

Exploring Emerging Trends in Lagos Gospel Music Performance through the Lens of Láolú Gbénjò's *Àlùjò Mèta* Song

AYODELE Sunday Samuel

Abstract: *Issues of sacred music versus contemporary music call for rethinks. It is a general knowledge that the Contemporary Christian gospel music in Nigeria from its inception till late 19th century was still what it ought to be using the biblical and theological standards. It is noted that many things seem to have gone religiously ambiguous and secular about the sacredness of gospel music in these modern times. Although several scholars have written about gospel music in terms of its contexts, contents and style, however, little attention has been paid to emerging trends in gospel music performance culture in contemporary Nigeria, particularly in Lagos. This study explores emerging trends in Gospel music of modern time. It investigates the factors responsible for these trends and the implications on Christian lives. In addition, it analyzes the musical and literary structures of Laolu Gbenjo's music focusing on his 'Àlùjò mèta'. It is in this light, that this work takes a critical look at Laolu Gbenjo's 'Àlùjò mèta' from his 'Turn Around' album based on SPCF (Source, Purpose, Content and Focus) conceptual framework. The methods employed in carrying out this investigation include; discography and analytical methods by giving it close listening which helped in analyzing the structure, form, rhythm, melody and harmony in order to unfold the emerging trends. Secondary data were collected through books, journals, magazines, YouTube and other internet resources. Data collected were subjected to musical and content analyses. Through the aid of music notation software- Muse score, the results were represented. The findings revealed that there is a clear difference between the gospel music performance culture of the early years and that of today owing to factors which include influence of popular music culture- , dance, technology and economic reasons. The result also shows that Laolu Gbenjo as a gospel musician shuffles between the church and social spaces leading to hybridization of gospel music and new trends emerging in his gospel music which include: the introduction of alujo, speech surrogacy, use of street language (such as ọmọ Jèsù gbé body, etc), social media appropriation and many more. This paper concludes that engaging in the investigation of Laolu Gbenjo's 'Àlùjò mèta', an hybridization of Fuji and Afro-pop music will provoke further gospel music research in ethnomusicology and African musicology as a whole. Since preservation of traditional music of a culture or a society is a benchmark for their continued existence, this study contributes to archiving the Laolu Gbenjo's gospel music in order to tell the historical development of the hybridization of gospel music and new trends emerging in gospel music in Nigeria. This study also contributes to the understanding of undiluted Gospel music and Gospel music sustainability in contemporary Nigeria.*

Keywords: gospel music, trends, performance, Laolu Gbenjo, 'Àlùjò' gospel, undiluted, hybridization.

Introduction

Music is the language of the soul, it's influence upon human minds is thus ennobling, strengthening and elevating Ritter (2004), quoting Luther stretches that music is one of the greatest gifts of the creator and assigns it the first place next to divinity. Music sets the soul at rest and places it in the happiest mood in which it connects to God and as such it is an inseparable part of religious worship especially the Christian worship. We could observe that besides foreign church hymns used in African Christian worship sessions, church services could have been a dull and boring session and it might be void of good singing as it was at the dark ages.

Nigeria being a country where the entertainment and social life is 'bubbling' nation where the music industry is not an exception, new musical idioms are being developed constantly welding the modernized style with the traditional. Therefore, this work is also consistent with research that have examined the issue of "code-switching" in Nigerian popular music, as examined by Omoniyi, and the significance of a linguistic approach in the analysis of gospel music, as suggested by Alim (2009). (2006, 2009, Agbo 2009, Babalola and Taiwo 2009), While these studies provide logical justifications for code-switching and the manner in which it is depicted in the lyrics of Nigerian Christian songs, Euba (1989) observed that modern African popular artists' inventiveness is reflected in a new genre of music in which Western and African elements have been combined to create new idioms with a distinctly African nuance Euba (1989).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework on which this study is based is Source, Purpose, Content and Feedback conceptual framework (SPCF). Several scholars have used this framework successfully which include Olaoluwa Marvelous AYOMIKUN and Julius Oluwayomi OLUWADAMILARE (2020) in a joint article in which the conceptual frame work was used to advocate for sanitization of modern trends in gospel sacred music. This framework is considered to be fair perimeters in evaluating any contemporary gospel music as the 'source' of music refers to the composer or performer as an individual in regard to personality. In this context, it justifies if the song writer or performer has a relationship with Christ, the center of gospel or not. 'Purpose' bothers on the reason or drive behind the music; to praise and worship God, to get rich by singing all sorts of Christian songs, edify the believers with bible based songs

or means to become a celebrity. 'Content' refers to the lyrical content and messages of the music either they are of the gospel or canal. 'Feedback' deals with the reactions of the listeners or worshippers to the music. It tells if the music is a blessing to the listeners by edifying their souls or a distraction to their spiritual life by merely steering up their emotions.

Methodology

At the preliminary stage of this study, the researcher carried out survey of related and relevant literature review from some personal archives and a few relevant e-articles, which were part of the secondary sources of data collected for this study. This provided background knowledge to the study as relevant books, journals, theses, newspapers, magazines and reports were sourced. The methods employed in carrying out this investigation include; discography, biblical and analytical methods through which additional data were sourced. The selected song *Alujo meta* was sourced from Laolu Gbenjo's YouTube channel from his album titled "Turn around". Content analysis was carried out on the song, transcribed and notated with Muse 3.0 notation software. The study set to reveal various emerging trends in gospel music and factors responsible for this new experience.

Literature review

Gospel music as a subject of discourse has enjoyed scholarly debate from scholars such as Garret (1976), Robert (1973), Oludare and Adekunle (1993), Kukoyi (1995), Adedeji (2001, 2010), Ikibe (2002, 2010) Emielu, (2010), Japhet (2010) among several others. Some have explored the emergence and development the musical genre (mention 1 or 2, e.g Adedeji 2014,), while others have examined its classifications, definitions, lyrical context, and musical structure , including conceptual issues and many more controversial issues in their discussion of Nigerian gospel music (references). According to Adegbite (1994) , A "new type of church music" is gospel music. To support the aforementioned claim, Adedeji (2010) states that "gospel music" is simply the "gospel message" sung and played on musical instruments. It is a form of Christian music that primarily focuses at preaching the "good news" of Jesus. Reflecting on the definitions of gospel music, Ikibe and Babarinde (2013) emphasized that, despite using diverse approaches, the idea of soul winning and providing comfort to the tormented soul is important to these definitions of gospel music. Even while some researchers in the past have always glossed over the issue, the controversy over the methodology used in gospel music seems to have only recently emerged Olusoji (2006), reflecting on the use of music in Nigerian contemporary churches opines that, "it is a known fact and truism that the serenity and solemnity required for church services are now profaned by jeering, yelling, screaming and disco dancing. He stresses further that; The pastiche of styles that have hitherto been associated with popular genre and termed "worldly" are now found in its unrestrained form in contemporary churches. Music types such as reggae, hip-pop, Jazz, Afro beat and others have been incorporated into church music in the name of "making" a dance before the lord.(2006:181). The assertion above is backed up by Okonkwo (2006), laying credence to the assertion, affirms that 'gospel music has usurped the rhythmic styles of popular music which include R&B, reggae, rock, rap, highlife e.t.c.' It becomes difficult to make distinctions which can only be clarified through the song text. Vidal as cited in Adedeji (2007), it is typical to see young people adopting musical genres and vocal techniques from satellite TV and music CDs into the setting of divine worship, especially in non-traditional and orthodox churches. but which are alien to church music or even to our culture. Dance music and movie music reminiscent of night club culture are being brought into religious modes of worship.....

Commercialization Of gospel music

Today, Christian religious music has become very popular and can be heard everywhere, incorporating virtually all local and foreign musical styles identified in the non-religious category. Whereas, Christian religious music is a sacred music used by Christians as part of their worship and religious expressions which have texts derived from the Holy Bible or other Christian-associated words, gospel music should then be understood from the context of the concept of the gospel, and not popular music.

Major trends in gospel music performance culture

In Adedeji (2004), it is clearly stated that Nigerian gospel music started in 1960. Oluwaseyi [2018] further explained that "gospel music started in Nigeria due to the efforts of the early indigenous Christians trying to evangelize the gospel of Jesus Christ. Adeleke (2018) affirms that the changes that occur over time in the gospel music have a long term negative consequence on the faithful in the church as religious society. Meanwhile, Its clearly stated in the Bible the kinds of songs Christians should sing along with purpose and approaches. (See for Ref. Col. 3:16; ICh. 16:9; Mark 14:26, Eph. 5:19; Psalm 105:2) Today, there are diverse styles including Juju- gospel, gospel-fuji, gospel-hi life, Alujo-gospel, Sewele-gospel, gospel-waka, Tungba-gospel, pop-gospel and several others. The trend is musically interesting and genres are inevitable. There are several factors responsible for this but Adeleke (2018), concludes that such changes have resulted from adaptation of forms and styles from the secular domain. Nevertheless, it is important to state that singing with canal disposition and ulterior motives in Christianity result in mere entertainment. Pseudo-christian musicians are fond of using expressions that are casual and sensual. Some consciously avoid the mention of the name 'Jesus' in other to attract more patronage. They also employ nuances that turn the 'house of God' to a club

house. Other trends include: introduction of alujo, speech surrogacy, use of street language (such as *omọ Jésù gbé body*, etc), social media appropriation and many more.

Brief profile of the Artiste Laolu Gbenjo

Laolu Gbenjo is a gospel music artiste who has carved a niche in the gospel Alujo-music genre and he is known for gospel music live performance especially in several studio live sessions that are broadcasted on social media platforms which include his YouTube channel and Instagram page. His works include: Dabira, ‘*Àlùjò méta*’, Olaoluwa among others. In an interview with the punch news paper dated 28th of March 2020, Laolu narrated his journey before stardom on how he started music from his secondary school days. According to him, he gained public recognition after the release of his third album ‘Expression’ with the hit track ‘*Baba faye mi dabira*’.

Musical Analysis of ‘*Àlùjò méta*’ by Laolu Gbenjo

The analysis of the song titled ‘*Àlùjò méta*’ by Laolu Gbenjo is based on structural eclectic approach to analysis of African music as conceptualized by Agatha (2017).

The eclectic approach was derived from the combination of the criteria for analysis of African music by three authors: Agu (1999): Uzoigwe (1997) and Ezegebe (1983). The criteria includes (a)identification and form (b) the scale mode (c) the melodic structure (d) the rhythmic structure of the melody (e) the song text (f) the medium (g) length and style (h) range and tessitura... (p.221).

The selected song ‘*Àlùjò méta*’ (3-Dance rhythm) *Àlùjò* according to Adedeji (2010) is a Yoruba term by popularized by fuji musicians to indicate a dance rhythm or up beat music that beckons you to dance. ‘*Àlùjò méta*’ by Laolu Gbenjo is an audio visual piece recorded in one of his live performances in a studio session produced by Wilson Joel September 2020.

(a) Identification and form

The song is an amalgam of Fuji and Afro pop with a heavy emphasis on local percussion. Laolu Gbenjo is the song's lead vocalist, and two male and one female singer make up the song's three backing voices. The song is in the AABACA form, with a bridge and Afro pop-style musical transitions.

(b) the scale mode

The song scale mode is on Tetratonic which consists of four notes per octave. The song was performed on this scale having F# as the tonal centre.

TETRATONIC SCALE



The four notes contained in the scale used are; F#-G#-B-C#.

(c) the melodic structure

The song ‘*Àlùjò méta*’ consists of short phrases, call and response between the vocalist and the backup singers. The song is highly repetitive in terms of melodic structure and characterized by both short and wide leaps. The use of code switching gives the melody an exciting effect throughout the performance.

Àlùjò Méta

Laolu Gbenjo



(d) the rhythmic structure

The song is in a common time, fast, lively and it's melody is characterized by a number of different notes with different values: half, quarter, dotted quarter, and eighth notes. However, it is observed that eighth note of varying pitches predominates the entire song. The music is highly percussive with energetic rhythm from a lineup of traditional drums which include, Gangan (Talking drum), Omele, bata with a background loop creating a blend of fuji and Afro-pop beat filled with various syncopation. Based on the foregoing, it is reaffirmed here that in addition to metric and non-metric beats, African music manifests complex rhythmic structures and modes that are characterized by syncopated and asymmetrical beats.



(e) Song text

The text of this song is based on code switching of Yoruba, English and sparingly pidgin. The song text is highly repetitive and it depicts happiness, gratefulness and praises to God from a heart that has received some benefits. Although, Laolu Gbenjo injects diverse questionable elements, non-sacred and casual expressions which include nuances and borrowed expressions from secular musical performances which are religiously profane as observed in the song text below;

Song text

Translation

Call; <i>Let's go, pèlú àlùjò mэта,</i> <i>àlùjò mэта àlùjò mэта, àlùjò mэта</i> <i>Ebami làlùjò mэта-kilẹ̀wí</i>	with three dance beat three dance beat, with three three dance beat help me play three dance beat
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Chorus;

Resp; <i>Àlùjò mэта mofẹ̀ yin baba lógo</i> <i>Ọba alágbádá ina</i> <i>Kòsómí tólè pá</i> <i>Ọba tó ga ga ga</i> <i>Kò sẹ̀ni tólè beat è</i> <i>Yin baba yin baba</i> <i>Pèlú Àlùjò mэта</i>	three dance beat, I want to praise father The King with robe of fire Unquenchable the most high king the unbeatable praise the father, praise the father with three dance beat
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Lead; *Óyá gbẹ̀sẹ̀, fijo rẹ̀ làlùjò mэтаkilẹ̀şọ* lift your legs, to the dance beat, you say what?

Chorus;

Resp; <i>Àlùjò mэта mofẹ̀ yin baba lógo</i> <i>Ọba alágbádá ina</i> <i>Kòsómí tólè pá</i> <i>Ọba tó ga ga ga</i> <i>Kò sẹ̀ni tólè beat è</i> <i>Yin baba yin baba</i> <i>Pèlú Àlùjò mэта</i>	three dance beat, I want to praise father The King with robe of fire Unquenchable the most high king the unbeatable praise the father, praise the father with three dance beat
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Verse;

Lead;	<i>moni ko làlùjò mēta yé è</i>	I said play the dance beat
Resp;	<i>mēta mēta mēta, mēta to šaná</i>	Sparkling three three
	To our God the sharper	
	To our God the proper	
	<i>O šápà , O purópà</i>	He is sharper, He is proper
	<i>O šápurópà</i>	He is both sharper and proper
	<i>Àlùjò meta to šáprám'prámu</i>	Three dance beats that are sharper and proper

The slang “*o šáprám' prámu*” used above is a street slang originated by a popular secular fuji musician , Abas Akande Obesere which he used in the early nineties after the release of ‘*Asakasa*’ album. The term is used to describe a beautiful young lady who is still in her prime. Adopting such a secular word to describe the type of music to play in the worship of God is questionable indeed. Also, some archaic Yoruba cognomens for eulogizing God are occasionally injected in the song texts.

(f) Medium

The piece is essentially vocal but accompanied with both western and traditional musical instruments that are creatively arranged.

(g) Length and Style

Àlùjò mēta is a relatively short musical performance recorded in a live studio session of 5minutes, 13 seconds long, a medley of short repetitive lyrics performed in an acrobatic dance steps as found in Afro-pop music of the contemporary time. The style is a fusion of Afro-pop and fuji. In terms of harmonic texture, the piece employs unison singing style with a unique 3-parts cadencial ending points.

(h) Range and Tessitura.

The range of the song melody is within an octave, while the tessitura lies in the middle register.

Àlùjọ Mèta

Laolu Gbenjo

Lead

E ba mi la lu jo me ta ki le wi

Response

A lu jo me ta mo fe yin ba ba lo

Lead

o go O ba a la gba da i na ko so mi to le pa

Rspns

o go O ba a la gba da i na ko so mi to le pa

Biblical Evaluation

Taking Christian songs out of contexts in order to spice up musical performances and for the pleasure of listeners is like a temptation to turn stone to bread for meal, a compromise which Jesus rejected out rightly in the scriptures. According to Adejeji (2009), new radical forms such as gospel-fuji and gospel-waka came into being in 1990's. *Àlùjọ mèta* belongs to this category. In terms of source, Laolu Gbenjo who is the composer is well known for his Alujo-gospel fuji flavours. He is popular for his energetic musical performances which are characterized by a blend of Afro-pop and fuji brands spiced with heavy and aggressive percussion, yelling, nuances and acrobatic dance movements. The purpose of the music needs some probing. The song *Àlùjọ mèta* is chiefly characterized with lots of gyration and frivolity. The emphasis on rapid drumming, yelling, pulsations and several acrobatic dance in the musical performance obviously make the music more of an entertainment based than of gospel as it is also observed that the name 'Jesus' was avoided all through the song text and replaced with "bàbà and Ọba" meaning father and King respectively. It is safe to state here that Laolu Gbenjo's music generally conforms to the brand of music classified as gospel entertainment or 'gospotainment' according to Ayomikun (2020) who noted that some of the so called gospel music are new brand of music which neither conform entirely to gospel music nor secular music, and later concludes that such brand belongs to the new age music known as 'Gospotainment'. This is a deviation either consciously or unconsciously from the primary purpose of the 'gospel'

Content wise, *Àlùjọ mèta* contains about 550 words without a single mention of the name 'Jesus Christ'. This is one of the many trends observed in the new wave of gospel music and it is prevalent among the new generation churches, a kind of gospel that believes that the acceptance of Jesus Christ comes with an instant financial and material rewards. Such music and its song content usually celebrate material and other canal blessings rather than making Jesus the center of worship.

As regards feedback and effect, whenever and wherever *Àlùjọ mèta* is being raised, it causes uproar and the audience reaction is usually unrestricted characterized with gangsterism, devoid of sacredness especially among the youth. The music obviously communicates to the people's emotions; hence, it does not fulfill the purpose of the essence of gospel music which is edification and salvation. It could be said that the character of every music and the resultant effect it has on people reflect the 'spirit' behind the music.

Conclusion

Whilst the gospel musicians are supposed to drive the teachings of Christ through their songs, other inevitable factors are also a major consideration for them to remain socially and economically relevant. Laolu Gbenjo's musical style 'LG' as fondly called is appealing to the street/youth culture via his language, dance, social media presence, dress style etc. Regardless, There is a great declination in the scriptural standard of Christian gospel music of the 20th/21st centuries in Nigeria. There are lots of Pseudo-Christian music in circulation today, songs full of unscriptural elements in terms of texts, content, tune, beat style, performance practice e.t.c. It is obvious that many release musical albums and singles for commercial, fame and entertainment purposes. *Àlùjò m'èta*, is though musically creative and appealing, cannot be regarded entirely as a gospel music; it conforms more to the entertainment category.

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