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The Artist as Social Critic: The Musical Performances of Beautiful Nubia and his Roots Renaissance Band in Nigeria

ADEKUNLE, Idowu James¹

¹Department of English, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Abstract

Music is a pleasurable global Performance. Its therapeutic functions cannot be overemphasized. It is a succour and mirth to its audience. Existing studies have examined music from therapeutic functions without considering its deeper social functions. Therefore, this article examines the artist as a social critic in the musical performance of Beautiful Nubia and his Roots Renaissance Band in Nigeria. The artist's mental status, both conscious and unconscious, in the creation of his work was investigated. Closely allied with this is his intention about the work, as well as the factors that prompted the state of mind for example, the spirit of the age, the socio-economic conditions of the times he expresses feelings to his audiences, and so forth. Video recording texts of the Nigerian artist were used for the analyses. Schechner's Performance theory and Psychoanalytical theory of Jung were used. Data were subject to Performance and literary analyses.

Keywords: Music, Artist, Audience, Performance, Criticism.

Introduction

The artist (chanter, troubadour, poet, dramatist, novelist, singer, etc.) as a social critic serves as a watchdog and gatekeeper of society (Bamidele, 2003; Adekunle, 2021; Adekunle, 2024; Adekunle, 2025). The artist plays a prominent role in the establishment of social institutions that established societal norms, ideas, values, and other products of human interaction. He is the conscience and the educator of his society who purges and sanitizes society through his art as a social critic (Adekunle, 2023). His medium of enlightenment gears towards the civilization and progress of the community. He is the life wire and the sustenance of his society (Bamidele, 2003; Adekunle, 2024). Among the Greeks, he is called vates' a prophet and this means he can delve into the past, present, and future (Duvignaud, 1972; Werner, 1983; Bamidele, 2003; Geraldine, 2018; Adekunle, 2019, Adekunle, 2022; Adekunle, 2023). What this entails is that he is empowered with a keen metaphysical insight to know and describe the problems of the society and provide lasting solutions to these problems. This is why works of art present problems of

both interpretation and evaluation. To Soyinka (1976:66), the social vision of an artist must reveal realities beyond his immediate environment. Soyinka sees his artists as the promoters of socio-political, economic, and cultural justice and equality in the environment they belong. They are social critics that evaluate, analyze, and describe the universal and regional concepts that run or battle with society.

In the same vein, this opinion has immensely assisted the social critic as an advocate who pre-occupies himself with the problems of society. The artists as social critics, who don't only partake in the common struggle or historical background, but suffer similar problems like colonialism, neo-colonialism, racial oppression, economic hardship, underdevelopment, and sociocultural conflict of contemporaneous existence.

In pre-colonial African society the artist may be a musician, a poet, or a singer, who sustains the community and its institutions through his art (Adekunle, 2004; Adekunle, 2009; Adekunle, 2020; Adekunle, 2023). Most of the time the artist warns the society of an impending doom. The artist sees himself as having a moral and intellectual superiority over society (Bamidele, 2003: 29). He portrays himself as a messiah who is singularly empowered to lead and guide the nation on its path of progress. Shelley (1821: 33) comments in his *Defence of Poetry* that poets as literary artists are unacknowledged legislators, great philosophers of high intellectual witticism, morally upright, and most fortunate personalities of their ages. Brutus (1969:100) examines the role of the literary artist in society as a man who takes his images, ideas, and inspirations from the society he lives. The artist gets his materials from the society. His works are highly therapeutic and predominantly predicated on societal ethos with social or historical circumstance as the reflection of the society, which is highly significant and beneficial. He represents these materials through ambits of literary genres in a unique way that makes his works of art distinguished from the conventional postulations of sociologists.

According to Welch, Blasutti, MacRitchie, McPherson & Himonides (2020:1), musical artist gears their works toward human development and well-being. Musical artists' works are representations of cultural diversity across the globe (Cross, 2016; Welch & McPherson, 2018; Mehr et al., 2019). Music is a cultural learning art from childhood and adulthood (Elvers, Fischinger & Steffens, 2017; Saether, 2016; McFerran et al., 2018; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Lindblad & Boise, 2020). The works of musical artists give physical and psychological benefits that promote a healthy lifestyle (Guhn, Emerson, & Gouzouasis, 2019)

In the above, different critics and studies examine music from various dimensions without taking a closer look at how it serves as a tool for social criticism. Therefore, this study examines the artist as a social critic by examining the musical performance of Beautiful Nubia and His Roots Renaissance Band in Nigeria in a bid to investigate sociological realities in Nigeria and Africa at large.

Methodology

Theoretical framework

Schechner's Performance theory and the Psychoanalytical theory of Freud were used.

Schechner's Performance Theory

Schechner's Performance theory was used to analyze the data. Performance theory discusses day-to-day realities which include rituals, sports, arts, music, presentations, science and technology, and social interactions (Schechner, 1985; Schechner, 1993; Schechner, 2002). It also re-creates, re-performing, and re-rehearsing social realities in reflexive and iterative ways (Schechner, 2006). It is a reflection of the physical, cultural, and social environment in which the performance takes place. In literary or theatrical performance, shows a dynamic relationship between the audience and the performance. In this research, performance theory is used to analyze the sociological realities in Beautiful Nubia's musical performance. Data were subject to Performance and literary analyses.

Psychoanalytical Theory

Jungian psychoanalytical theory makes to have a deeper understanding of human behaviour, psychological advancement, and personality (Jung, 1916; Jung, 1928). It emphasizes the collective unconscious that reveals common pool of archetypes, images, and universal symbols shared by all human beings across races, cultures, genders, and time. Jung discusses several archetypes, such as persona, the social image that presents individuals to the world; shadow, the hidden and repressed aspects of individuals; self, the main archetypes that reveal the potential and nature of the individuals; Anima/ animus, the masculine and feminine nature of individuals in society; individualism, conscious and unconscious, emotional and rational of each individual in the society; complex, a collective feeling, ideas, and experiences that are structured around central archetypes; unconscious mind, that shapes human behavior, thoughts, and emotions for psychological fitness (Jung, 1960; Jung, 1963). Jungian theory is applied to examine the sociological realities in Beautiful Nubia's musical performance.

Method of Data Analysis

A live record of a video of Beautiful Nubia and His Roots Renaissance Band in Nigeria was used. The record was selected based peculiar way the musical performer, Beautiful Nubia, reveals sociological realities that occur in his country Nigeria, and Africa as a whole. He uses the metaphoric device of binary oppositions to showcase the disparity that occurs in his society. Besides, he uses the African nostalgic recreation past to create unity, love, and friendship in the modern era. He employs a musical metaphor as a clarion for nation and capacity building. Data were subjected to performance and literary analyses.

Results and Discussions

Whatever factors that helped to form the work of art in the artist's mind fall under this heading. The experience undergone by the artist in the creation of the work constitutes the artist's experience. Beautiful Nubia uses his work to speak against social injustice and challenge the status quo. He is a voice for social change that uses his performances to create awareness, inspire action, and highlight important issues to bring about positive change in his society. He uses musical performance to promote critical thinking that encourages the members of society to

In the oral rendition of Beautiful Nubia and the Roots Renaissance Band entitled *Jangbalajigbü*, Beautiful Nubia uses binary oppositions to express the minds of the suffering or down-trodden masses to the outer world and likewise uses his musical performance as a solidarity song that reveals the common struggle encountered by his people. According to Beautiful Nubia, the oral artist, I am writing about my environment and my people and struggles they are encountering in seeking happiness (Nubia 2005). He believes that the joys of his people are merely euphoria that are encumbered with sorrows posed to them by the upper class or the bourgeois. In one of the collections of his songs subtitled “Small People Anthem” goes thus:

Nubia expresses the minds of his people who are in a state of inconspicuous dilemma about the environmental upheavals that characterize their well-being as revealed in lines 1 to 10. He is lost in thoughts and at the same time, questions the fate of life. He sees life as a binary dichotomy

that serves as a meddler between the rich and poor, the upper class and the lower class, the subject and objective, the core and merging, the active and the passive, and between the bourgeois and proletariat as reflected in lines 11 to 25. These concepts go beyond human ideation. The incomprehensible mystery of the world's societal inequality makes global home obscure. This is why he uses this song as a corrective oral enactment that preaches against the philosophy of existentialism which foreshadows cruelty, despair, disparity, disillusionment, and general absurdity. This song gives insight into the problems of mankind.

African Traditional Communal Feast of Love, Unity, Friendship, and Medication in Pastime

This song is a dialectic discourse that tries to synthesize the two propositions, that is, the thesis that represents the bourgeois and the antithesis that presents the proletariat. This is a meeting point at common ground at a level of equilibrium where everyone believes in fate and works for the good of others without any sanctimonious hypocrisy. Here, the song serves as a Hegelian dialectic process of reconciliation of disputations or contradictions of the societal belief system or historical past about social class and feminist oppression. This process is resolved at the higher level of truth (synthesis). To level this ground, Nubia also reminds us of the African historical and cultural past in our spare time when everyone in the community comes together for a common festivity to share a traditional drink named 'emu' (palm wine). "Emu joint" is a common meeting place where adults and young ones, males and females co-exist in the evening to enjoy themselves after the hard labours of the day. The rich and the poor are there to share their plights and find a lasting solution through a common effect. *Emu* is an important drink in any African popular festival pastime. Without it no ceremony is complete. It is the drink of the gods, old and young. It fosters friendship and cordial relationships. It is also a medicinal drink that is used for multipurpose functions. It has helped to create peace in the community. At this African recreational junction, when songs are raised, the entire atmosphere becomes lively with great laughter and the people are highly excited to hear the songs that touch their emotions, kill their boredom, remove tensions and at the same time serve as corrective measures against any social anomalies.

Our work is done it is time to have some fun
People come together to sing a song of the joy
Pas de kalabash to drink some palm wine
Pas amuo pas amuo drinka muo drinka muo
Share amuo share ramuo don't forget in Africa
People always share with other neighbours
We don't discriminate. pas de kalabash o
Make we drink the palm wine. pas de kalabash
Make we drink the palm shack some palm wine
(Nubia 2005)

To foster their relationship, palm wine is used as an exchange of gifts with a lively rendition that creates a natural atmosphere for a peaceful environment. "Kalabash" (calabash) signifies a cup in which African people used to put their native drink called "emu" in the ancient past. In this act of

musical rendition, a lot of fun and enjoyment is derived from the general participation of people in the song. It gives a befitting atmosphere of a relaxed mind and sound sensibility.

The rhythm of the musical renditions in pastime in Pas de kalabash helps to develop flexibility and agility which are essential for physical fitness. The bodily exercises such as clapping of hands, shaking of the heads, and shaking of the body to lively renditions as displayed in “Pas de Kalabash” allow the human body to shed excesses of weight and at the same time make the body a sound mind. They also assist in the removal of hypertensive mood and stroke that deform the body structure. Songs give happiness and lasting joy through their messages. Apart from this, the vital organs of the body are developed e.g. the rate and the force of the heartbeat, breathing becomes deeper, heat production and body waste elimination are enhanced, improved appetite, sleep, and accelerated energy build-up. The body's muscles are developed in strength and size through these bodily exercises. Through songs, emotional wounds are healed just like the days of the African American society where the blacks worked on plantations under duress. Work songs are other typical examples that served as soul-healing to depressed people. This is what the psychologists called 'social psychology'. It is the study of the social behavior of individuals and groups with special stress on how the behaviour is affected through the influence of other people. This is why social psychologists focus on social and political behavior, the communicative process, and the development of attitudes. Songs here also aim at developing people dexterously by making them physically, socially, emotionally, and mentally upright through their cognitive messages and physical participation in musical renditions. Songs in Pas de Kalabash give ample opportunities and equal rights to individuals in the society to learn the activities that will make them have mental soundness, social consciousness, emotional growth, and physical fitness. By this, songs help to eliminate the stress and strain of modern-day. These songs give avenues for physical fitness and relaxation by this means promoting physical and mental health. Under this atmosphere, proper child nourishment is carried out through the societal ethics and ethos that are presented through songs. This is what is also called eugenics'. It is the idea that society can be enhanced by permitting people to become parents if only they can produce healthy and intelligent children. Songs here are also known as psychosomatic medicine. It is taken from the Greek word “psychic which means mind and 'soma' which means body. It is the use of the techniques and a set of principles of psychology in the treatment of physical diseases. These are emotional depressive diseases that bring about stress that affects a person's body. When the person is angry or scared, adrenaline runs into the blood, raising the action of the heart.

These mental depressions or emotional disturbances easily allow people to be exposed to various kinds of diseases. Such diseases are hypertension (high blood pressure), rheumatoid arthritis (inflammation and stiffness of the joints), asthma, peptic ulcer (stomach ulcer), neurodermatitis (chronic skin disorders), and impaired resistance to infection.

Clarion Call for Hard Work for Nation and Capacity Building

Another musical rendition by Beautiful Nubia is *Owuro L'ojo*. It is a newsworthy song that is used to create healthy sensibility, community comfortableness, societal-oriented value, orientation responsiveness, and a sharp public consciousness in the hearts of every citizenry of Nigeria and Africa in general. This consciousness is used to awaken individuals to their sense of

duties and likewise charges them to their responsibilities. The act of commitment to work, state, and nation is paramount thing.

This is what is called 'national patriotism'. It is the total loyalty to the service of humanity. An early riser with self-discipline, determination, focus, and an industrious heart will make a brilliant success. This means that those who value time make outstanding achievements.

Ojumoti mọ ara mi
Egbaranile ise ti ya
Ojumoti mo ore mi egbon ra jigi katun ramu
Onise owo alakowe gbogbo eni to wa ise
Omoleèwe owuro lojo eni mari ire
A seeba owuro
(Nubia 2005)

Good morning guy creature you got some work to do
Good morning guy creature how was your night
If you do you work with honesty and pride
You will find your dreams coming true very soon
If you could be patient live within the law
There will be much progress everyone will be happy.
(Nubia 2005)

This is a therapeutic healing song of emotional wounds for the depressed souls who are living below their incomes. It is used as the resurrection of hope for a brighter future through hard work, self-commitment, patience, honesty, and obedience to societal or national law. This is a clarion call to national duties. "Good morning" here is a symbolic interpretation of the early hour of life of individual youths who are supposed to work hard while they still have energy before their old age. This is what the psychologists called 'motivational therapy'.

Inclusion

In the above analyses, Beautiful Nubia critically uses his musical performance to criticize the disparity that often occurs between the rich and poor, the lead and the led, the mighty and the weak, and the great and the small as reflected in 3.1's analysis. In 3.2's analysis, Beautiful Nubia uses musical performance as a nostalgic recreation of the cultural past in which Africans used "emu," a local drink, and its arena of funfair to create unity, love, and friendship between the rich and the poor, male and female, high and low. 3.3's analysis is used as a clarion call for nation and capacity building in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Beautiful Nubia employs these devices to bring out sociopolitical changes in Nigeria and Africa in general.

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