

A MODEL FOR THE STUDY OF AFRICAN MUSIC

by

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Introduction

In recent years, African music which some in the past had considered as 'grotesque', 'cacophonous', and a perversion of the norm in music has gained wide acceptance and respectability. Its formal study in a number of institutions in Euro-America, combined with research into its various forms, is becoming increasingly popular. Thus, it is not uncommon to find elementary and high school children learning African songs and dances in their original languages and at the college level, apart from full-time scholarship, students are given experiences in performing African music either through singing of songs, dancing or playing of various musical instruments¹.

In spite of this increasing interest in the study of African music, its diversity poses a fundamental problem which continues to deter its structure as a curriculum subject. It is general knowledge that within an ethnic tradition, there exist numerous varieties of musical expression, not to mention national groups. This basic problem has rendered highly questionable the plural concept which has been advanced in regard to the diversified musical phenomena in Africa. The question which now faces those concerned with making African music a curriculum subject is how to structure the music in a way that will optimize the plural concept *vis-à-vis* European music and make it amenable to classroom processes of teaching and learning.

The usual approach to this problem, particularly at the college level, has been to give a general introduction to musical practices in Africa before narrowing it down to a specific ethnic group in a particular country in Africa. This approach which emphasizes social and anthropological methods is obviously unsatisfactory for the treatment of musical structures in Africa. In this paper therefore, we shall attempt to present an alternative approach to the study of African music specifically and any other non-Western musical culture for primary and high school students anywhere in the world. It will be based on concept clusters abstracted from the field of ethnomusicology given the assumption that every discipline has certain organising concepts, key ideas and modes of inquiry which scholars have developed and believe to be fundamental to their fields. Many important issues relevant to the development of ethnomusicological concepts arise from this assumption. What, for instance, one might ask are ethnomusicological concepts? Can they be identified and are they significant to that field of knowledge? First let us examine the term 'concept' and its relevance to ethnomusicological endeavours.

Theoretical base

The term 'concept' has been used in different contexts with a wide variety of meanings, James (1939), for example, defines it as a mental image of a thing or event, and Jarolimek (1969) speaks of 'concepts' as 'categories of meaning' (p. 208). In general a 'concept' is regarded as a mental image of categories or abstractions that apply to interrelated

¹The programme of ethnomusicology at U.C.L.A., whereby undergraduates and graduate students apart from learning the theoretical foundations of the music of the non-Western world are also required to participate in performing such music, provides a good example. However for reports on similar activities at the elementary and high school levels see Elizabeth May and Mantle Hood, "Javanese Music for American Children", *Music Educators Journal*, April-May, 1962, p. 38-41, and "An Experiment with Australian Aboriginal Music", *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 4, December 1967, p. 47-50.

activities in a field or discipline. Hence, ethnomusicological concepts will be taken to mean abstractions of interrelated ideas about ethnomusicological activities.

The field of ethnomusicology as an area of study is very recent. As an approach to the study of music it is currently being applied to the study of non-Western music, including European folk music, as well as for all varieties of music found in one locale or region (Hood, 1970).

As a field of study, it developed from a previous conception referred to as 'comparative musicology', the activities of which were dominated by structural problems and historical considerations. Ethnomusicology has expanded these dimensions by emphasizing the study of any music not only 'in terms of itself, but also in its cultural context' (Hood 1963).

The growth of ethnomusicology as a field of study has yielded a great deal of information on various aspects of music of the non-European peoples. However, most of this information still remains unsystematized and unclassified for classroom use. The increasing realization of the role of ethnomusicology in general education and the demand for the inclusion of non-Western music in the curriculum of schools and colleges² have necessitated the development of a framework upon which the music of the world can be examined with uniform techniques and terminology. The attempt to provide a conceptual approach, which is the central concern in this paper, has grown from the need to meet this demand.

In recent years, the main emphasis in educational research has been on the use of conceptual structures and generalization of knowledge by curriculum workers as organising centres for school programmes. The arguments in support of this approach are well summarized in the following quote from Frazer (1969):

Learning within an organized structure of ideas is efficient. Specific facts become meaningful when their relationship to concepts or generalizations are understood. Interest and motivation for further study is encouraged by such meaningful learning . . . If the framework is built from significant concepts, generalizations and principles, these become tools for investigating and organizing information and thinking about problems and issues that may be encountered later (p. 15).

The utilization of conceptual approaches is gaining increasing acceptance and instruction is beginning to be focused on those fundamental concepts that explain the phenomena in the field of study. This approach has been particularly successful in teaching elementary social studies and the same approach is being used to develop programmes in various social science disciplines and in the humanities (Jarolimek 1969). One such attempt in the field of music has been reported by Oslon (1967).

Assuming that the conceptual approach could prove useful to the study of ethnomusicology in the classroom, the next problem involves the search for and identification of basic concepts from the field. In view of its partial relationship to Western musicology, one wonders if concepts germane to that field of study will find easy application to African musicology. Concepts related to forms, styles, perception, sound and so forth are drawn from 'supporting disciplines' of physics, psychology, musicology and musical criticism. Because of apparent fundamental differences in orientation and modes of inquiry between these fields, not all the concepts will find general application.

However, since the overriding aim of ethnomusicology, it seems to me, is to better understand a culture through music, and music through the culture in which it is practised, perhaps a better approach to identifying concepts in ethnomusicology will

²Hood's report that at a two-week seminar on music education held at Yale University sponsored by the United States Office of Education, there was a "unanimous endorsement of a proposal that some study of non-Western music should be included in the curriculum of elementary and secondary schools" is indicative of this increasing demand. For further information, refer to Mantle Hood, "Non-Western Music in Western Education" *Education News*, Office of Education, North Sydney, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1965, p. 11-13.

be to search for relevant concepts which overlap with such concepts as ones in use in the field of cultural anthropology. Certain words, terminologies and phrases which have found their way into the vocabulary of the field of study could also provide useful guidelines. For example, such words as 'culture', 'universalism', 'structure', 'performance', 'tradition', 'acculturation' and such phrases as 'cultural variability', 'bi-musicality', 'musical diversity' might be developed into basic concepts.

Concept development according to Jarolimek (1969) is an information-sorting process which includes all associations and relationships that belong and excludes those that do not; hence, it calls for the placing of information in correct cognitive categories.

The model that is being proposed constitutes an attempt to apply what could be conceived as ethnomusical concepts to the design of an African music programme for elementary school children on the one hand, and also one of several endeavours to find a suitable approach to the presentation of African music to African children and possibly children from other parts of the world at the elementary school level. With appropriate modifications it can also be applied to the teaching of any other non-Western music at elementary and high school levels.

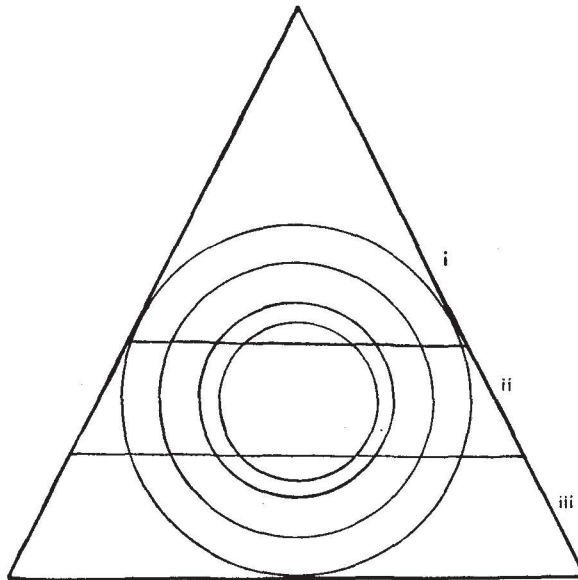


Fig. I Model of African music curriculum

- CONCENTRIC: 1 = Locale, i.e. ethnic oriented music practices
 2 = National, i.e. music practices viewed at the national level
 3 = African, i.e. representative countries
 4 = World, i.e. musical cultures of the world
- TRIANGULAR: i = Culture ii = Performance iii = Structure

Description of the model

There are two parts to the model (see Fig. 1): the concentric part which represents the scope and geographic distribution of musical phenomena to be covered and the

triangular part representing the concepts to be learned in relation to, or in the context of the areas named in the concentric section. Thus the concentric part by representing the concrete content of knowledge offers the necessary resources to be used in the abstract comprehension and inquiry of the triangular part. These various parts of the model are interrelated, they are arranged from the most specific to the most general. In the concentric section, knowledge of the outer circles is based on knowledge of the inner ones. The knowledge of each outer circle depends on knowing part, or all, of the inner ones. This process is reversed in the triangular section where the movement is from top to bottom or preferably from high to low. Thus, knowledge of the lower level is based on knowledge of the higher level; and knowing each lower level also means knowing all or representative parts of the higher level. This does not preclude simultaneous teaching of facts relating to all the levels nor does each band in the concentric part correspond to educational levels.

The concentric part is arranged by placing the concept 'locale' in the inner-most part of the circle because it is the most specific in terms of content coverage of any programme of music education. This means that local musical practices will be covered first and will probably be used as points of departure for musical practices of other areas. It will therefore be seen that representative ethnic-oriented musical practices of a locality form the basis of the music programme presented in the model. In other words, taking the city of Ibadan in the Western State of Nigeria as an example, children in elementary schools will be as mixed in their ethnic background as the population of people living in Ibadan. However, most children in schools will belong to the Yoruba group which is the dominant ethnic group in that locale. Thus, according to this model, the content focuses on musical practices in Ibadan city beginning with those contributed by the dominant group followed by those by other groups found in the same locality.

The second circle has the word 'national' placed in it and this means that the survey of ethnically-based musical practices of a locality done previously could now be brought within a national perspective. The same approach is extended to the next section which deals with musical practices from selected African states and finally to the rest of the world. One advantage of this approach is that it allows for selection of content from a wide variety of available materials. Under the scheme, school children will no longer be limited to traditionally selected materials; instead, each generation of students will be able to learn the same musical ideas using different materials.

According to the pattern of organizing the triangular part, the concept of *culture* is at the top, *performance* at the next level and *structure* at the bottom level. The concept of culture is very broad and apart from providing a way of relating music to other subject matter disciplines, it forms the necessary base for music instruction. Through an analysis of various cultural phenomena such as art, literature, religion, social organisation and so forth in various cultures, for example Yoruba, Hausa, Ibo, Kanuri, Ashanti, Bambara, Kikuyu, Baganda, the children will be led to an understanding of cultural diversity, change and influences, as well as an appreciation of their own relationship as individuals to their society.

The concept of performance involves the consideration of events leading to the contexts of musical performances, the types of musical performances, medium of performance and the forms performances take. For example, consideration will have to be given to whether it is solo or ensemble or a mixture of both, and whether it is the aesthetics of performances among a group of people, in a given society and in the world at large. Finally, the concept of structure incorporates within it the first two concepts in their relation to harmony, rhythm, melody and scale.

Within this general framework, other elements and structures can be arranged in hierarchies and at various levels of abstraction as shown in Fig. 2. For example, consideration of the material and non-material aspects of culture might lead to discussion

of musical instruments, constructions and designs as well as various customs that have relevance to music and musical instruments. Under performance and structures, such constructs as were outlined above will be given consideration. These can all be learned through the use of the ethnomusicological mode of inquiry which involves such behavioural responses as analysis, description, comparison, performance.

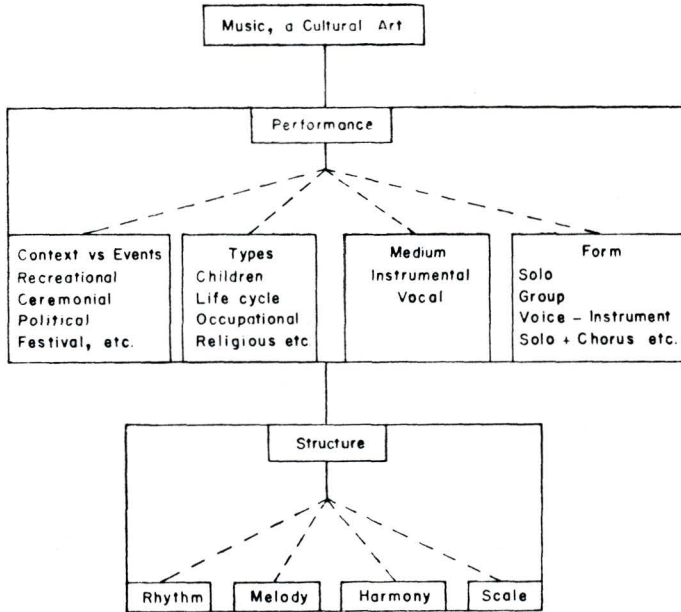


Fig. II Conceptual levels of African music instruction

This model provides a way of classifying and structuring African music and possibly other non-Western music for elementary school children, and a plan for the teaching of that subject-matter content. The teacher has absolute freedom to select those items from suggested materials that will best illustrate the concepts he seeks to teach. Activities to be engaged in in the classroom are expressed in Fig. 3, and it is hoped that these activities will go a long way in promoting cultural growth and in helping to mould performers, listeners or audiences and composers.

Rationale

The rationale for this model is based essentially on the fact that music is a cultural phenomenon which according to Hood (1970) varies 'often in principles and always in detail from region to region and locale to locale . . .' (p. 219).

If, therefore, there are many communities of music in the world (Seeger, 1941) every child needs to be inducted into the grammatical and syntactical components of the language of their musical culture. Before they reach the age of twelve, it is essential that children be led into the understanding of their musical tradition in order to develop the right attitudes towards it and also to provide a basis for the study of other musics of the world. For, as Pratt (1957) rightly puts it,

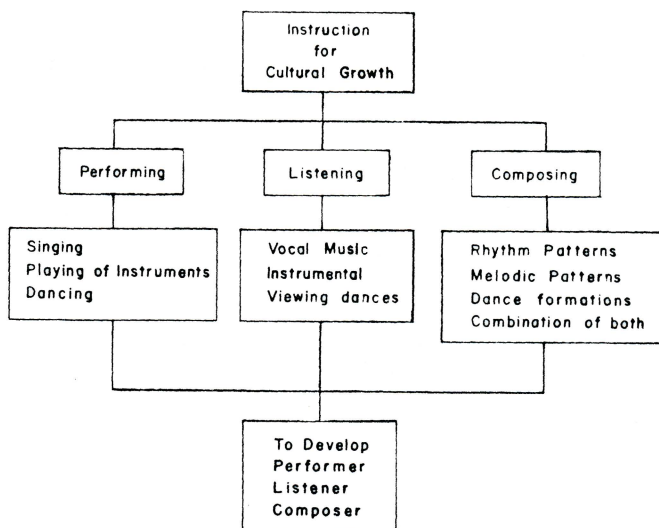


Fig. III Phases of the curriculum model

If music and makers of music are to some extent the product of their social environment, a thorough knowledge of that environment assumes a place of first rate importance not only in understanding the lives of musicians but also in striving for deeper insights into the styles of their composition (p. 57.).

Hence, the view expressed in this model — essentially making local music of the children the basis of their music education, is in keeping with the general consensus about issues relating to music education. Furthermore the idea of an integrated music curriculum embodied in the concept of culture to form part of music education is relevant to Africa where music is inextricably bound to religious and social life of the people.

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