of music as an agent of change in society by emphasising the enormous impact of traditional music and also established that musicians act as agents of change in society, rather than mere entertainers. Most importantly, the paper established traditional music as an agent of social change in society via its impact. They include socio-cultural and religious impacts.

Aside from discussing topical issues, The *Ufie* and *Igede* are the only music that creates social stratification. They are highly prohibited to the class of people like the slaves (ohu), the outcast (Osu) and the war captives *Egbeleje*.

Today Nkerefi has produced reggae stars e.g. Eddy Wonder, Andy Star, and Igwe Nicholas from Ihuakpu and Umuezeochie villages. Others are Onovo Joel (Ihukulu), St. Patricks Christian Band, Nkerefi and Engr Gabriel N Egbo-Omeogo (Igbokeocha). Nevertheless, there is a need to preserve our traditional music, to leave a legacy for the coming generation to showcase our rich cultural heritage.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Federal Government should aim towards the improvement of the cultural heritage of Nigeria as part of Nigeria's Vision 20: 2020
2. Cultural week should be part of the academic calendar in our various institutions of learning.
3. Performing Arts and Visual Arts should be merged in our tertiary institution in other to improve the knowledge of students in both units.
4. Nigerian language should not be discouraged in teaching indigenous music, especially in our primary and secondary level of education.

## References

- Aja, G. O. (1993). *The history of Nkerefí (A reflection of Nkanu people)*. Enugu: The AGOP Communications and Publishers.
- An intelligence report on the Nara Group in the Nkanu Area of the Udi Division by S.P.L. Beaumont, Esq. (Assistant District Officer. Nigeria: NAE/2/2/ONP ROF. 8.1.4740 and UD DIV 4/1/30 and UD DIV 4/1/29
- Aninwogo, E. N. & Aniemeka, K. M. (2002). *A history of the Nkerefí Igbo*, Lagos: First Academic Publishers.
- Bikeway, E. U. (2009). Performing arts and nations building – the role of music. *A Journal of Research in Music*, 4(2), 11-19
- Chukwu, J. C. (2022). Gender-based violence in Nkerefí Nkanu East Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria, 1995 – 2014. *Iconic Research and Engineering Journals*, 5(12), 134-135.
- Chukwu, J. C. (2022). Impacts of gender-based violence: The Nkerefí experience 2004 - 2014”, *IJO-International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, 5(9), 1 – 14.
- Chukwu, J. C. (2022). Violence against women in Africa: A case study of Nkerefí in Nkanu East Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria”, *Global Publication House International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, 5(8), 20-27.
- Dejo, K. & Ilori, A. (2003). *African music, arts & folklores, Nigerian examples*. Abeokuta: Satalite publishing.
- Enugu State of Nigeria Official Gazette, (2002). 11(2), Enugu – 5th September .
- Folorunso, J. (2015). Indigenous music in Nigeria: Its role towards national development. *FUNAI Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(2) 2015, 102 – 109.
- Igwe, A. U. & Chukwu, J. C. (2022). Aspects of intercommunal relations between Nkerefí and Nara Unateze 1900 – 1960. *Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 3, 78-89.
- Igwe, A. U. & Chukwu, J. C. (2022). Nkerefí and Anaevuna Relations in Pre-colonial Nigeria. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 8(1) 2022, 164
- Isaac, A. (2009). Indigenous music education in Nigeria: The bata drum ensemble experience. *Interlink: A journal of Research in Music*, 3(1), 1-15.
- Lasisi, S. A. (2012). Traditional Music in Nigeria: Example of Ayinla Omowura's Music”, *Developing Country Studies*, 2(10). 108 – 118. [www.iiste.org](http://www.iiste.org)
- Olatokun, G. O. (2000). Music and national unity. *Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 2(10), 132 – 133.
- Vidal, T. (2002). *Music, culture and national development*. A Distinguished Lecture Series at Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Otoljanikin,
- Omojola, B. (2012). *Nigeria music in the twentieth century: Towards a cross cultural theory of music in Nigeria*. A Lecture presented at the Lagos State College of Education Annual Lecture Series.