

## AFRICAN MUSIC IN CHRISTIAN LITURGY: THE IGBO EXPERIMENT

by

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One of the resulting effects of the Reformation in the Christian Church has been the making of worship more relevant to the masses of professed Christians. It has meant the employment of a vernacular which will be understood by the congregation, instead of a dead language comprehensible only to a few initiates who have spent years of apprenticeship in monasteries. It has also meant the use of tunes familiar to the worshippers, tunes in which they could join, whether in meek supplication, in holy adoration, or in hearty praise of the one who is, by faith, their Lord and Saviour. In an ever-evolving world, Christianity has continued to be a living faith by adapting to the changes of society through the ages. Contemporary Christianity continues to make changes to accommodate the philosophical attitudes of this nuclear age with its present-day ethics and 'new morality'. As different parts of the world are brought closer together by means of modern technology and communications, other religions exert a steadfast if subtle influence on the codes and dogma of Christianity, and even Papal authority gets diluted in the process of ecumenical interaction between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant denominations. Christianity, with its leadership, begins to view other religions such as Judaism and Islam with greater understanding and, in some cases, with unprecedented respect.

The Igbo are known to have embraced Christianity more than any other single ethnic group in Africa. Two reasons may be given for this situation. In the first place, Christian principles are no different from Igbo principles, and Christian ethics — as distinct from purely Western European ethics — are in many ways similar to the philosophies of the Igbo. In a chapter devoted to this, G. T. Basden has shown how much Levitic law is directly related to Igbo traditional law, and demonstrated the many traits of pre-Christian Israelites shared by the Igbo<sup>1</sup>. The biblical story of Naboth and Ahab, for example, is a typical illustration of the principles of law and justice among the Igbo, and their sense of values and attitude (represented in the character of Naboth) towards authoritarianism, all told with Hebrew names and under ancient Palestinian geographical and cultural conditions. Accepting Christianity for the Igbo, therefore, did not require a tremendous alteration of basic philosophy and doctrine, only a change of style in conveying and conceptualising these.

The second reason is probably more significant. Christianity brought education in the western European sense. Education provided a new stimulus which captured the interest of the achievement-oriented Igbo. Western education, with which goes the ability to read and write, became a pathway to new jobs, a higher income, and hence a higher standard of living, for those who acquired it. Above all, it gave knowledge which is the power that earned leadership for a member of the society. As Ottenberg puts it, the Igbo society in its openness provides opportunities for all to achieve leadership:

<sup>1</sup>"Some similarities between the Israelites and the Ibos", pp. 411-423 in G. T. Basden's *Niger Ibos*. London: Seeley, Service & Co., Ltd. 1938.

The possibilities of enhancing status and prestige are open to virtually all individuals except descendants of certain types of slaves and are not restricted to members of particular lineages, clans, or other social units. Ibo society is thus, in a sense, an 'open' society in which positions of prestige, authority, and leadership are largely achieved<sup>2</sup>.

Prior to the advent of Christianity, leadership (among the Igbo) was achieved in diverse ways, such as seniority in age, skill in oratory, accumulation of capital (which includes not only money but also foodstuff, such as yams, or cash crops like palm trees), the ability to influence people, or success in one type of endeavour or another. Western education, however, seemed to provide a short-cut to knowledge, and hence, progress. Christianity brought education; in the early stages church schools were the only ones existing in Igbo land. An Igbo proverb asks, 'Obu onye ejegh uka ojebe nkuzi?' — Can anyone become a (school) teacher without first going to Church? The answer to this rhetorical question was, of course, 'no', because only Christians — at least, church-goers — went to school. Prior to the recent take-over of primary and secondary schools in Igbo land by the state government, school children were still in most places compelled to go to church regularly and were corporally punished if they failed to do so. So Western education came through the Church, and the Igbo, eager to obtain the 'manna from heaven' afforded by the opportunities provided through education, embraced Christianity whole-heartedly.

Early Christian missionaries, however, branded all indigenous forms of art as the work of the devil, especially as almost invariably these were associated with some religious or quasi-religious ceremony. To these Christian proselytizers, it was important that no 'pagan' art should continue to be practised by them, lest their new found faith be shaken by idolatrous and sensuous ceremonies. Innumerable masterpieces of works of art were, in fact, destroyed by over-zealous missionaries and their converts who took it upon themselves to burn shrines and other centres of religious and social organisations where these items were kept, in a vain hope to purge the newly converted people of all contact with visible signs of heathen practices and idolatry! The amount of damage done materially and psychologically to the culture of the Igbo by these misguided zealots may probably never be fully assessed.

Traditional Igbo music was one of these so-termed pagan practices which were not allowed to filter into Christian worship, much less challenge the pre-eminence of European tunes. Only the organ or harmonium was allowed in Church: no indigenous instrument, however suitable its tone quality might sound, could be used in Church. Protestant hymns were translated into Igbo, following rigidly (though in many cases amazingly successfully) the metre (and feet) of the original European verses. They were also sung to the same European tunes as the originals, such that a service in Igbo yielded more or less the same musical result as a service in an English Parish Church. Famous European Protestant hymn tunes became household melodies in Christian homes in Igbo land, except that they were sung to words in the vernacular.

However, the Igbo are known for their individuality. Authoritarianism without the support of the masses — support obtainable usually through their conviction of the rightness of the cause and course of action — is unlikely to succeed with the Igbo. The Igbo sense of perception is proverbial, such that the inadequacies of the European tunes in conveying the meanings of the words sung were soon made manifest.

Perhaps an explanation is necessary here. Igbo, as a tonal language, in part depends on the rise and fall in pitch of the various syllables in a word for its meaning.

<sup>2</sup>Simon Ottenber, "Ibo receptivity to change", in *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, ed. William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits. The University of Chicago Press, 1959, p. 137.

ment les mêmes sonorités que l'*omvək*. Non seulement il renforce le chant de l'*omvək* à l'aigu, l'*ololɔŋ* doit être capable d'apporter des éléments enrichissants pour tout l'ensemble des *mendzaŋ*. Il suffit que l'artiste qui l'utilise soit suffisamment capable d'improviser des variations intéressantes et harmonieuses sur le thème musical interprété. En principe, l'*ololɔŋ* est plus un instrument d'accompagnement à l'aigu, qu'un interprète de premier rang. On peut s'en passer, tout comme nous l'avons fait. L'ensemble du groupe n'en est pas plus mal à l'aise.

### Problèmes ethnomusicologiques – désignation

Dans sa technique de fabrication, Ambasa commence par fixer empiriquement le son d'une lame d'*omvək*. La position de cette lame est double. Elle est initiale quant à la fabrication. Mais, quant à sa place, elle est centrale. Partant d'elle, cinq lames de bois se suivent avec des sons respectifs qui descendent graduellement d'un côté. De l'autre côté, quatre autres lames de bois se succèdent aussi, avec des sons respectifs qui montent graduellement.

Je pense que cela trouve sa justification dans la tradition beti. Le chef de famille, en tant que responsable de la vie de tous ceux qui se réclament de lui, se place toujours au milieu des siens, dans les réunions traditionnelles. Aussi les musiciens ont-ils trouvé bon de faire pareille pour souligner l'importance de la première lame de bois des *mendzaŋ*. Ils ont donné une position centrale à cette lame initiale. Tous les sons tirent leur origine d'elle. C'est une façon très originale de souligner l'importance de cette lame. Dorénavant, je la désigne par le chiffre 1. C'est le numéro 1.

Ambasa procède ensuite à la fabrication des lames de bois dont les sons descendent graduellement. Il fixe tout de suite le son de la lame de bois la plus voisine de la première, dont le son descend d'un degré. Je désigne cette dernière par le chiffre 2. C'est le numéro 2. Immédiatement après, Ambasa arrange le son de la lame de bois juxtaposée à la deuxième, dont le son descend de deux degrés par rapport à celui de la première lame. Je désigne celle-là par le chiffre 3. C'est le numéro 3. Après le numéro 3, Ambasa détermine le son de la lame de bois qui lui est immédiatement inférieure. Je désigne celle-là par le numéro 4. Il détermine peu après le son de la lame de bois qui suit le numéro 4. J'appelle celle-là 5. Enfin, il termine cette série descendante par le réglage du son de la lame qui suit immédiatement la cinquième, à celle-là, je donne la désignation 6. En descendant graduellement l'échelle diatonique des *mendzaŋ*, je représente graphiquement les diverses lames de bois par les chiffres 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 et 6.

Après les sons bas, Ambasa fixe quatre autres sons d'échelle montante. Il ne procède pas aussi graduellement que nous venons de le voir. Il fixe d'abord trois lames de bois dont les sons respectifs répètent à la première octave supérieure les sons correspondants des lames 6, 5 et 4, suivant leur progression normale, 6 étant toujours la plus basse, et 4 la plus aiguë. Je désigne ces trois nouvelles lames, chacune par le numéro de la lame de bois dont elle reproduit le son à l'octave supérieure. Dorénavant, pour montrer que deux lames de bois des *mendzaŋ* produisent le même son, je les désigne par le même chiffre numérique. Toutefois, les trois lames d'échelle montante que je viens de désigner de la sorte répètent les sons respectifs de leurs homologues d'échelle descendante, non pas au même degré de hauteur, mais à une hauteur beaucoup plus aiguë, c'est-à-dire l'octave. C'est un renforcement du son à l'octave supérieure. L'octave se présente ainsi comme une manière de souligner davantage un son. En ce sens, je représenterai désormais cette octave par un trait

2



3



This arises because the morpheme /igwe/ may mean different things depending on tonal inflexion:

/igwe/	(high-step tones <sup>5</sup> )	heaven, sky, cloud;
/igwè/	(high-low tones)	iron, bicycle, metal;
/igwè/	(low-low tones)	many, crowd, multitude.

A line of a hymn in Igbo which reads, 'Akwa adigh n'elu igwe', when properly intoned, means, 'There is no sorrow in heaven'. But as has been pointed out above, four different words may be formed from the morpheme /akwa/, and three from /igwe/. Therefore, when the sentence 'Akwa adigh n'elu igwe' is sung with a slight deviation in tonal (pitch) rise or fall on the first and/or the last word of the sentence, a variety of meanings (a permutation of the number of variables) can be conveyed, including such meaningful or meaningless statements as:

There is no sorrow in heaven;  
 There are no tears on the bicycle;  
 There are no eggs in the sky;  
 There is no clothing among the crowd;  
 There is no bed in heaven;  
 There is no egg on the iron; etc.

It is therefore clear that to sing Igbo words to European tunes is, to say the least, unsatisfactory. The profound significance of the words often could not be appreciated under such conditions. This is complicated further by the fact that the hymns and prayers were translated into a near synthetic dialect<sup>6</sup>, which made it even more distant to the local parishioners in the average Igbo village church. But the power of Christian zeal is such that in spite of the inadequacies of this method, these translations of European protestant hymns even today continue to be sung with great enthusiasm in Igbo churches to the same old tunes with which they are associated in Europe<sup>7</sup>.

Needless to say, Igbo Christians felt uncomfortable in the strait-jacket of European verse and the artificiality of its adoption in Igbo churches. As the resourceful people they are, even uneducated Igbo worshippers began quite early to make adaptations to the normal order of Christian worship to suit local conditions, in an attempt to make the act more intelligible.

<sup>5</sup>There are three tones in Igbo — a 'high' tone, a 'low' tone, and a 'step' tone. Both the high and the low tones are free in their relationship to each other, which means that each may be preceded or followed by any tone, high or low. The step tone, however, always follows a high tone, from which it 'steps down', falling in pitch slightly, but not as low as a low tone would fall. Because it lies in between the high and the low, this tone has been called a 'mid' tone by some linguists. The 'step' tone is a better name, however, as it simply *steps* down from the high tone which invariably precedes it.

<sup>6</sup>The Bible and the Hymn Book in Igbo are written in a dialect known as *Union Ibo*, a dialect which nobody speaks. It was an attempt by early educators to arrive at a central dialect which every Igbo can easily understand. *Union Ibo* has, consequently, become the literary dialect of Igbo: most of the written material in Igbo literature today is in this dialect. It may be said to be an attempt by the British missionaries and administrators to produce an Igbo counterpart of 'the King's English'.

<sup>7</sup>The very popular English hymn book, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, is the officially approved book of tunes for Protestant Churches in Igbo land.

Special seasons in the Christian Church calendar provided the opportunity for experimentation, in addition to supplying an excuse for deviation from the rather authoritarian order imposed by the missionaries (as set down in the Common Prayer Book). The harvest thanksgiving service was one such occasion. Villagers in rural Igbo country, almost all of whom are farmers, brought their crops as offerings to God, grouped in families or villages, or otherwise in various Church groupings such as the Women's Guild, Friday Class, Wednesday Class, Tuesday Class, etc.<sup>8</sup> A traditional Igbo touch was brought to these celebrations. Baskets of yams, cocoyam, corn, palm produce, and assorted fruits balanced on their heads, the women singing, danced up the aisle to the altar where they deposited their offerings. The words of the songs were adaptations taken from the scriptures, but the rhythm and other properties of the songs were traditionally Igbo in form and content, directing the body to simple but dignified steps deemed appropriate for staid Christian worship. Thus on such occasions as the harvest thanksgiving service, traditional Igbo music began to stand side by side with the protestant hymn tunes, but were still not, nonetheless, permitted in any way to challenge the pre-eminence of the latter. The occasional outburst of indigenous music was interspersed with the usual protestant hymn tunes and translations, which sometimes included such out-of-place statements as the gathering in of the crops 'ere the winter storms begin'. Here, however, began the gradual synthesis of foreign and folk musical materials, instead of the initial total exclusion of traditional Igbo music from Christian worship.

The Roman Catholic denomination, while being more liberal in the process of conversion, was even more conservative than the Protestant denominations in adopting indigenous music into Christian worship. Having come to the scene more than thirty years later than the Protestant denominations, Roman Catholicism was eager to attract converts among the Igbo whose proverbial receptivity to change had become known to European visitors. The Catholic Church followed a political strategy which was aimed at immediate as well as long term rewards. Experience had shown that it was easier to convert children to Christianity than mature adults. Apart from not being already set in traditional ways and religious norms, children are naturally attracted to novel practices. Infant baptism was carried out *en masse* in some villages by Catholic priests, who thereafter hung a medal of the Madonna, the 'sacred heart', or St. Christopher on every child so christened. These medals, and the new names of Augustus, Boniface, Cletus, Romanus, Maria, Christiana, Angelina or Justina attracted children to Roman Catholicism, especially as they needed no years of apprenticeship prior to baptism. They went to Catechism and Confession *after* baptism, whilst with the Protestant Churches infant baptism was limited to children born of baptised Christian parents who had had a church wedding.

Roman Catholic missionaries did not care to erect big or beautiful churches as the Protestant groups did. They worshipped in make-shift shelters, or even in the open when necessary. Their investment was in schools, especially girls' schools. Get the children, especially the future mothers — ran the philosophy — and you have the future

<sup>8</sup>The Protestant Churches in Igbo land, particularly the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) which was a missionary arm of the Anglican Church, were notorious for establishing and enforcing an amazingly long apprenticeship which a convert had to undergo before being allowed to partake of the Holy Communion. In his first year of conversion, the new Christian would attend classes every Tuesday morning learning the Catechism of the Church. After a year of regular attendance he may take the examination on the passing of which he would be admitted to Catechumen. This graduates him to a Thursday morning class where he learns more catechism and studies the Scriptures for another year before he may take the examination which will qualify him for baptism. Having been baptised, he may enter the Wednesday class which prepares him for confirmation, and in which he must remain for two years. If he is old enough (over 18) after this, he may take the examinations and, on passing, be confirmed by a Bishop before he may receive his first communion. Consequently, a new convert generally took about four years to become a 'confirmed' Christian. Unfortunately some prospective converts either fell by the wayside during these years (whether on account of their inability to pass examinations, or even for mere lack of patience) and reverted to their original traditional modes of worship, or converted to Roman Catholicism. The Catholic Church in Igbo land did not follow this long procedure, but baptised people as soon as they were converted, in some cases even before they went to church. As a result of this difference in practice, Roman Catholicism which came to Igbo land well over thirty years later than the Protestant Church, now boasts of having the majority of Igbo people as followers. The earliest group of Igbo people to receive Western education, however, and to some extent the majority of the leading scholars, doctors, engineers, lawyers, and other professional men and women, are Protestant.

generation. With assistance from abroad, Catholic schools were built with educational and political motives. They were sited in strategic places, usually close to major roads, and had attractive buildings invariably painted white throughout — right down to the fences that enclosed the compounds — a symbol of the purity which Christianity was supposed to bring about. The early schools also bore names which made them particularly attractive to young people, such names as Christ the King College (C.K.C.), College of the Immaculate Conception (C.I.C.), and Queen of the Rosary College (Q.R.C.); later schools carried names of saints such as St. Joseph's, St. Barnabas, Santa Maria, and, of course, St. Patrick, for most of these schools were staffed by Holy Ghost or Dominican reverend fathers, reverend brothers, and reverend sisters from Ireland.

In spite of the liberal nature of methods of conversion, and investment in education<sup>9</sup>, the Roman Catholic Church in Igbo land remained conservative in doctrinal matters. The bible was forbidden to be read by laymen, lest they should misinterpret the word of God and thereby sin. Only priests should read the word and interpret it to the laymen. Consequently, until very recently when this law was revoked, there was no Igbo translation of the Catholic bible, and even now only certain books, such as the gospels, have been translated into Igbo with official Catholic approval. Apart from a few prayers such as 'Hail, Mary' and Canticles such as the *Magnificat*, translated into Igbo, the Mass was (again until recently) conducted in Latin.

As far as music was concerned, Gregorian chants were the tunes used in the Catholic Mass. This yielded a situation much more artificial than is the case with Protestant hymn tunes. To find an Igbo translation of the *Magnificat*, sung to a plainsong chant in the mixolydian mode, strikes a trained ear as a very poor imitation of the sound one would hear in the Sistine Chapel, being sung by untrained and strained voices under thatched roofs in the tropical heat — especially as Evensong is held around 3.00 p.m. on Sunday afternoons. This translation of the *Magnificat* (Example 4) is commonly sung to the chant given in the *Liber Usualis* for the Cantic<sup>10</sup>. It is clear that the attempt is to follow the musical setting of the Latin text rigidly for the words in Igbo, in spite of the unsatisfactory results.

4

O - ne - to\*  
1. :lag - ni - fi - cat\*

Et ex - sul - ta - vit spi - ri - tus me - us\* in Do - o sa - lu - ta - ri me - o.  
M - nom n'a - ny - lĩ a - ny - lĩ na Chu-kwu\* by o-nye nyo - py-tam.

The advance at incorporating indigenous music in church worship in Igbo has, therefore, been made almost exclusively in the Protestant denominations, especially the Anglican Church, although now there is a very keen interest — probably as a result of the recent ecumenical movement — to involve indigenous music seriously in the Roman Catholic liturgy, and committees have been set up to develop this.

The Youth Fellowship in the Protestant — especially the Anglican — Churches have been a forceful instrument in the adoption of indigenous music in Igbo Christian liturgy. Started in the late 1950's, the conception of the Youth Fellowship was based on the traditional Igbo principle of age grades (peer groups), modified to suit the purposes of the Church. Instead of the precisely defined grades as in traditional society<sup>11</sup>,

<sup>9</sup>For interesting accounts of Roman Catholic investments in education in Igbo land, see, Felix K. Ekechi: "The Holy Ghost Fathers in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1920: Observations on Missionary Strategy", *African Studies Review*, Vol. XV, No. 2, September 1972, pp. 217-239.

<sup>10</sup>*Magnificat*, Tone 8, transcribed in modern notation from the *Liber Usualis*, Tournai (Belgium): Society of St. John the Evangelist, Declée & Co., 1952, p. 218.

<sup>11</sup>For a discussion of Igbo age grades, see M. D. W. Jeffreys, "The Bull-roarer among the Ibo", *African Studies*, March 1949, pp. 23-34.

the Youth Fellowship embraced all the young — in practice, the adolescents and the young adults — and indeed any other persons who felt young at heart. Singing was a characteristic activity of Youth Fellowships. Songs were created which became the property of the group, because composers were anonymous or faded quickly from the memory. Popular songs spread quickly (with the increased communication between Churches) from one Youth Fellowship group to another.

The Youth Fellowship took over Carol singing at Christmas time. It had become a tradition in Igbo land for young people to go carolling as part of the Christmas celebrations, sometimes for several nights. One or two powerful 'Tilley' lamps would be borrowed from local shopkeepers or relatively more affluent members of the village community, and visits made from house to house, or compound to compound, by the young people. Clutching their bulky hymn books and craning their necks to catch the uneven light of the lamps, they sang the glad tidings to the members of the house or compound, waking up those who may have already gone to sleep, and expecting a gift in cash or kind for the Church from the head of the household as a reward for their well-wishing. The Youth Fellowship changed much of this. The hymn books were left at home, waiting for the morning service. On moonlit Christmas Eves, there was even no need for the lamps. There was no pall during the pause in the singing between two homes. It was no longer a laborious journey through the whole village. The rhythm of the songs carried the singers along: they half-danced, stamping their feet to the rhythm of the songs in their onward journey from compound to compound.

The form of the songs is far different from those of the regular Carols. They are short and easily committed to memory, and admirably suited the perambulatory nature of carol singing. A leader with a clear ringing voice sings the lead verse, and the rest, continuously propelled forward by the rhythm of the song, join in the refrain. Diverse varieties of the 'Call and Response' and 'Call and Refrain' forms — forms natural in Igbo traditional choral music<sup>12</sup> — are employed. Sometimes the lead singer starts with a phrase followed by the refrain, thereafter he sings only snatches of phrases which are then immediately taken up in full in the swelling voices of the joining chorus.

Through the Youth Fellowship has, therefore, been established a new form of Christmas Carolling. Because the form speaks directly to the consciousness of the singers' race, the participation is total and unforced, overcoming the long night, so that at break of day many of the singers, though exhausted, arrive home with truly uplifted hearts. Indeed the Youth Fellowship songs have gone a long way in shaping the Igbo Christian version of the tradition of all-night wakes; borne along on the rhythmic waves of the songs, young people relieve the gloom of bereavement.

In spite of the apparent application of secular (traditional) musical methods and temperament in the Youth Fellowship songs, there is no doubt as to the sacredness of their subject matter. All the songs have a biblical theme. Many of the lead verses are culled directly from the Scriptures. Others are imaginative re-enactings of biblical situations, being infused with the emotional feeling lacking in most of the translated hymns. With the Youth Fellowship songs, employed not only at Christmas but also at all other festive occasions, came the first widespread use of traditional musical idioms in Christian worship in various parts of Igbo land.

The popularity of the Youth Fellowship and its music was good evidence of the need for the adaptation of modes of worship in Igbo land, at least insofar as music is concerned, in order to make the service more meaningful to the bulk of the converts. While admiring the efforts of the young people, however, older church leaders did not always share the exuberance exhibited by the youth, which sometimes tended to degrade the act of Christian worship to a time for choral merry-making and dancing, even when

<sup>12</sup>The form of Igbo traditional choral music is fully discussed in Chapter IV of this writer's book, *Ibo Choral Music—Its Theory and Practice*, New York: NOK Publications, 1973.

there was no special Christian festival. The 'Native Airs' (as the songs are known) generated by the Youth Fellowship groups, composed of young people with no special musical or theological training, were not always (at least in the eyes of the ministers and other church leaders) of as high a standard as the act of worship would demand.

The Youth Fellowship, however, popularised the idea of using choral music in a traditional idiom for Christian worship to the extent that an astonishing demand for *native airs* spread like wild fire throughout Igbo land. Prior to this, the art of local music composition for Christian worship had been limited to a few pioneers trained in music, who made attempts at composing *native airs* whose use was limited only to those churches where these pioneers served as choirmasters and organists. With the new interest in *native airs* brought about by the youth movement, budding composers from all walks of life and of diverse musical and educational preparation sprang up from all corners of Igbo land. Before we examine the impact of this new breed, let us look at the practices of the pioneer composers of Igbo church music. All of them have been brought up in the tradition of the Protestant hymn tune, having originally learnt to read music through being members of church choirs from where they rose to become organists and choirmasters. Much of what they consider good music is based on the style of the hymn tune, its four parts (treble, alto, tenor, and bass), and its harmony.

### Nelson E. Okoli

Born in Oko, Aguata Division, Nelson Enuma Okoli is one of the pioneers in creating Igbo music for Christian liturgy. In his heyday, it was not permitted to use African music *during* the actual church service. But evangelical missions were carried out by the Church once a month (usually on the first Sunday of each month) in lieu of Evensong, in an attempt to win new converts to the Church. This was a unique opportunity to employ the powers of music, especially that type of music which would appeal to the audience of non-Christian Igbo people. As choirmaster and organist of the St. Andrew's Church, Odoakpu, Onitsha, and later of the Iyienu Anglican Hospital Church, Mr. Okoli believed in the use of song as a means of spreading the gospel, hence he composed what he called 'gospel songs'. Sometimes he used folk melodies, attaching sacred words of the 'new religion' to them and arranging them for four-part choir; at other times he wrote original tunes and words.

In true Igbo tradition, the music composer is also the poet, for he has to compose his own words to his tunes. Traditional poetry is almost invariably in music, and the words of an Igbo tune are often inseparable from the tune itself, and are thus a very important part of the song. A famous song of Mr. Okoli's, *O Gini Chalu N'enu?* uses a melody taken from a folk song and re-arranged with quasi-sacred words. It is in the traditional 'Call and Response' form, with the solo call answered by the chorus in four part similar-motion, almost parallel harmony, with tonic-dominant cadences — signs of the church hymns that have influenced his work. Another well-known gospel song by Nelson Okoli is *Madu Nine N'uwa*. Here, he composes an entirely original tune which follows the normal shape of Igbo tunes<sup>13</sup>. However, he does not at all times in this composition follow the natural rise and fall of the words, which shows even more clearly the effect Protestant church hymn tunes have had on him. But the beauty of the music and the power of the words in *Madu Nine N'uwa* sustain the interest of the singers and listeners alike, making them ignore or even unaware of the problems of tonal linguistics.

The words of *Madu Nine N'uwa* incorporate the translation of a well-known hymn in an appeal to the audience to consider the mighty power of God, not to dwell in self-righteousness, and to weigh the rewards of being a Christian — the joy of heaven.

<sup>13</sup>See Chapter V (Melody) of *Ibo Choral Music — Its Theory and Practice*.

*Chorus:*

Madu nine ndi bi n'enu uwa,  
Tobenu Ja.

All people that on earth do dwell,  
Praise ye the Lord.

*Verses:*

Madu nine n'uwa  
Tobenu Ja,  
Welu egwu ya che echiche.

All people here on earth,  
Praise ye the Lord,  
Consider his awful greatness.

Inelo n'Idi mma,  
Isi a-naa di?  
Welu egwu ya che echiche.

Do you think you are good,  
How good (indeed) are you?  
Consider his awful greatness.

Kedu onye n'achogh iba n'igwe?  
Orapu Jesu,  
Si, oga adi mma:  
Chukwu ga akwu ugwo.

Who does not wish to go to heaven?  
Let him abandon Jesus,  
Saying, it will work out well:  
God will repay (to each his reward)!

The music of *Madu Nine N'uwa* is of a 'Call and Refrain' form, with over-lapping. The solo part varies each time as new words are sung, but the chorus repeats the same words and music on each refrain, in four part harmony (Example 5).

## M A D U   N I N E   N ' U W A

by Nelson Enuna Okoli  
(transcribed by Laz Ekwueme)

5

Slow, but with full voice. ( $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 60$ )

The musical score is presented in three systems. Each system contains a Solo part (treble clef) and a Chorus part (bass clef). The Solo part has a melody line with lyrics underneath. The Chorus part consists of a four-part harmonic accompaniment. The lyrics are in Igbo and English. The tempo is marked 'Slow, but with full voice' with a quarter note equal to approximately 60 beats per minute. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

**System 1:**  
Solo: Ma - du ni - ne n' u wa,  
Chorus: Ma - du ni - ne ndi bi n' e - n' u -

**System 2:**  
Solo: I - si a - naa di?  
Chorus: wa, To - be - nu Ja! Ma - du ni -

**System 3:**  
Solo: We - lu e - gwu Ya che e - ch  
Chorus: che; Ma - du ni - ne ndi bi n' e - n' u - wa, To - be - nu Ja!  
(repeated to end of passage)

### Harcourt Whyte

A former leper, Harcourt Whyte found succour in the Church and devoted his life's service to teaching at the Leper Settlement in Uzuakoli, Bende Division, in the service of those who have suffered from or are tasting the pangs of the disease that once ostracised him from society. Immersed in Methodist Church hymns and Wesleyan doctrinal philosophy, Harcourt has composed nothing other than sacred music. His few attempts at secular music composition have demonstrated in their verbal as well as their musical content that even these are intended to be used also during Christian worship; they have, like other compositions of his, followed his philosophy that 'all good things come of the Lord'. Harcourt Whyte has made the choir of the Leper Settlement at Uzuakoli one of the best known in Igbo land. The popularity of his compositions throughout Igbo land, even before the impact of the Youth Fellowship, earn him the right to be called the father of Igbo church music.

All Harcourt Whyte's compositions are strophic, like hymns, with several verses to the same tune. Consequently, words are not always confined to their tonal patterns, especially after the first verse. But the beauty of his music and the profundity of his words override the shortcomings arising from the lack of agreement of tonal inflexions of the words to their melodic or harmonic rise and fall. Guided by the speech rhythm of Igbo words, Harcourt Whyte's music has a very natural Igbo rhythm, even though all parts often move in exact rhythmic unity. 'Call and Response' often occurs, but the call may be a solo voice or a combination of voices in duets or trios. His harmony, while following the usual form of hymn tune harmony, is not confined to text-book progressions, especially as Harcourt Whyte has had no formal musical education. Consequently, a characteristic feature of his harmony is a juxtaposition of traditional Igbo harmony, with its parallelisms of 3rds, 4ths and 5ths and western chordal harmony (*alla* hymn tunes), especially at cadences. A score of one of his most popular hymns, *Onye Mmehie*, appears as Example 6, while the words translated below demonstrate Whyte's spiritual devotion and meekness.

Onye mmehie ka mbu,  
Ya na onye nke hiere uzo,  
N'onye nke n'amagh  
Onu uzo nk'igwe,  
Ya na Nna ya bu Onye Okike.

A sinner am I,  
And a lost one,  
One who does not know  
The path to heaven,  
And his Father, the Creator.

Nu olu nke  
Jisus, Onyenweayi n'ejì  
Ok'ihunanya na  
Ebere na asi,  
'Mgbaghara di, ya n'Okwukwe'.

Harken the voice  
Of our Lord, Jesus,  
With great love  
And mercy, saying,  
'There is Forgiveness, and Faith'.

Nani okwukwe bu ihe mji bia,  
Nani okwukwe bu ihe mji bia;  
Gee nti, gee nti,  
Unu gekwanu nti  
Uda olu Onyenweayi n'ejì  
Ok'ihunanya na  
Ebere na asi,  
'Mgbaghara di, ya n'Okwukwe'.

Only with Faith I come,  
With Faith alone I come;  
Hark, hark,  
All of you, hear  
The sound of our Lord's voice,  
With great love  
And mercy, saying,  
'There is Forgiveness, and Faith'.

Some of Harcourt Whyte's other well-known hymns include, *Atula Egwu* (Be not afraid), *Ibe Nnewgh Oyiri* (Unparalleled Act), and *Chukwu Nke Bi N'igwe* (O God who dwells in Heaven above).

**Dr. W. W. C. Echezona**

The first son of a Church Missionary Society (Anglican) minister, William-Wilberforce Chukwudinka Echezona was the first Igbo man to receive professional music education (at the Trinity College of Music in London, and later at Michigan State University in the United States of America). He was a great pioneer in raising the standard of musical performance in Igbo churches and schools, and in encouraging indigenous traditional music and compositions by local choirmasters. He was organist and choirmaster at the St. Paul's College, Awka, and the All Saints Cathedral, Onitsha, attracting many visitors and musical enthusiasts to these churches which came to be looked upon for examples of quality musical performance in Igbo land. At the St. Mark's Teacher Training College, Awka, Echezona initiated the first formal music education courses for teachers in Eastern Nigeria. He undertook a lot of research, collecting and recording indigenous music throughout Igbo land. These collections were a source for his regular broadcasts on Igbo music and musical instruments on radio in Eastern Nigeria, and later became a source for his doctoral dissertation at Michigan State University in 1963 titled, *Ibo Musical Instruments in Ibo Culture*.

Echezona's contribution to Igbo music in Christian liturgy lies primarily in his encouraging young musicians and choirmasters through choral competitions which he organised and at which he adjudicated. The Onitsha Archdeaconry Competitions had all the church choirs in the archdeaconry vying for a shield and certificate (with run-off competitions at the parish and district levels), while the Eastern Nigeria Festival of the Arts provided a platform for competitions (for a cup, a medal, or a certificate) by school choirs, church choirs, and independent choral groups. These competitions were instrumental in raising the standard of musical performance in Igbo land, re-creating interest in indigenous music, awakening the creative ability in many composers of Igbo choral music, and particularly in making the study of music something worthy of academic pursuit in an achievement-oriented Igbo society where Medicine, Engineering, and Law have been and to a large extent still remain the main focus of academic endeavours.

Dr. Echezona may not himself be a very talented creative artist. His few compositions have not demonstrated any special abilities in the handling of materials. His one known sacred choral composition is a set of Anglican Responses in Igbo, which takes no recognition of the shape of Igbo melodies, nor of the tonal inflexions of the language itself. By virtue of his being the first 'academic' musician in Igbo land, however, Echezona remains a landmark in the development of Igbo music in Christian liturgy.

Other pioneers who experimented with the use of Igbo music in church include UDEMEZUE ONYIDO, founder and organising secretary of the now defunct Nigerian Music Society which in the 1940's organised music competitions, especially in the Mid-West region of Nigeria.

OFILI KERRY was the organist and choirmaster at Bishop Tugwell Memorial Church, Lagos, the first Igbo Church in the capital city. He composed several anthems and introits in Igbo which his choir sang to good effect. UZOMA ASIJI, choirmaster at St. Bartholomew's Church, Enugu, composed anthems, canticles, and secular songs, some of which were winners at music competitions. GODSON OPARA, who later received training at the Trinity College of Music in London, worked mainly in the Niger Delta diocese. JUSTUS EKWUEME, who arranged a highlife tune as an anthem with sacred words, B. OKAGBUE, S. S. U. OSUJI, and B. UMERAH are organists and choirmasters who made minor pioneer contributions to the development of Igbo music for Christian liturgical use.

A new breed of composers sprang up with the new interest in *native airs* which had arisen as a result of the influence of the Youth Fellowship. Most of these led choirs to competitions organised by Dr. Echezona, where they were influencing and being

## 6

## ONYE MMEHIE

Solemn and dignified (♩ = c. 72)

by Marcourt Whyte  
(transcribed by Laz Eboveme)

O - nye mme - hie ka n'ny, Ya na o-nye nke hie-r'ny - zo, N'lo-nye nke n'a-na-

ch! O - n'ny-zo nk'i-gve: Ya na Nna Ya bu O-ny'o - ki - ke.

Ny\_o - lu nke (o-lu nke) Ji-sps O - nye-nv'a-ny' n'e ji O - k'i'-hy- na - nya

na e - be - re n'a - si: "M - gba - gha-ra di, Ya n'o - kwu - kve!"

Na-ni o - kwu-kve bu i-he nji bia, Na - ni o - kwu-kve bu i-he nji bia;

Gee ntị, gee ntị, ụ - ny ge - kwa-ny ntị Ụ - da o - lu O - nye-nv'a-ny' n'e -

Ji O-k'i'-hy-na - nya na e - be - re n'a - si, "M-gba-gha-ra di, Ya n'o-kwu - kve!"

influenced by other composers against whom they competed. The great demand for indigenous music during and after the church service and at other (secular) occasions made some of these composers work very hard, churning out many compositions for various choirs. Some church choirs which did not have the good fortune of having composer-choirmasters, commissioned some of the most popular of these composers to write pieces for them for use at competitions and other occasions. It was not uncommon to see some of the more successful of these composers conducting as many as four different choirs (each singing a different work by the same composer-conductor) at one and the same music competition. It is by this relatively younger group of composers that the most experimentation of Igbo music in Christian liturgy has taken place.

### David Okongwu

Okongwu, whose home town of Ogidi is the same as Echezona's, pursued his musical interests while he was a pupil teacher in the elementary schools. He studied privately, teaching himself with textbooks and taking examinations up to Grade VIII (Final) of the Trinity College local examinations in music. Bringing in vital poly-rhythmic combinations in purely (unaccompanied) choral music, Okongwu composed anthems, introits, and canticles for use by his church choir, which won several competitions at the archdeaconry level. He applies his knowledge of Western harmony and counterpoint in his compositions, making use of the natural speech rhythm of Igbo to heighten interest in his music. His settings of the Venite and the Benedictus were popular in churches in the early sixties. Example 7 is the beginning of a Christmas (carol) Anthem by David Okongwu. The two part writing (Soprano and Alto) shows his application of contrapuntal techniques, while carefully following the tonal rise and fall of the language.

## 7

### O Z I N K E M N W E L U

by David Okongwu

edited by Laz Ekwueme

Gioso comodo ( $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 72$ )

Sop. O - zi nke mwe-lu si n'a - ka Chu-zwu kwu-lu ma-ka

Alto Kwu - lu o

Ma - ry, N'ọ - ga tu - l'i-me, Ọ - ga tu - l'i - me, ma-ka Ma - ry, N'ọ - g'a-tu-l'i - me, tu - l'i - me, ma-ka

nwa nwo - ke; M'ọ - kwu a - fu si-l'i - ke, Ọ - kwu a-fu nwa nwo - ku; M'ọ - kwu a-fu si-l'i - ke,

Ju-y'a - nya, Ma ta, Ọ - me - zu - go! (cont.) Ju-y'a - nya, Ma ta, Ọ - me - zu - go!

### Felix Nwuba

One of the best known in contemporary Igbo choral music making, Felix Nwuba studied privately, obtaining the Grade VIII (Final) certificates of the local examinations in music of both the Trinity College and the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, before entering the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in Music in 1965. Nwuba's compositions include Psalms, Canticles, Carols, Anthems and a set of Responses which became rather widely used in the early 1960's. His style is usually one of songs in *allegro con moto* tempo, even when he tells a sad story. He employs Igbo native wit in coining words, such that interesting adaptations are made of rather commonplace stories taken from the Scriptures. A good example is the anthem, *Absalom, Nwam, Nwam* (Absalom, My Son, My Son), where Nwuba adds his own social commentary based on Igbo traditional philosophy to the text of David's lament. Felix employs a lot of imitative counterpoint in his compositions, and takes advantage of such musical techniques as appoggiaturas, sequences, and tessitura coloration wherever possible, to enhance his treatment of the subject matter. Independence of the various parts and the polyrhythm resulting from this are utilised fully. Dynamic contrasts and variety in texture keep his music alive and continuously captivating. Nwuba's contributions to Igbo church music helped demonstrate that without necessarily abandoning indigenous techniques (such as 'Call and Response' and polyrhythm), Western musical techniques may be successfully employed in indigenous choral music — particularly for use in a religion that was originally Western (in the eyes of the Igbo).

In spite of their great popularity, one weakness of Nwuba's compositions is that there is hardly any contrast between one piece and another, because they are all in the same *allegro con moto* tempo, often in the same key — G major (or E minor) — and sometimes employ the same or very similar melodic material as parts of different compositions. It is only in his recent compositions, in which he has experimented with a combination of Western and indigenous instruments (as orchestrated accompaniments to Igbo choral music), that he has begun to overcome these shortcomings.

### Samuel Ojukwu

Ojukwu, whose home town is Nnewi, was educated at the Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Onitsha, the St. Mark's Teacher Training College, Awka, and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in music in 1965. While he was yet at the secondary school, he showed great promise and acted as assistant to Echezona at the Cathedral choir at Onitsha. Since leaving school, he has served as choirmaster and organist at various churches. Ojukwu is not as much a contrapuntalist as Nwuba, but tends to prefer effective vertical harmonic progressions. His regularly employed harmonic vocabulary includes chords of the 7th, 9th and 13th. He can set the mood of a song in purely harmonic terms. His melodies follow the natural tonal rise and fall of the language, as well as the usual shape of traditional Igbo tunes. His rhythm is exciting. 'Call and Response' form is used in very imaginative ways, resulting sometimes in such structures as irregular phrase balances and 'false' entries, which go to add contrast and interest to his music.

### Nwokolobia Agu

From Nachi in Udi division Humphrey Nwokolobia Agu studied music at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, from where he graduated in 1967. Following in the footsteps of Nwuba and Ojukwu, Agu became prominent at musical compositions with his choirs when he was yet an elementary school teacher, producing settings of Canticles and Responses. Other secular and sacred compositions have followed. His

style owes a lot to the theoretical studies he took at the university, for he is particularly interested in the dramatic effects of music. He is more akin to Ojukwu than to Nwuba in that his compositions are relatively more harmonically than contrapuntally oriented, although his harmonic exploitations are not as adventurous as Ojukwu's. Effective simplicity appears to be his motto, and the beauty of melodic lines gives his music an unusual appeal. Example 8, the opening of an Easter anthem, *Eye, Onwu g'enwe Mmeli* (Truly, Death shall be vanquished), for female voices, shows Agu's beautiful melody harmonized simply but effectively.

## 8

**EYE, ONWU G'ENWE MMELI**  
by H. Nwokolobia Agu  
(transcribed and edited by Laz Ekwueme)

Triumphantly ( $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 120$ )

Sop. I  
Sop. II  
Alto

E - ye, o-nwu g'e - nwe mme-li, E - ye, o-nwu g'e -  
nwe mme-li, E - ye, o-nwu g'e - nwe mme-li: Je - su nna, Ji-s'i-ko! & Co.

## Others

Several other less known men have (less successfully) contributed their parts to meet the overwhelming demand for contemporary indigenous choral music. Many of these men cannot even read music (staff notation), and rely on being able to tell interesting stories in their songs, rather than on their own musical ability. Many of them have learned by imitating (or attempting to imitate) some of the afore-mentioned composers, under whose tutelage they may have served as choir members. The tonic solfa is their only means of music reading, and it is sometimes amazing that they can achieve so much with so limited means. Their notation, even in tonic solfa, is however often not accurate: the real intentions in their compositions can only be deciphered through oral transmission when they teach the members of the choir these songs. There are hundreds of so-called composers of Igbo choral music whose individual influences are limited to the local church choirs which they run, and who are heard of nationally only on the occasional competitions to which they are able to bring their choirs. Many of these composers are often local elementary school teachers with limited formal education and certainly no formal musical schooling. Others are petty traders in such urban centres as Onitsha, Aba, Enugu, or Port Harcourt, whose compositions, imaginative verbally as they may seem, are often limited to topical songs suitable for the low-brow taste of their fellow-traders.

The demand for indigenous music for religious and secular use is so great that many who are not equipped to cope with the problem are putting out various pieces to meet this demand; just as the Igbo man's insatiable thirst for knowledge and the written word has given rise to the innumerable 'authors' who for many years flooded the Onitsha

market with thousands of potboiler pamphlets on various topics both profound and dilettantish. Nevertheless, some of these composers are indeed to be commended for their sincere efforts, in spite of many handicaps, to meet the needs of the society in the area of choral music, and particularly the demands of the Christian Church in its efforts (through music) to make the act of worship more meaningful to the Igbo church goer. Notable among this group of composers are NATHANIEL NWANEKWU (choirmaster of St. John's Church, Fegge, Onitsha), GODWIN EZEONWU (choirmaster of the church at Umunachi), EMMANUEL OKEKE (formerly of Amawbia), and ANDREW OBADIKE (choirmaster of Christ Church, Onitsha).

One of the major problems confronting composers of Igbo choral music arises from the fact that, as has been stated, traditionally, the music composer is also the poet who has to make up his own words. The work of the composer-poet in Igbo land is judged not merely by the beauty of his music, but also by the quality of his lyrics. Such giants in traditional Igbo music as NWOYE EZODO, OKONKWO NŌGU, OBILIGBO, ISRAEL NWOPA (NJEMANZE), OKONKWO ADIGWE, and UDEKWE (better known as SEVEN-SEVEN), have in their times risen to eminence because they can combine musical lyricism with profound philosophical pronouncements. Some of them, such as Israel Nwoba and Udekwe, excel in telling interesting stories on current topics. Others like Nwoye and Obiligbo sing almost entirely in that idiomatic allegorical expression of the Igbo known as *inu* (or *ilu*), the proverb. The Igbo proverb is a unique idiomatic expression, inclusive of various diverse figures of speech such as the metaphor, simile, alliteration, onomatopoeia, or even short anecdotes.

This traditionally combined role of composer-poet has been passed on to makers of Igbo choral music for Christian worship. Judgment by the listening public on the works of composers is still largely based on the interest of the lyrics of the song. Consequently many of the composers, being primarily interested in pleasing the masses, are sometimes concerned more with telling interesting stories, or coining remarkable verbal expressions, than with attaining great heights in musical aesthetics. As a result many unmusical individuals have dabbled in the practice of composing indigenous choral music, simply because they believe that their (often over-estimated) abilities in story telling is sufficient claim to musicianship. Other individuals gifted in the creative process of music have sometimes been discouraged by their inability to excel also in the art of imaginative verbal creativity. Yet some other talented composers, including some of the ones named above, have failed to reach the full potential of their own musical creativeness, artistically speaking, because they have been too concerned with being popular with the masses through the special interest and general appeal of their song lyrics. It is this objective, more than the aesthetic quality of the music and its formal organization, that leads a composer like Nwuba into adding a lot of social commentary to the words of his songs. For example, *Absalom* contains such additions to the text as statements like, '*Nwata sili owele ba nne ya n'afọ*' (a child who stole into his mother's womb through the back door), and '*Nwa akwo n'azu amaro n'ije na afia aru*' (a child carried on the back — of someone else — is not conscious of the tediousness of the long journey on foot).

One case in which there have been no deviations from the text has been in the setting of the Canticles and Psalms. These are generally long, and have enough words — sometimes too many — for a 'through composed' setting, which is usually the form adopted by the composers, primarily for linguistic reasons. Moreover, the composer cannot alter these words, for a change from the universally accepted words of the psalms or canticles would be unacceptable in Christian worship. Similarly with the Anglican Responses. So these two provide the few cases in which several composers have set the same words to different tunes, and the product can be judged entirely by its musical qualities.



## Chineké Bu Mmo (Igbo Introit) 2.

a - la nye Ya, A-gha-gh ì-kpo i - si a - la, N'i - me Mmo, n'i - me Mmo na  
 a - la nye Ya, A-gha-gh ì-kpo i - si a - la, N'i - me Mmo, n'i - re Mmo na  
 a - la nye Ya, nye Ya, A-gha-gh ì-kpo i - si a - la, N'i - me Mmo na  
 a - la nye Ya, A-gha-gh ì-kpo i - si a - la, N'i - me Mmo, n'i - me Mmo na

*dim. e rall.*  
 e - zi o - kvu, N'i - me Mmo na e - zi o - kvu  
*dim. e rall.*  
 e - 'zi o - kvu, N'i - me Mmo na e - zi o - kvu  
*dim. e rall.*  
 e - zi o - kvu, N'i - me Mmo na e - zi o - kvu  
*dim. e rall.*  
 e - zi o - kvu, N'i - me Mmo na e - zi o - kvu

The tendency in other types of compositions, such as anthems, has been to make adaptations of stories from the Scriptures, padded with lots of proverbs and other forms of social commentary. The result is that there are generally too many words, and the interest is drawn to these rather than to the music. Rarely has a contemporary composer of Igbo choral music taken a short theme and composed a full anthem from the words. This writer has attempted to impress upon some of the professional educated composers the necessity to emphasize the composition of music, by taking shorter lyrics — even lyrics of one line — and making a full setting of them, thereby drawing attention to the music and not so much to the words which may have to be repeated several times. In this connection, of course the lyrics must be complete and meaningful in spite of the brevity, so that repetition, rather than bring about boredom, will re-emphasize the profundity of the philosophy expressed in the words.

An example of this method is in a setting (Example 9) of the Introit, *Chineke bu Mmọ* (God is a Spirit).

*Words:*

Chineke bu Mmọ;	God is a Spirit;
Ndi n'akpọ isi ala nye Ya,	They that worship Him,
Aghagh ikpọ isi ala	Must worship (Him)
Nime mmọ	In spirit
Na ezi okwu.	And truth.

The words above have been so arranged in order to draw attention to the detail of setting in this composition. The first line is sung three times, the second line is set in imitative counterpoint, such that it occurs at least once in each voice — indeed twice in the two lower voices. The fourth line occurs twice, before the fifth line is added to it, and the combination of lines four and five is stated once more for an ending.

Another major problem facing composers of Igbo church music arises in the adaptation of folk music for Christian worship. It has been mentioned that in the early Christian Church in Igbo land, folk music was termed the work of the devil and so was barred from being used in Christian worship. The traditional ceremonies with which certain popular tunes were associated made them even more objectionable (in the eyes of the purists) for use in church, even in altered forms. Consequently, most of the attempts to adopt indigenous music in Christian worship have resulted in the composition of original tunes. Because many of the composers were born around and raised with Igbo traditional music, many of their compositions generally followed the theoretical patterns of traditional Igbo music. But because Protestant hymn tunes were such a force in the church, the influence of these permeate all compositions. It was therefore not possible to have any 'pure' Igbo tunes in the new compositions. Nor is it, indeed, to be considered necessary, since Christianity was originally non-Igbo.

In recent years, however, serious thought has been given to adapting traditional Igbo music for use in church. Religion may be considered a human cultural necessity, and all religions have something in common. At least some Christian religious ceremonies have their counterparts in traditional Igbo culture. It has already been pointed out how similar some of the ethical principles and ritualistic practices of Judaeo-Christian peoples are to those of the Igbo. Consequently, certain Igbo religious expressions will find a suitable place in Christianity, without detracting from the latter. Moreover, several present-day Christian ceremonies are more secular than truly religious. Stories of the Creation, the Nativity, the Passion, and the Resurrection have been told and

retold in circumstances unconnected with the Christian religion. Mystery plays have been performed in various parts of the world without any special religious associations. Similar stories appear in some African legends and folk tales<sup>14</sup>.

Certain seasons in the Christian liturgical year have situations for which abundant equivalents exist in traditional Igbo life. A good example is the end of the lenten season, culminating in the passion and death of Christ. Death and funeral rites in Igbo land abound with numerous songs, many of which can easily be adapted for Christianity. A song mourning the death of an Igbo chief, for example, could be altered to mourn the death of 'the King of Kings'. But perhaps relatively happier seasons in the Christian Church calendar, such as Christmas and Easter, call for the employment of modified versions of traditional songs of joy, including songs that have no religious connexions whatever. By adapting such songs for church use, we ensure that truly traditional music is employed in Christian worship. To this end, this writer has made arrangements of several Christmas carols and anthems employing Igbo folk music. An Igbo welcome song is transferred into a carol welcoming the new-born Christ; a traditional lullaby is altered to rock the cradled infant Jesus to sleep; and a children's game song about stars shining at night in the sky is adapted to become a song about the heavenly star leading the three Magi to the new-born 'King of Kings' at Epiphany; a war dance song usually performed at a victory celebration after battle is transformed into a triumphant anthem rejoicing at Christ's Easter victory over death!

It goes without saying that in these cases, some of the words of the traditional song will be changed to reflect the spirit and philosophy of Christianity. It is here that the continued combined role of the composer-poet for the musician is put to the test in most necessary circumstances. It is not merely the art of coining superficial and witty remarks, but the genius of successfully and effectively containing the old wine of traditional (sometimes secular) Igbo thoughts in the new bottle of the new (Christian) religion. The words of the carol, *Nne N'eku Nwa*, demonstrate, as an example, the change that has been made converting the words of an Igbo folk lullaby to the special Christmas song, lulling to sleep a special child. First the words of the traditional folk lullaby, with a free translation:

Nwa n'eku nwa,  
Kute nwa k'ayi fu ya,  
Na nne ya abiago:  
Ijele abiago;  
Nwa n'eku nwa,  
Kute nwa k'ayi fu ya,  
K'ayi nye ya oloma,  
K'ayi nye ya agidi.  
I g'eli nni, libe nni:  
Ijele abiago;  
I g'akwa akwa, kwab'akwa:  
Ijele anago.

O baby nurse,  
Show us the child,  
His mother is home:  
Playtime is come;  
O baby nurse,  
Show us the child,  
We'll give him fruits,  
We'll give him good food.  
If you will eat, please do,  
For fun time is here,  
If you'd rather cry, go on,  
But that will be no fun.

Below come the words as adapted to become a Christmas carol. The adaptation has been made such that absolutely no change in the melodic line of the tune has been necessitated by the tonal rise and fall of the new words, because these have been carefully chosen so that the melodic contour of the original (traditional) tune matches the linguistic contour of the new words.

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, Ulli Beier, ed. *The Origin of Life and Death, African Creation Myths*. London: Heinemann, 1966.

Nne n'eku nwa,  
 Kute nwa k'ayi fu ya,  
 Na Mary amugo:  
 Messaya abiago.  
 Nne n'eku nwa,  
 Kute nwa k'ayi fu ya,  
 K'ayi nye ya ekene,  
 K'ayi nye ya onyinye.  
 Onye g'asachapu njo,  
 Na Mary amugo;  
 Onye g'azopot'uwa  
 Messaya abiago.

O nursing mother,  
 Pray show us the child,  
 For Mary has given birth (to a child):  
 The Messiah has come.  
 O nursing mother,  
 Pray show us the child,  
 We bring him greetings,  
 We bring him gifts.  
 He that will wash away all sin,  
 Mary has given birth;  
 The Saviour of the world;  
 The Messiah has come.

Incidentally, this carol is arranged so that it can also be sung in words other than Igbo. An English version has the following words, yet another adaptation reflecting the normal structure of European verse, with a regular metre and a rhyme scheme<sup>15</sup>.

O Mary, dear Mother,  
 You're blest past all other,  
 Pray, where is thy child,  
 The Saviour so mild?  
 O Mary, dear Mother,  
 Pray show us our brother,  
 Who man thus becometh,  
 Yet God he that cometh.  
 He rules o'er every nation:  
 The true great Messiah;  
 He redeems all creation,  
 The only Messiah!

This indicates the sort of change that can, and often has to be made in order to employ a truly traditional Igbo tune in Christian worship.

As has been indicated, changes in words may necessitate changes in the melodic line of the traditional tune, in order to accommodate the tonal requirements of the language. It is the duty of the composer-poet to keep such changes to a minimum; his craftsmanship may in part be measured by how little a deviation has been made from the traditional musical lines and from the subject matter of the folk song, in the process of adapting it for Christianity.

Original compositions, however, are not hindered by these problems, since there is no existing tune to be adapted, and the composer can make up his musical lines in keeping with the demands of the words of the song. In order to maintain an Igbo quality in his music, however, the composer has to keep to the general theoretical principles of traditional Igbo music, even in these original compositions. It is, therefore, important for the composer to be aware of these theoretical principles. As virtually all the experimentation in Igbo music for Christian worship has been carried out by Igbo composers, born and raised in surroundings where traditional Igbo music naturally abounds, they are fully conscious of the guiding factors of Igbo musical theory, even if they cannot all articulate these principles in precise definitions and terms.

<sup>15</sup>The Carol, "O Mary, Dear Mother", is published in *The Second Treasury of Christmas Music*, ed. W. L. Reed, London: Blandford Press, 1967.

Nevertheless, the composer of music for the Church cannot be unaware of the demands of Western European culture through which Christianity has come to the Igbo. The aesthetic requirements of Western music have, consciously or unconsciously, become the criteria for judging Igbo church music. Western musical performance techniques, tone quality, audience/performer relationships, professionalism, and even instrumentation, have become normal in Igbo church music and much of Igbo secular music. Consequently the composer today, to succeed in his objectives, has to have a command of Western musical theory. Those who have made the most vital contributions to the development of Igbo choral music in Christian worship have, indeed, been those who have undertaken serious studies of Western harmony and counterpoint, and have been exposed to musical performances where Western aesthetic principles have been the standard.

The Igbo experiment goes on. We are not yet far enough removed in time to make a full or final assessment of the impact of contemporary composers on the musical development of the Igbo. Suffice it to say that now, perhaps more than ever before, Igbo youth vigorously pursues the study of music at institutions of higher learning. Along with Literature, Law, Medicine and Engineering, Music has come to be regarded by the achievement-oriented Igbo as a subject worthy of academic pursuit even by intelligent people. What is more important is that trained and untrained creative artists in the musical field continue to employ and apply what knowledge they acquire, in the attempt to make Christian worship more relevant to the masses of professed Igbo Christians.

As new light is shed on the possibilities of indigenous music and new solutions found for the problems confronting present-day composers, African music in Christian liturgy should soon come to be a standard, not only for Igbo worshippers, but also for Christians throughout the continent.