

## THE ÒSÀRÁ ENIGMA: AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF MUSICAL STRUCTURE OF ILE-IFE'S IMMATERIAL HERITAGE

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### ABSTRACT

Òsàrà music, a fundamental cultural heritage of Ile-Ife's cultural legacy, remains insufficiently studied. This study analyses the musical composition of Òsàrà festival music, focusing on its rhythmic patterns, melodic contours, and harmonic structures. This study utilises a mixed-methods approach that combines ethnographic fieldwork and audio recordings, employing the Musical Phrase Structure theory proposed by Lerdahl and Jackendoff in 1983 to clarify the intricate relationships among the musical elements of Òsàrà. The results indicated that Òsàrà music incorporates intricate polyrhythms, comprising 3-4 simultaneous rhythmic patterns. Melodies generally adhere to a pentatonic, hexatonic, or tritonic scale. Harmonic movement is frequently governed by rhythmic patterns. Òsàrà music emphasises Yoruba traditional values, including community and spirituality, with lyrics frequently referencing mythological figures and ancestor veneration. Òsàrà Music functions as a medium for cultural transmission and identity formation. The study suggests that Òsàrà music demonstrates a unique blend of African and African diasporic musical influences. Rhythmic complexity and melodic ornamentation are essential characteristics of Òsàrà music. The musical composition embodies Yoruba cultural principles and mythological narratives. This research aids in the documenting and preservation of Òsàrà music, while the study offers a foundation for evaluating other traditional Yoruba musical genres.

**Keyword:** Analysis, Melody, Òsàrà, Structure, Scale

### INTRODUCTION

The term "The Òsàrá Enigma" implies that the musical patterns and cultural importance of Òsàrá music are captivating, intricate, and potentially not entirely comprehended, prompting investigation and examination. Immaterial heritage is a heritage that is passed down through generations, influencing communal identity and cultural variety. Immaterial Heritage, also known as Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), refers to non-physical aspects of culture that are inherited from past generations and passed on to future generations. These elements are essential to a community's identity, social practices, and cultural continuity. Immaterial Heritage includes traditions such as: proverbs, epic poems and storytelling. Social practices such as: Festivals and celebrations, Rituals and ceremonies and Traditional medicine practices. Knowledge skills such as: Traditional craftsmanship and ancient knowledge systems and representations that communities recognise as part of their cultural heritage

This study explores the composition of Yoruba festival music, focusing on rhythmic patterns, melodies, and harmonic structures, in order to document and preserve this cultural transmission.

Melodies in African music is evidence of artistic and aesthetic creativity, varying in rhythm, range, or note choice. The basic scale patterns in Òsàrà songs include ditonic, tritonic, tetratonic, pentatonic, hexatonic, and heptatonic. These scales are constructed by the ear and not mechanically well-tempered. The melodic structure of music in Africa is based on scales and selected interval sequences, with different musical elements contributing to this structure. The tempo of Òsàrà festival music is slow and graceful but gradually rises to a moderately fast sequence that is danceable and then fast. The music rarely stops for a change of tempo during the performance. The Asaju among the Abebe player uses a rhythmic pattern depending on the type of song Alu sings to bring other Abebe players into the fast tempo. Rhythm is an important factor in African music, as it has attracted the attention of scholars more than melody, harmony, and form. African tradition is more uniform in the choice and use of rhythms and rhythmic structures than in selecting a pitch system. Music notes are beats of different durations, and the arrangement of these beats in a piece of music takes a rhythmic pattern.

Different kinds of rhythms are found in both instrumental and vocal music, organized in both linear and multilinear forms. The rhythm of a song is determined by its poetic context and divided into long and short corresponding to the six generally accepted rhythmic modes of eleventh and twelfth period in Greek music: trochaic, iambic, dactylic, anapest, spondee, and tribrach. These rhythms are represented in Òsàrà festival music. The specific objectives of this study are to Identify and categorize Òsàrà's rhythmic patterns and time cycles. Analyze melodic motifs with their variations and, Examine harmonic structures and their cultural significance. This study enhances our comprehension of Òsàrà music, illuminating its distinctive musical lexicon and cultural significance. The results will guide music education, cultural preservation, and multidisciplinary research.

### DISCUSSION OF THEORY

Lerdahl and Jackendoff (1983, p. 12) point out that when we listen to a passage of music we automatically segment or chunk the sound we hear into units of widely varying sizes such as motives, themes, phrases, theme groups, sections, and so on. Lerdahl and Jackendoff (1983) use the term group to refer to such structural units. Lerdahl and Jackendoff (1983) highlight the importance of grouping sound into units like motives, themes, phrases, and sections in African music. Melodies in African music is influenced by rhythm, range, and note choice. The basic scale patterns in Òsàrà songs include ditonic, tritonic, tetratonic, pentatonic, hexatonic, and heptatonic. The tempo of Òsàrà festival music is slow and graceful, gradually rising to a moderately fast sequence. Rhythm is a key factor in Òsàrà music, with rhythmic structures and notes being organized in linear and multilinear forms. The rhythm of a song is determined by its poetic context and represented in Òsàrà festival music.

### Melodic Structure

(Ogli, 2010)<sup>1</sup> notes that melodies are evidence of the artistic and aesthetic creative prowess of composers that vary in rhythm, range, or choice of notes. The basic scale patterns of melodies in African songs are based on vocal and instrumental music such as include: ditonic, tritonic, tetratonic, pentatonic, hexatonic and heptatonic. (Akpabot, 1998)<sup>2</sup> explains that there are three ways in which African melodies can be examined: the movement of melodies, whether upwards or downwards, how the melody is constructed conjunctly or disjunct, narrow or expanded, and the range of melodies. (Agu, 1999) agrees to this by observes that, most African songs are characterized by short melodic motifs which serves as a basis for repetition variation and extemporization. Especially in music of Òsàrà festival short melodies often occurs and longer melodies occasionally occur, but with motifs reappearing repeatedly in different forms.

### Melodic Contour in Òsàrà music

(Adedeji, 1991), citing Ologunde refers to Sach's three classification of melody, and points to terms like: logogenic (word-born), pathogenic (emotionborn), and melogenic (music-born). The above classification in a sense, form the resources of melody. The melody of Òsàrà music is word-born. Melodies on which texts are based obey tonal inflection of the people's dialect. The term contour is used to refer to shape of a melody over time whether the notes rise to higher pitches, fall to lower ones, remain at the same pitch, or a combination of these. There is close relationship between the scale of a piece and its melodic contour. In music, a step, or conjunct motion, shows the difference in pitch between two consecutive notes of a musical scale.

In other words, it is the interval between two consecutive scale degrees.

Any larger interval is called a skip (also called a leap), or disjunct motion. The concept of melodic contour (shape, configuration, outline) is frequently encountered, but its precise meaning and significance in musical analysis is elusive. Good melodies have a strong sense of balance between aspects of contour: rise versus fall and conjunct motion versus disjunct motion.

Below are the examples of different melodic contour in music of Òsàrà festival

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<sup>1</sup>Ogli, G.E. 2001. Idoma Funeral Rite an Ethnomusicological study. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Ibadan.

<sup>2</sup>Akpabot, Samuel. Form, Function, and Style in African music: Macmillian Nigeria Publishers Limited, Lagos, 1998



The first bar in treble stave started with solo's call with the lowest note in the passage and rose gradually to the highest note (disjunct ascending and conjunct descending), while chorus on bass stave response is mainly in conjunct and disjunct and ended with undulating movement.

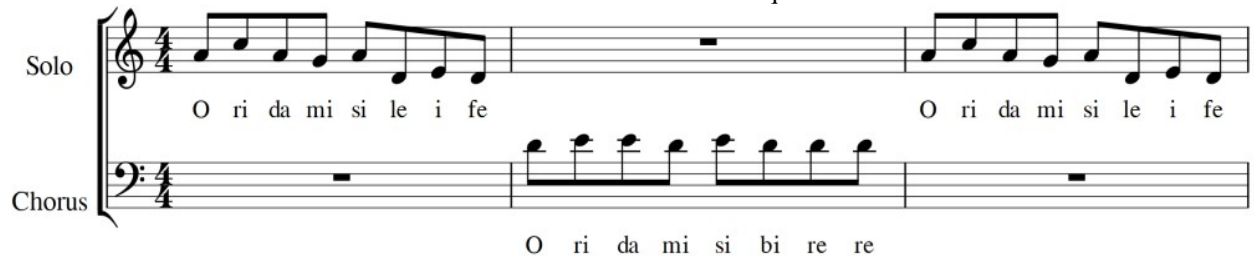
In singing a song that has only three notes scale, there will be a lot of gapped notes and leap in the melody. An example is the song below as the melody opens with a leap up and a leap down.



### Scale in Òsàrà music

These scales are constructed by ear and are not mechanically well-tempered. (Akpabot, 1998, p. 27) states that it is obvious that if African scales are measured by a western mechanical contraption like tonometer it will reveal than we need to know because that instrument is constructed with western scale pattern in mind. The melodic structure of music in Africa is based on and controlled by scales and the use of selected interval sequences. Different musical elements constitute melodic structure in African music these include scales, contour, continuity, and melodic framework. Several factors also contribute in forming certain contour pattern melodies and can be differentiated according to how each contour is used. The contour variables include shape direction change and range. The shape is the overall pattern of the contour. Direction change deal with changes in general movements of notes where leap and stepwise movement are involved while range is the distance between the highest and lowest points, rate of pitch change, any variation in the rate of pitch change, distribution of low, middle and high notes. Continuity is the general flow of effects caused by melodic intervals, rhythm, values, articulation. Differences between melodies depend on how these factors are coordinated with contour features. Melodic structure of music in Òsàrà festival consists of contour with the use of shape, direction change, and range. The term contour<sup>3</sup> is used to connote the shape of melody over time, whether the notes rise to higher pitches, fall to lower ones, remain at the same pitch, or a combination of these. Additionally, contour is used in discussing the movement of melody by adjacent notes (known as conjunct motion or motion by step) or by larger intervals (known as disjunct motion or motion by leap).

The scales of the melodies often employed in African music are based on diatonic (2 notes), tritonic (3-notes), tetratonic (4-notes), pentatonic (5-notes), hexatonic (6notes) and heptatonic (7-notes). Music in Òsàrà festival often employs the use of tritonic (3-notes), tetratonic (4-notes) and pentatonic (5-notes) scale. The lead singer may make his melodic call (Lile orin) from any degree of the scale used for a particular song and the chorus may also respond (gbigbe orin) and end the song on any note (mostly second) degree of the scale. The structure of the melodies built out of these scales is based on the controlled use of selected interval sequences.



<sup>3</sup>[www.ableton.html](http://www.ableton.html)

The first song used for this analysis and was sung in modal pentatonic of the dorian mode as the song started on the 5<sup>th</sup> degree of the scale (l) and ended on the second (r). According to Hood (1971:324), basic features of mode seem to include the following; a gapped scale which is a scale that comprises both large and small intervals, a hierarchy of principal pitches, the usage of vocal and ornamental pitches and extra musical associations with the season, hours of the day and nights. Considering the gapped scale is more applicable to music in Òsàrà festival where the melodies consist of songs with tritonic, tetratonic, and pentatonic scales mostly. The major and minor modes of western music are made up of whole steps and half steps (tone and semitone) or chromatic scale - the tempered tuning system equidistance intervals. Major and minor modes may consist of large and small intervals following the model of Hood (1971) in which (S) representing small interval and (L) representing large intervals with the following arrangements:

L                    L    S    L    LL    S

Major mode: C            D            E            F            G            A            B            C`

L    S    L    L    S    L    L

Minor mode: A            B            C            D            E            F            G            A

But tritonic, tetratonic, pentatonic and hexatonic are not tempered tuning system, their theoretical scale structure is gapped in such a way that tone and semitone formation are not fully important.

o lomo lo la ye o O sa ramo komo de o

o lomo lo la ye o O sa ramo

The song above is another example of a song on the five-tone pentatonic scale (d r m s l) with the omission of fourth and seventh note of the scale together with song ten. The omission of 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> notes creates a gap between 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> degrees of the scale. There is also a variation of the pentatonic scale in most cases. The structure used to be on (d r m s l) but other types were used in the music of Òsàrà festival. Pentatonic scales are found in both equidistance and nonequidistance forms Nketia (1974). The pentatonic without a half step (the anhemitonic pentatonic) and pentatonic with one or two half steps (the hemitonic pentatonic).

The commonest type of pentatonic is the scale without of the fourth (F) and the seventh degree (T) in a musical composition. But there are various types of pentatonic scale as Nketia (1974) highlighted which consists of anhemitonic and hemitonic pentatonic. The type of pentatonic scale peculiar to this study is anhemitonic pentatonic shown above. Another example below:

A la si o, A la si o gbe ran le ko di de

A la si o, A

Song Four employed the use of pentatonic substituting the third note (m) for the fourth note (f). The above song is another variation of anhemitonic pentatonic scale, same as song number below.

The type of Pentatonic scale used in Òsàrà festival music is the anhemitonic type of pentatonic scale which is based on the dorian mode where the second degree of the scale is the dominant sound because the music end on the (r) note. In the western church modes, a particular gapped structure seems to be the hallmark of mode Ionian (major) mode Hood (1971). But functionally in African music, any five notes, regardless of their arrangement and intervallic relationships, comprise a pentatonic scale. It is wrong to always view the first note of this scale as tonic. From previous examples, anhemitonic pentatonic scale were used while in the following example Another type of scale used in Òsàrà festival music is tetratonic (four tone scale). Unlike songs that employs pentatonic scale, a group of notes were used as tetratonic in Òsàrà festival songs eight showcased songs written in tetratonic scale.

The above example is a song on tetratonic with the notes (d r s l). It is a typical example of gapped scale. Hood (1971) observed that:

the theoretical might be based on tempered tuning system like the equidistant intervals of the twelve white and black keys of the piano octave but the practical scale on which mode is based must be whole non-equidistant. (p.235).

The scale of four-tone is not tempered tuning systems because their scale structure is gapped. Song above uses *d r s l* where the omission of pitches between second and fifth degree of the scale is more than four semitones that explain why African scale cannot be view from the western perspective because the scale is not well tempered. Another type of tetratonic scale used in Òsàrà festival is in Song

The example above showed another song with tetratonic scale. Unlike song number 13, the note in the song is different. The notes are (d m f s) which is a typical example of hamitonic tetratonic in which despite the gapped kind of scale a semitone is found in the music.

The above excerpt indicates what is between bar one and two, and bar three and four in order to show hemitonic tetratonic.

The above example has shown songs in tritonic scale. There are a number of songs in the festival with three tone scale, songs five six and seven showed songs with tritonic scale.

### **Tempo**

Tempo is the speed of a musical performance. The tempo of Òsàrà music is slow and graceful beat but gradually rises to a moderately fast sequence that is danceable and then fast. The tempo does not slow down till the end of the musical performance. The music rarely stops for a change of tempo during the performance in Òsàrà festival. The Asaaju among the Abebe player uses a clearly rhythmic pattern depending on the type of song Alu sings to bring other Abebe player into the fast tempo.

### **Harmony**

Multipart singing and harmonic concepts are basic traits of many African musical traditions. Harmony in African music is as old as in the being music of African. Harmony is not a result of acculturation, but rather indigenous to the African music. It is commonly found in two parts: a second, third, fourth and five apart harmonies. Nketia (1974) stated thus:

Songs conceived of as single lines of music may break here and there into two voices and then return to the basic linear form when a choice of melodic direction is possible. Thus, in some form of pentatonic music, some singers may sing a second, third, or fourth above or below a note in the main melody and return quickly to the main part...this organization however, is essentially linear rather than multilinear, and we may regard the incidence of occasional heterophony as purely decorative. (p. 160).

Occasional harmony is used in indigenous African music. It could be in unison (where the melody will be repeated in octave), seconds, thirds fourths and fifths. The solo distinctive and role of accompanying music voices is more defined. Some communities use fourths and fifths while others deploy the thirds but in most communities these intervals are used. Akpabot (1998) posits that:

Consecutive seconds are discordant in African music but acceptable when used at cadential points as in the music of Yoruba of Nigeria, where two-part singing in fifths is brought to a close by the second voice part moving up to harmonize the last note of a solo voice at the interval of a second. Akpabot, 1998, p. 23).

However, two-part singing is more prominent in Yoruba indigenous singing and highly significantly realised in Òsàrà festival music. Harmony is not strictly homophonic as it is in Western music because words in African music are inflationary in nature. It is therefore necessary to limit harmony to two parts or occasional harmony. Concept of group singing and harmony Western music point of view is different from their African counterpart. On this, Adedeji (2006)<sup>4</sup> writes:

The term “indigenous choral” as used here differs from the Western interpretation of the same word. It is not the SATB tradition. What is obtained is “group singing”. Also, although choir as an exclusive aesthetic singing group (*egbeakorin*) exists, it is not commonly practiced by the Yoruba. (Adedeji, 2006, p. 5).

Musical concept is not scientifically based in Africa where harmony is scientifically constructed unlike in western music. In African music, harmony in songs is spontaneously a part of the musical performance. Below is an example of occasional heterophony in second (2<sup>nd</sup>) in the performance of Òsàrà festival music;

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<sup>4</sup> Adedeji Centering on African Practice in Musical Arts Education *Edited by Minette Mans* The Pan-African Society of Musical Arts Education. African Minds 2006.

Solo  
I fe Oo ye o lo ri a ye gbo gbo

Chorus  
I fe Oo ye I fe Oo ye o

6  
I fe Oo ye o lo ri a ye gbo gbo

lo ri a ye gbo gbo I fe

There are some notes in the response of the chorus towards the end of the lines of the chorus. An example is in bar six of the above melody where two-part singing in seconds is brought to a close by the second voice part moving up to harmonize the last note of the chorus. The most prominent form of harmony in of Òsàrà festival music is unison and two-part singing. Another form of harmony Òsàrà festival music is in song below:

la ye A de ye ye la ye A de ye ye ka ro wo to mo ka je re O mo o.

The above excerpt showed occasional harmony moves in third in sharp contrast to song 8. The call was made by the leader of the group and the harmony does not follow western style of harmony in various motions such as; similar, contrary and oblique motion.

O ri da mi si le i fe

O ri da mi si bi re re

The call and response are a form of music composition where a vocalist or instrumentalist sings or plays a phrase and another vocalist or instrumentalist answers with another phrase, thereby creating a lively exchange. Akpabot (1998) noted that: among some ethnic groups in Africa, the chorus response to a solo's call sometimes breaks into two-part singing in thirds, fourths and fifths, in what is an entirely spontaneous phenomenon (p. 39). The call and response pattern used in of Òsàrà festival music have been based on the leader is (*Alubiagba*) call and the group response.

Solo  
la ye A de ye ye la ye A de ye ye ka ro wo to mo ka je re O mo o.

Chorus  
la ye A de ye ye la ye A de ye ye

7  
la ye A de ye ye la ye A de ye ye ka ro wo to mo ka je re O mo o.

13  
ka ro wo to mo ka je re O mo o.

la ye A de ye ye la ye A de ye ye

From the above example, we can see that the chorus is often occasionally harmonized like in the previous excerpt of Òsàrà festival music. Another voice sometimes accompanying the lead singer in two-part singing.

### Rhythm

According to word web English dictionary rhythm is the variation of strong weak elements (such as duration accent) of sound notably in speech or music, over time, beat or meter. Rhythm can also be defined as the flow, repetition or regularity of notes. It can also be seen as a strong regular in repeated pattern of sound. Rhythm is an important factor of African music; such that even melodic patterns often serve rhythmic purposes as well. In African music, the element of rhythm has attracted the attention of scholars more than melody, harmony and form. African tradition is more uniform in the choice and use of rhythms and rhythmic structures than in selection of pitch system. Music notes are beats of different durations, and the arrangement of these beats in a piece of music takes a rhythmic pattern.

In Oriental music, the rhythmic conception is generally free, whether in vocal or instrumental music. Rhythm in Òsàrà festival music is orderly arranged by the inflection of words. Movement in Òsàrà festival music through time happens in patterns of lengths of tunes in a group of notes of various durational values. Basically, the meter is composed in groupings of simple quadruple equivalent, and in compound duple. Simple triple time is rare in Òsàrà festival music. There are different ways in which rhythm appears in the music of Òsàrà Festival music.

Different kinds of rhythms are found in both instrumental music of Òsàrà and vocal music. Instrumental rhythms are organized in both linear and multilinear forms, and are generally conceived of either as syllabic rhythms reflecting those of songs, or as abstract rhythmic patterns (Nketia, 1974). The rhythm of song stated by Akpabot (1998) is determined by its poetic context, and divided into long and short corresponding to the six generally accepted rhythmic modes of eleventh and twelfth period in the Greek music are: trochaic, iambic, dactylic, anapest, spondee and tribrach. In medieval music, rhythmic modes were set patterns of long and short rhythms. These rhythms are being represented in Òsàrà festival music, each of the modes will be seen in the following song.

Mode 1 is called trochaic, short-long and is found in song *Alasi* is the title



Mode 2 is called iambic, long-short it is found in song *Baba omo* is the title



Mode 3 is called dactylic, long-short-long, found in song *Olomo lo laye*.



o O sa

Mode 4 is called Anapest, short-long-long, found in song *Yeye o*



ye o

Mode 5 is called spondee, long long long and found in song *Iba o* is the title.



Mode 6 is called Tribrach, short-short-short, found in song *laye Adeyeye*



ka ro wo to mo ka

A particular type of rhythm common to African music is bell rhythm and is made up of the three rhythmic modes; the trochaic, the iambic and the spondee. The study has shown that there is no instrumental ensemble in Africa that does not deploy this rhythmic pattern (Akpabot, 1998).

Rhythm in Òsàrà festival music is simple and complex. Simple when the instrument play in isolation and complex when all instrumental components play together. Idamoyibo (2004:99)<sup>5</sup> stated that:

<sup>5</sup>Idamoyibo A. the primacy of Rhythm in Indigenous Yoruba Music. JANIM 2014 vol. 8



Yoruba traditional music exhibits two distinctive characteristics: the dominant of the two is the reflection of the tone of the language in their vocal music (the melody) and the other focuses on the rhythmic sensibility of the instruments that serves as the accompaniment.

The instrumental accompaniment for music in Òsàrà festival is Abebe. Generally, abebe is built to function as rhythmic instrument in the performance of the music.

### Conclusion

Òsàrà music showcases artistic creativity through melodies, rhythm, range, and note choice. Scale patterns in songs include ditonic, tritonic, tetratonic, pentatonic, hexatonic, and heptatonic. The melodic structure is based on scales and interval sequences, with different musical elements contributing to it. Rhythm is a crucial factor in Òsàrà music, with a more uniform choice than the pitch system. Different rhythms are found in instrumental and vocal music, organized in linear and multilinear forms. The rhythm of Òsàrà song is determined by its poetic context and divided into long and short corresponding to Greek rhythmic modes. Òsàrà music emphasizes Yoruba traditional values, community, and spirituality, and serves as a medium for cultural transmission and identity formation. The research aids in documenting and preserving one of the most intangible cultural heritages of Yoruba people.

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