

## **PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS IN ASU EKIYE'S MUSICAL VIDEO BACK TO BASE**

**By**

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper examines the performance elements in Asu Ekiye's musical video entitled Back to Base. The study cuts across the use of costume and other theatrical elements to portray various ethnic nationalities as represented in the production. This style of music video production has not been given adequate scholarly attention by researchers. Thus, the paper examines the performance elements in Asu Ekiye's music video, Back to Base. It is against this backdrop that the content analysis method of investigation is deployed. It adopts comparative analysis investigative approach which appropriates primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are musical video CD of Asu Ekiye. The secondary sources are scholarly materials related to musical performance and theatre. This paper observes that Asu Ekiye's musical video performance dialogue with performers ranging from lead singers to back-up singers, actors and dancers also involves audience participation and other performance elements. Asu Ekiye's musical video entitled Back to Base is performed on two different performing areas: the arena stage and the aquatic stage. This paper holds that costumes, dances, and dramatic performances, props and locations are the main strengths and attractions of the music video. It recommends that for music to thrive in Nigeria, a multicultural society, musicians should ensure that their musical productions should be cross cultural and they should deploy variety of performances elements.*

**Key Words: Musical, Performance, Dance, Acting, Costume, Audience, Cultural, Stage.**

### **Introduction**

Musical performances are presented via several means depending on the source and financial ability of the performer. Some performers might choose to perform in the theatre, some by the road side, some in the Church; others might choose to go to the studio to get their music recorded in other for them to make money out of it, and also for it to have a wider spread of audience. Whatever medium they choose to present their performance determines the kind of audience and outreach.

In looking at musical videos, one observes that some performers present or produce their musical videos without paying attention to key performance elements that will enable a wider spread and appreciation by members of the audience. These performance elements include: well-choreographed dance movement, good costumes, scenery design, set and props, singers, actors, language and makeup. All these when used can synchronize with the musical presentation in telling the story surrounding the musical performance. However, every musical performance has a story to tell. If the story is not told via the lyric of the musical performance, it will be told through the costume or via dramatization or choreographed dance movement. Sometimes the audience can equally perceive or be sensitized by the various scenic backgrounds employ by the performers in their musical production.

Musical performances/productions across ages and the world are very important as seen in celebration of ceremonies. They serve as a people's cultural identity since no culture can do

without music. Hence, from the Greek festival of Dionysus, to the numerous festivals we have in Africa, music performances have become a part of the social life of the people. A people without music performance are likely to be a people without cultural identity and history. This is because the norms and values and also the history of a people are imbedded in their musical life.

Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base* is important and significant as it showcases the rich culture of the Niger Delta people and also exhibited some elements of theatre. Thus this paper is planned to look at the presence of performance elements in Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base* musical video. It shall identify the various artistic elements that make the performance relevant and exciting. This paper shall also examine the social significance of the Asu Ekiye's musical video, *Back to Base*, to the people of Niger Delta and the Nigeria Nation. No doubt, some Christian/religious musical video performances/productions have theatrical virtues. But most of these very rich and famous Christian/religious musical video productions have not been given adequate attention by scholars. The Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base* is a Christian/religious musical video production that cuts across the Niger Delta, calling for love and unity.

### **An over view of Performance in the Theatre**

Since the central issue of study in this paper is performance elements in Asu Ekiye's musical video *Back to Base*, it is also important to review what exactly constitute performance.

Performance can be in form of drama, music, comedy and dance as the case may be. The Oxford Dictionary of English 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, defines performance as "An act of performing a play, concert or some other form of entertainment." (p. 1308). From the above it is clear that performances are housed in the theatre. Theatre is about performance. Any art that is performed on stage in the presence of audience can be referred to as theatre. Hence, drama, dance and music can be seen as theatre. For theatre to occur on stage there must be performance and the performance in form of drama and dance has to be mimetic. This means that theatre is an art of imitation. Theatre is an art in which many arts come together to make a whole. It is a combination of both the visual, aural and imitative arts. Such visual arts include costume, props, set and light. Other supporting elements include actions and movement, sound and sound effect also make theatre complete. Wilson (2008, p.1) goes further to establish theatre as an experience. In his book, "*The Theatre Experience*", he states emphatically thus:

Theatre is experience, an immediate art whose meaning is grasped through an understanding of the encounter between who creates theatre-performance-writers, directors, designers and technicians and those who view it- members of the technicians and those who view it-members of the audience.

Wilson here states the connection of artistic contributors to what makes theatre happen. On the other hand, Grotowsky (1991, p.28) a seasoned theatre practitioner and theorist clearly state that, "To the average theatre goers, theatre is first and foremost a place of entertainment. If he expects to encounter a frivolous muse, the text does not interest him in the least. What attract him are the so-called gags, the comic effects and perhaps the puns which lead back to the text".

Grotowsky has made the point that the basic aim of theatre is to entertain. The language, the costume, the actors, the setting, the lighting effects etc. they all collaborate to bring out the entertainment value of theatre.

But the fact remains that theatre passes information, educates and even mobilises people through entertainment. Away from the white man's concept of theatre, some African theatre practitioners have their own explanations to make in linking traditional African theatre to the

western model. Thus, the nature and function of Traditional African theatre experience is expressed by Eneke who states:

It does not matter if there is no formally designated playing space for the only thing really necessary to an actor when putting on a play are audience and space to act in, though the latter may be only a patch of grass. But when there is no formal method of designated space, the actors and audience acknowledge a playing space as separate from viewing whether or not that space is rigidly defined or has flexible boundaries (34)

The concept of theatre is different from each person or scholar that tries to define it. What is different is that each person sees it from an angle. This brings to focus the communicative aspect of theatre. It suggests strongly that theatre is a communication art. It communicates messages, cultures, traditions and even the way people reason. Theatre brings all diverse art forms like dance, acting and music under one roof and forms a powerful means for communicating to the masses. It is both an aspect of knowledge and a performance that entertains and tells story to inform, educate and instruct society.

### **THE AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION**

A performer is any individual or group of people that entertains and educates creatively and skillfully before audience through any of these:

- i) Comedy
- ii) Artiste (music, drama & dance)
- iii) Artist

However, there is no performer without an audience, a group of listeners or spectators.

The Asu Ekiye's music the *Back to Base* is made possible by audience participation. Its formation, expression and development make it function and bring out its theatrical character as theatre. As audience is very important in western theatre practice so is audience very important in Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base*. This is as a result of the fact that the audience functions as spectators and participant actors in the theatrical display of the music *Back to Base*. The music has huge audience participation because the audience attention is grabbed towards the realisation of artistic occurrence. The Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base* as a theatre has no tradition of audience separation from the performance as they are seen surrounding the performers as that of the way African cultural life and Theatre is structured. The Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base*' audience is built around the performance ground called play ground. The audience plays the traditional function of watching the performance and at the same time participates in dancing.





### **THE PERFORMANCE STAGE**

The Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base* music is celebrated in a playing stage and on water. This means that it has both arena stage on land and an aquatic stage on water.

### **THE ARENA STAGE IN ASU EKIYE'S *BACK TO BASE***

For the arena stage, the performance area which accommodates both audience and actors takes up to two thousand people and above. The stage is located in a large open ground in Yenagoa. The Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base* is performed to a theatre of celebration which includes dances, good music rendition, and some form of acting. The playing stage of the performance is a stage of entertainment, evangelism and instruction. The stage has no features of the western type of stages like proscenium, thrust etc thus in the performance of various artistic events there are no prescribed scenic arrangements.



### **THE AQUATIC STAGE IN ASU EKIYE'S *BACK TO BASE***

Regatta is an aquatic theatre tradition and therefore brings about the aquatic stage that is set on water. The river at Hospital waterside, Ovum, serves as the aquatic stage. This stage accommodates beautifully decorated boat powered by outboard engines and a paddler who paddles a canoe to join Asu Ekiye and his group on the boat powered by engine. The aquatic stage performance provides one of the most exciting sceneries. This is because the performances of singing and dancing are at their best on the aquatic stage. The regatta also shows the means of transportation of some communities in the Niger Delta. Here songs and costumes are displayed on the water stage which is theatrical.

We shall now explore the aesthetics of music and songs within the context of the performance.



### **THE MUSIC *BACK TO BASE***

The music *Back to Base* cuts across Ijaw, Efike, Urhobo, and Irsekiri languages.

The music performance spreads within acting (dramatization), dance, and song presentation.

### **ACTING/ PERFORMANCE**

One of the very prominent features of Asu Ekiye's '*Back to Base*' is performance of drama and songs. Asu Ekiye's '*Back to Base*' has a story line whose script is centred on peace which was acted out during the performance. The drama of how the police came to the arrest of Asu Ekiye as he was singing calling for the people of Niger Delta to be at peace with one another was enacted. The acting is enhanced by powerful and evangelical pulling songs. Such as: "Rivers mo Bayelsa kenibinotu". This song means Rivers state and Bayelsa state are brothers, that they are same people, and should be united and live in peace. These performances were participated by both men and women as police men; aggrieve persons, fisher man, etc.



### **DANCE**

The expressive movements associated with dance lies in the beauty of its traditional performance. Dance therefore, is a rhythmic expression of the body within a given time and space. Every dance step is associated with rhythm. Without rhythm there will be no dance movement. Rhythm is made up of the combination of short and long sounds put together in a regular sequence. These short and long sounds when put together in performance via percussive indigenous musical instruments stimulate the dancer to action. Irisoanga (2007:102) sees dance as "something that happens when a human moves rhythmically in a directed or designed pattern, consciously performing specific movements." Gyapong (2007:113) defines dance as

art in which ideas and emotions are expressed in the creation of forms and patterns in terms of movement of human bodies in space and time.

Gyapong (2007:116) Further advocates that dance and music are inter-related and share the same rhythm while rhythm in music comes in a form of sound, dance comes in a form of movement in spaces. It is against this backdrop that Onwuka (2012:4) opined that: Dancing is the expressive medium of the body, an outward interpretation of musical rhythms and movements that is sensuously carried out by the human affective domain.

However, African indigenous music performance is aesthetically characterized by musical accompaniments which stimulates dance. It is on this premise that Onwuka (2012:46) advocates that these musical accompaniments consist by a specific combination of indigenous musical instruments. Hence, these musical instruments do not only accompany dance steps but also dialogue with the dancers. In the Asu Ekiye's musical video, it is observed that there was dialogue between the dancers and the singers and between the dancer and the audience. The dance steps are aesthetically dramatic and entertaining. They also reveal the cultural and historical life of the people of Niger Delta. The dance steps are 'purely dramatic. Dance also plays significant role in Asu Ekiye's musical video as the most effective non-verbal means of interpreting dramatic events to achieve varied emotional expressions.

The beauty of every dance lies in its musical accompaniment. These musical accompaniments could be in percussive or melodic rhythm. It could also be in combination of percussive and melodic form. Without the percussion instruments in performance it will be difficult to stimulate dancers to action. If the melodic instrument alone is used for the sole aim to accompany a dance without the percussive instrument, the dancers will not be able to dance as required of them. This set of rhythm forms the bases for every dance movement in the performance.

## **COSTUME**

Costume is one of the visual elements of performance that is strongly featured in Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base*. The others are scene design. From the staging of the dramatic nuances and music, costume re-enacts the culture of the people of Niger Delta and their social status. Costume plays a very significant role. The costume use not only set the period of the performance but also shows the occupation and characterization of the impersonators in the performance. Such costumes like fisher man's cap, police uniform, chief's wears, and those fighting were paraded in the dramatic actions in the music performance. Apart from the later, costume was used by those who did traditional dances of great artistic value. The Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base* paraded a lot of art forms and sports that made good and great use of costume. The beauty of colour showed in the aquatic performance and also the Efik dance movement. The costumes used which blends with the arrangement of the dancers presented amazing scenery when viewed against the aquatic background offered by the River. The dancers are colourfully dressed in a uniformed manner singing and dancing on arena stage.

## **SOCIAL RELEVANCE OF THE ASU EKIYE'S BACK TO BASE**

The Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base* has immense communal significance. In the first place, the musical video "*Back to Base*" is a music that calls for unity of the people of Niger Delta, making them to come to the consciousness that they are brothers. This music came at the time when there was war between the Isekiri's and the Ijaws. Asu Ekiye made use of his music to cut across these tribes through evangelism by asking them not to fight again that they are brothers. The performance of Asu Ekiye's "*Back to Base*" as the name implies displayed the culture of the Niger Deltans' in costumes, dance and songs. The display of songs, costumes

and dance steps from the Niger Delta drew the attention of its audience to start thinking of their culture and tradition in music performances. It was after this Asu Ekiye's, "*Back to Base*" that the outburst of most gospel musicians infusing dramatization and dance steps to their music productions hit the roof. Theatrical music performance such as Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base* have become more relevant to the Niger Delta culture because it has provided an opportunity to showcase the dance steps, costumes, means of transportation and language of select tribes of the Niger Delta in world theatre practice. For Example dance steps and costume of the Ijaws, Isekiri, Orhobos, Binis and Efiks were exhibited in the performance/production of the musical video, *Back to Base*.

Finally, for music to thrive in Nigeria, a multicultural society, musicians should ensure that their musical productions should be cross cultural and they should deploy variety of performances elements as seen in Asu Ekiye's Musical Video, "*Back to Base*".

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the theatrical performances in Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base* is in grouped into drama, music and dance as the case may be. This music performance of Asu Ekiye is regarded as theatre because of the presence of the elements of performance which came to play in its production. The researcher has taken pains to study the video record of Asu Ekiye and De Nu Dimension *Back to Base* to find out the performance elements that may be found in its production. These performance elements include: audience, actors, dancers, singers, costume and makeup, props and sound. These elements are important in the production of *Back to Base* and also play entertainment function. The production provides religious, social and cultural functions which have influence most Christian/religious musicians to choreograph dance movement and also included dramatization to their music performances. The Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base* is a production that cuts across the Niger Delta, calling for love and unity. That the people of Niger Delta are one, that they should stop fighting themselves for they are brothers. In the course of this study there are several findings made by the researcher, which are:

Performance on two types of stage: there are specifically two types of stage used in Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base* which are the arena stage and aquatic stage. On the Arena stage performances such as dances of various types and acting was done while members of the audience stand around the performance area. For the Aquatic stage performance was done on water as Asu Ekiye calls for unity among the people of Niger Delta in a boat performance. Generally, speaking it is observed that Asu Ekiye made use of his music, *Back to Base* as a means of evangelism.

The researcher found out that costumes, dance steps and dramatization adds beauty and colour to the performance of Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base*. Aside costumes, dance steps and dramatization, props such as net, circle, boat, canoe, paddle, cars, to mention but a few, and also sound effects such as siren was used in the production of Asu Ekiye's *Back to Base* music production. It is on these findings that the topic of this research is based.

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