

Nigerian Highlife Music. Austin 'Maro Emielu. 2013. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, index, 252 pp.

Nigerian Highlife Music is a book devoted to the socio-cultural dais of Highlife Music in Nigeria. Published in 2013 by Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC), this book was designed, edited and produced in Nigeria by Concept Publications Limited, Lagos. The foreword is written by John Collins, an acclaimed Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Ghana, Legon. The book, a first of its kind in terms of a text devoted to the highlife music genre in Nigeria, is organized in chapter form, spanning eight chapters. The purpose of this book is to provide information on the socio-historical dimension of the highlife music genre in Nigeria and other West African countries, tracing the evolutionary trends of what has emerged as a Pan-West African phenomenon whose roots are firmly anchored in the idioms of trado-musical culture of the sub-region, engaging the bibliophile on excursion of robust intellectual debate. It is, therefore, resource material and information for undergraduates and graduate students, as well as for popular music enthusiasts in Nigeria and the world over.

The first chapter serves as Introduction. It deals with a survey of highlife music within the corpus of African popular music. It presents the genre as a socio-cultural music lacquered with indigenous and foreign elements as it traces the origin of the genre and its growth. In covering the entire scope of its focus the chapter recognizes the six geo-political zones of Nigeria: North West, North East, North Central, South West, South East and the South-South, with the constituent states. However, Bayelsa State, an important home to the South-South people, was omitted. The author deliberately uses the old regional structure of North, South, East, West and Midwest. In this chapter, the author points out the challenges and limitations of this book with respect to research findings and materials, and the dearth of information on Nigerian highlife musicians as most notable figures of the genre are late.

In the second chapter, the author reviews existing literature on popular music in Nigeria. He argues that the humanity spirit that characterises music, especially in Africa is sufficient for it to attract intellectual and scholarship focus. He observes, against some of the existing literature, that contemporary atmosphere has allowed highlife music to be both indoor and outdoor music in the spirit of continuity and change.

Chapter three reveals the theoretical framework on which the work is based. The author uses the social constructivism theory to buttress his perspectives of highlife music. In his submission, he de-emphasizes the material essence of the genre by some of the early creators and patrons of the genre, and emphasizes the social responsiveness of the music. In furtherance of the propensity of the theoretical framework used, Emielu traces the etymology of the highlife genre, revealing the gap between the folk music traditions of rural dwellers and the imported popular traditions of the urban dwellers of the 20th century. Agreeing to highlife's diverse roots and modes of expression in each culture, the author submits that the nomenclature is a generic musical typology.

The fourth chapter focuses on the historical development of Nigerian highlife music. Because this genre is not peculiar to Nigeria, Emielu uses 'political periodization' to trace and delineate the roots. He uses six different periods to drive this chapter home: pre-independence period, post-independence period, the civil war period, post-civil war period, oil boom period, and economic depression period. In tracing the roots of the genre, the author considers the space of popular music at the continental level, not limiting it to Nigeria or highlife genre as the only popular music. He identifies a number of factors that suggest the roots of highlife music in Nigeria. Fusion of indigenous African music with European, Americas, West Indies music is part of what constituted the present genre in focus. He adds other factors like Christian religious music and presence of regimental military and brass band. In this chapter, Emielu records that highlife music gained from the cultural renaissance of the early 1950s, and used the opportunity to carve a niche as a nationalist product for itself. This chapter also attempts a chronological survey of highlife musicians in Nigeria and a stint of some from Ghana. He points out the extent of the acceptability of this genre which has no barriers, yet contains flavours of ethnic coloration. Every ethnic group accepts the genre without considering the ethnic nationality of the musicians, the language of the songs and the cultural subtleties and identities. The author in this chapter notes the decline in highlife music in Lagos as a result of the civil war, and how this decline paved way for emergence of another genre, Juju music. Emielu states that the economic downturn of the 1980s in the nation also affected highlife music. This was as a result of ban on imported goods which affected musical instruments and other musical accessories.

Chapter five focuses on form and styles of highlife music. The chapter reveals two types of rhythm in simple quadruple time and compound quadruple time with an underlining gong rhythm as a recurring rhythmic pattern. It further reveals the strict observance of tonal inflection both in the speech and songs used in the genre, even when the scales are still built on diatonic degree. The chapter records the use of both indigenous and foreign languages in the text, with Pidgin English appearing in some of the works and indigenous languages playing the dominant role. Emielu in this chapter states that keyboard was not part of the early instruments used in Nigerian highlife music. Brass, guitar, percussion and voice are, of course, the dominant instruments. He emphasizes the use of brass instruments which usually play the introductions, interludes and sometimes codas of songs. Using content analysis method which is characterized in quantitative manner, Emielu narrows down this aspect to a representative sample from the large volume of released songs of the genre. He, therefore, uses recordings of highlife songs on short track, extended and long-play records, audio tapes, compact discs and video compact discs for his analysis. He cites twelve songs from ten different musicians to buttress the analysis. Emielu attempts to classify styles of the genre, and comes up with six major categories: Highlife-jazz, Classical/Original Highlife, Guitar Highlife, Periodical Highlife, Contemporary Highlife, and Cross-Border Highlife.

Chapter six focuses on the Life and works of selected Nigerian highlife musicians.

In all, the author gives information on fourteen musicians across the country.

Chapter Seven looks at highlife music in contemporary Nigeria. The chapter identifies a decline in the genre since the 1970s and its replacement with other genres like *Juju*, and *Apala*. The chapter further identifies a revival attempts since 1990s. In Southwest Nigeria, it records the contribution of the “Highlife Party” which began with Alberstein Renate at the Goethe Institut, and Ojez night club, both in Lagos, as promoting the revival of the genre. The author in this chapter observes that the revival effort in the Southwest is domiciled in Lagos, which suggests that the focus is to re-enact Lagos highlife scene in the period before the civil war. In the South-South, the author records that there is a new generation of musicians who have taken after highlife styles, though such bands are not named after the genre. They have their indigenous names. However, the communities where they belong see them as new highlife groups. In the Southeast, inhabited by the Igbo people, the author records that the love of the genre in discussion among the people still remains supreme. He further observes that the ascendancy of gospel music in this area has incorporated highlife styles and forms into their works. Again, Emielu calls attention to the current increase in sales of old and some new highlife recordings in the region. In the North, Emielu writes that though one can enjoy highlife tunes on some of the radio stations, it can by no means be at par with live music of the genre in other regions of the country. In the hotels, he observes that various types of genres are performed by the live bands whose members are drawn from the southern region of the country. In this chapter, the author uses three different models to make submission on revival and sustenance strategies of the genre.

Chapter Eight, which is the last chapter of the book, proposes “a new theoretical model to analyse the development and sustenance of popular music styles, using Nigerian highlife music as a paradigm” (p. 211).

Emielu informs us that the principle objective of *Nigerian Highlife Music* “is to examine the social world within which highlife music emerged and has thrived in Nigeria and to also understand its defining characteristics and generic boundaries”. He further states that the book also examines “issues of sustenance of highlife both as a musical and an extra-musical phenomenon in contemporary Nigeria”.

It is pertinent to note the efforts of the author in translating the lyrics from the local languages and dialects into the English language. This process makes for greater understanding and appreciation of the message being conveyed in the music. He adopts three main approaches in his *Nigerian Highlife Music*. These are historical, sociological and empirical approaches. His empirical evidence is based on contemporary findings, contacts, personal experiences and associations. Ethnographic/Ethnomusicological methodology was adopted in the research.

On a critical view, one finds that the origin of highlife as stated in the book is not precise. At best, it is confusing. Emielu claims that highlife music started from Ghana, and that Rex Lawson, a Nigerian, “introduced the harmonic progression” (p. 159). His assertion of Sammy Obot, a Nigerian, leading the Ghanaian Broadway Highlife Band “which later metamorphosed into the Uhuru Dance Band” (p. 72) also raises questions

on the origin of the genre. The 'surviving generals' of the early highlife bands may be useful in resolving this. For instance, members of the Rex Lawson memorial band have their opinion on the origin of the genre. Ayinde Bakare Jnr. who is still active on stage may also be able to clear this aspect of the origin of highlife music in Nigeria. This may help in determining whether the genre came to Nigeria through Ghana; whether the origin of highlife music was initiated and influenced by the returning ex-service men, ex-slaves and merchants; or was influenced by similar trends that witnessed the emergence and development of highlife Music in other West African countries, or it metamorphosed from some other existing genres in Nigeria.

The account on the death of Cardinal Rex Jim Lawson is not correct. Lawson died on January 16, 1971, *not* 1969 (p. 159), following an autocrash on his way to Warri to honour a performance engagement. The accident happened at Urhonigbe along Agbor-Warri road.

Emielu argues intensively for the guitar prominence in highlife music over keyboard. It is unfortunate that this is not illustrated in the Appendices with music transcriptions, as evidence of this would have added more empirical evidence in driving this argument home. The limited number of transcriptions has not provided enough justification to the different styles of highlife music recorded in the text. Transcriptions showing classic/original guitar themes up to the contemporary would have sufficed for the obvious justification. Again, the few transcriptions included only represent some regions of the country, without that of Northern Nigeria. Balla Miller's music, as the only prominent musician from the area, would have given a clearer picture of what the genre is in Northern Nigeria.

Use of the concept of constructionism, deconstructionism and reconstructionism as demonstrated in chapter eight appears to be far afield and a borrowing whose contextual justification requires direct relevance. The author presents these in stages: Stage of Social Construction, Stage of Social Deconstruction, and Stage of Social Reconstruction. Perhaps application of the emerging three Rs after the civil war would have been more appropriate in reviving/sustaining the genre. These are Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction.

The use of existing literature on this subject as reflected in the Bibliography and inclusion of a Glossary and the Index pages shows the gamut of the effort of the author. Comprehensively, he has taken a giant step in making available a reference book on this genre. In addition, Emielu has created another intellectual window for the inclusion of popular music in the Nigerian educational curriculum.

Emielu's effort in *Nigerian Highlife Music* deserves commendation. For the first time a book is devoted to this aspect of creative endeavour beyond chapter presentations or sectional/sub-thematic entries which have characterized earlier accounts of previous authors linked to Nigerian highlife music.

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