



A Study of Musical Practices in Traditional Marriage Engagement Ceremony in Ile-Ife, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the musical practices in traditional marriage engagement ceremonies in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, which are anchored by coordinators conversely known as *Alaga Ìdúró* and *Alaga Ìjókò*. Several studies have concentrated mainly on the dramatic, ritual and rite of passage aspects of traditional marriages among the Yoruba. However, less attention is paid to the musical practices exhibited during traditional marriage engagements. Using the Ile-Ife environs as a case study, this paper intends to understudy such ceremonies, to unravel the musical practices performed during traditional marriage engagements. While the study engages with Schechner Richard's Performance theory, it utilises qualitative methods, which are harnessed through oral interviews conducted with 28 purposively selected individuals from four local government areas in Ile-Ife. The selection includes the two *Alagas*, the couples and three community members in each local government area. Findings showed that *Alagas* are naturally gifted in singing, therefore, they skilfully display their creativity during traditional marriage engagements based upon assimilation, modification and parody of diverse musical genres. Some of the parodied genres are drawn from secular, religious, and Indigenous songs, depending on the audience's preferences. Indeed, the *Alaga* may introduce an Igbo song, provided it is currently popular and universally embraced. This study concluded that while the musical repertoires employed are not novel, it is a conscious choice not because of the inability of the *Alaga* to compose new songs, but rather from a reluctant effort to introduce unfamiliar songs due to the audiences.

Keywords: Musical Practices, Alaga, Parody, Compositional Techniques, Music Performance, Originality

Introduction

The Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria hold their culture in high esteem, particularly on the occasion of taking a wife or giving out in marriage. This special occasion is celebrated as a beautiful and unique expression of love and cultural heritage, as people from both sides of the family come together to celebrate the union of two families as their children decide to be committed to one another in marriage. Music as a fundamental feature of the Yoruba ceremony serves as a form of cultural expression as it plays a significant role in their celebration. The culture of Ile-Ife, a subset of the Yoruba ethnic group, is expressed in music, which gives the group its unique identity. Through this art, unity and reunion are fostered among the attendees,

cultural awareness is promoted as people come together on this joyous occasion. As a result, Music plays a crucial role in traditional Yoruba marriage ceremonies, particularly among the Ife people, as it creates a relaxed, vibrant, and enjoyable atmosphere for all attendees. The intrinsic connection of music to the social texture renders it inseparable, which can be likened to a conjoined twin; the dissolution of one signifies the demise of the other. In other words, music holds a crucial place in our society, and it is hard to envision a society that could exist without a touch of it. Chukwuma (2024) posits that all societies have had some form of musical expression, be it ancient or modern. Music's significance is undeniable, and it continues to have a remarkable impact on individuals and communities today. In this symbiotic relationship, music functions as a potent medium for the representation and assertion of communal identities, offering a platform for the embodiment and celebration of collective heritage.

Olusola and Onyesiku (2019, p. 1) also affirm that music cannot be separated from people's culture. Music is one of the cultural elements that have distinguished Africa from the rest of the world because of its uniqueness and unparalleled aesthetics. Some forms of music hold a profound significance for specific cultural groups, eliciting immediate understanding and evoking deeply symbolic connections with the people who own the culture and such music. While some individuals may respond to such music with dance, others may enter states of high levels of emotion or spiritual ecstasy. For instance, individuals who are well-versed in the musical traditions associated with Ogun worship, and are deeply immersed in its rituals and beliefs possess the ability to comprehend and interpret the nuanced messages conveyed through instruments such as Agogo. Unlike someone who may perceive such music as merely enjoyable with a danceable rhythm without a deeper understanding of its cultural significance. This underscores the uniqueness of African musical traditions, highlighting their integral role in the lives of communities and the profound impact they have on individual experiences.

In light of the foregoing, Ibekwe (2023, p. 125) opines that African Music can neither be fully elucidated nor better conceived or appreciated outside its functional and utilitarian point of view. People who make, perform, listen to, and appreciate music determine what is called music; in other words, it is the society that determines and defines what her music should be like. Consequently, Vidal (2002, p. 2) observed that music over the decades has been established to be one of the crucial arts cultivated by humans for the growth, nurture, and transfer of their institutions and values to future generations. Hence, music undoubtedly has been a crucial and useful part of African culture and society at large, which is attached to every activity from cradle to grave. As a child grows up in Africa, each of his or her developmental stages is marked with different music. In the same vein, Vidal (2012) opines that music functionally constitutes an interactional mode with which people entertain themselves. From the foregoing, culturally grounded entertainment is a common phenomenon in traditional marriage engagement among the Yoruba. For instance, singing of nuptial songs and chanting of bridal poetry, otherwise known as epithalamiums, had always been an interesting part of the Yoruba marriage engagement ceremony that every girl who was yet to marry looked forward to, but in recent times, things have changed. The young women of today often display little or no interest in traditions such as epithalamium (i.e., a song or poem celebrating a marriage) and various chants. Some of these women choose to move in with their future husbands prior to the wedding, expressing a desire to gain greater assurance of their compatibility through

observation before fully committing to one another. This practice, however, was once viewed with disapproval in earlier times.

In this article, the focus is on the music of traditional marriages among the people of Ile-Ife, a Yoruba community in southwestern Nigeria. Generally, there was virtually no communal activity in Africa that could be done without music. Nketia (1975, p. 20) buttresses this assertion by saying that in traditional African societies, music is generally organised as social events, e.g., coronations, festivals, rituals, funerals, marriages, etc. Hence, music is a very useful art in society and can never be ruled out in any social event such as marriage. This ethnographic study, however, intends to examine the musical practices exhibited by the *Alagas* (the Wedding Coordinator) during traditional marriage engagement ceremonies, using Ile-Ife environs as a case study. The presence of *Alaga* during marriage engagement ceremonies cannot be overemphasised, as their performances usually brighten and add to the glamour of traditional marriage engagement ceremonies among the Yoruba. In addition, the study intends to unravel the musical practices employed by the *Alaga* during such events as their activities and practices have been underexplored.

Theoretical Framework

Performance theory by Richard Schechner (2001) is based on a comprehensive approach to analysing human performance in various cultural, social, and artistic contexts, which enables an understanding of the roles of music within cultural rites and ceremonies, such as traditional marriage engagements. This theory emphasises the performative aspect of social practices, including music, dance, and theatricality, and examines how these performances construct and communicate cultural meaning and identity. This theory allows for an exploration of how music functions in African society. Richard Schechner (2001) posits that performance study theory is a lens through which human behaviour and cultural expression can be well understood. He stresses that it is important to study performance as a process rather than focusing solely on the end product. He, therefore, highlights the dynamic and transformative nature of performances as a way to understanding the ceremonial performance, exploring the cultural meaning and embodiment. In this context, understanding the ceremonial performance implies analysing the music of traditional marriage engagements and examining how the music, dance, gestures, and other performative elements are orchestrated to create meaningful and transformative experiences for the audience.

Next, in exploring the cultural meaning, the study engages with various genres of music to contextualise the cultural meanings entrenched within the musical practices of the *Alaga*, which may facilitate or contribute to understanding how music is being performed and expressed during Yoruba traditional marriage in Ile-Ife, including how the music communicates to the audience. Lastly, the nuances of embodiment represent holistically the diversity of expressions, of how the celebrants (the Bride, Groom and the Families) through body movement, facial expressions, and many other conveyors of meaning, emotions, and intentions accept the practices and performances of the *Alagas*. In the context of music adaptation and adoption, this aspect allows investigation of how the musical expressions and styles are adapted to different songs to suit the occasion, culture, social, and individual identities. Additionally, studying audience responses to embodied performances of music can provide insights into the affective and sensory dimensions of musical experiences, highlighting

the embodied nature of musical reception and interpretation. Therefore, performance study theory as a theoretical framework enables a comprehensive insight into the elaborate relationship between music, culture and social life in traditional marriage engagement ceremonies in Ile-Ife.

Alaga (The Marriage Coordinator)

In traditional Yoruba marriage engagement ceremonies, usually, two women would anchor or coordinate the ceremony; they are known as *Alaga Iduro* and *Alaga Ijokoo*. These women make sure that certain peculiarities are considered during marriage engagements. Their roles include but not limited to taken care of different cases, for instance, if the bride and the groom are not from the same ethnic group, i.e. the bride may be an Igbo lady while the husband is a Yoruba man, the *Alaga* engage few elements of both cultures and nuances of cultural difference in their performances e.g., in greetings and costumes. Moreover, people of the same ethnic group (Yoruba) who came from different communities, e.g., the bride is from Ile-Ife while the groom is from Ijebu, might not have fully understood why some things are done in a way that is different from what they are used to. It is the job of these *Alagas* to explain in clear terms to both families the differences between the two sub-cultures. The main job of these women is to serve as spokespersons for the families they represent. They also make sure that the engagement items which are very significant to the ceremony are complete and all of the procedures are duly observed. Whoever violates the rules is sanctioned accordingly.

There are some rules governing *Alaga* craft that all the members engaging in this craft must strictly adhere to; therefore, anyone who has the intention of joining the craft must strictly adhere to those rules as well. The first rule is that on no account must any of them be religiously biased. In other words, the audience must not be able to identify the *Alaga* and say categorically that this *Alaga* is a Muslim, Christian or Traditionalist. They must at least have some basic knowledge of those religions mentioned above. In case of having anyone belonging to any of those religions among their audience, they must be able to carry such a person along. The second rule states that whenever you are given a responsibility to anchor any marriage engagement, no matter how close you are to the family, you must always dress well, and it is also compulsory to be in the best state of mind. If not, the work should be entrusted to another *Alaga* who will eventually bring returns to the initial *Alaga* that was invited.

Musical Practices in Marriage Engagement Ceremony

As Barz and Cooley (2008) have noted, musical practice refers to the collective activities, processes, and cultural behaviours associated with the production, performance, transmission, and reception of music within specific communities. This concept encompasses how music is embedded in everyday life and how it reflects cultural values, beliefs, and social structures. In line with the above statement, the *Alaga*, being a cultural practitioner and musician, performs music in such a way that reflects cultural expression and identity, symbolism and ritual, transmission and improvisation, and social function and community cohesion. These dyad combinations do not only express joy but also reflect respect, community bonds, and ancestral reverence as they maintain cultural continuity through music. One example of cultural heritage is Yoruba orature in wedding engagement. It is necessary to look closely at Yoruba orature and other nuances of the marriage engagements as they form connected roles in the *Alaga* practices.

Generally, orature is a body of poetry, tales, songs, folklores, etc., preserved through oral transmission as part of a particular culture, especially a preliterate one. It is a blend of oral and literature; thus, orature is also known as oral literature. Yoruba orature is a large corpus of unwritten works that have been transmitted orally from generation to generation before the advent of Euro-Western civilization. Yoruba folk songs and folk poetry constitute a great source of compositional resources for the engagement coordinators. The *Alaga* have employed *oriki orile* (family origin poetry), *oriki adaje/oruko* (personal poetry), *oriki idile* (clan poetry), *oriki ilu* (town poetry) in order to praise people, their families, their lineages, and their hometowns. This is one of the most profitable practices in their craft. People respond to this by spending lots of money for the *Alaga* as they perform, and this qualifies the *Alaga* as modern-day griots—making money through music by praise-singing. Below is an excerpt of *oriki orile* of Ijebu, and when used by the *Alaga* creates identity and familiarity for the Ijebus.

Oriki Ijebu

*Ijebu, omọ ere niwa,
Omọ olowo isẹmbaye,
Kowo kukuji to gbode,
Koto dọwọ ẹru, koto dọwọ omọ,
Iran-an 'jẹbu ti n nanwo dollar
K'oyinbo to kowo de
Oyinbo lode lowo ohun pọsi
Omọ ẹleyinkule adewure
Orisa jẹn dabi onile yi,*

*Ni wọn fin pe
Itọ Ijebu owo,
Kẹlẹbẹ Ijebu owo,
Igbe Ijebu owo,
Ito Ijebu owo,
Otun Ijebu owo,
Osi Ijebu owo,
Iiwaju Ijebu owo,
Eyin Ijebu owo,
Kekere Ijebu owo,
Agba Ijebu owo,
Dudu Ijebu owo,
Pupa Ijebu owo,
Gbogbo Ijebu ti mo mọ lo lowo lọwọ o
Ijebu Ode Ijebuni, IjebuigboIjebuni
Ijebu Isara Ijebuni, Ayepeljebuni,
Ikorodu Ijebu Ijebu naa ni,*

*Ijebu n le o,
Omọ ere niwa*

Translation

Ijebu, offspring of noble character
Offspring born into prosperity and opulence.
Before currency went mainstream
Before anyone obtaining it
The *Ijebu* have been using dollars
Before Briton introduced currency
Britons' arrival boosted the currency.
The children with a bountiful backyard.
May the gods favour me as they do the master of
this house.
Hence the saying:
The *Ijebus*, considered their saliva valuable
The Ijebu mucus is considered valuable
The excrement of the Ijebu holds value.,
The *Ijebus* consider their urine to be valuable
The right side of an Ijebus holds value.,
The left side of an Ijebu holds value
The fore of an Ijebu individual holds value,
The rare of an Ijebu individual holds value,
Ijebu youth are affluent.
Ijebu adults are affluent
Dark-skinned Ijebu are wealthy.
Light-skinned Ijebu are wealthy.
All my *Ijebu* acquaintances are wealthy
Ijebu Ode and Ijebu Igbo
Ijebu Isara, Ayepe Ijebu
Ikorodu Ijebu, all of them fall under the Ijebu
category
Greetings to the entire Ijebu,
Individuals with admirable character traits.

Next to Yoruba orature are folk songs, traditional songs that have been passed down orally from one generation to another. Lots of Yoruba folk songs relating to marriage, love and family lives are being adopted by the *Alaga* in their craft. An example of a folk song that has been adopted by the *Alaga* in their practice is:

Song

I ha mo de be hi o
Onile, onile
I ha moja, a mo ta,
Ai baraja
Oluku ara la a se

Translation

We are all here
Our dearest host
We are not here to fight
We do not fight one another,
We are friends.

The song serves as an introductory anecdote for the marriage engagement as guests are already seated. Moreover, the Yoruba folk song corpus also includes songs for lineages, towns and some special names of individuals that have special cultural significance. For example, a song for twins by King Sunny Ade titled, "Èjire ara isokun" becomes relevant where a couple is a twin.

Song

Call: *Bi mo bab'ejire o*
Resp: *Inu mi a dun o*
All: *Èru o bami o rara o*
Aya o fo mi o lati b'ejire o
Ejire dara, mol'epo nile
Mo lewa lona o
Call: *Tayelolu ijo lowo*
Resp: *Ijo, ejire ijo lowo...*

Translation

If I give birth to a set of twins
I will be so glad
I'm not afraid at all
I'm not scared to give birth to twins
Twins are good, I have palm oil at home
I have beans in the house
Tayelolu dancing is your business
Dancing is the business of the twins

This particular song is renowned for its ability to stimulate twins and inspire them to dance along with their loved ones "Èjire ara isokun" is often played at ceremonial gatherings, such as weddings, to pay tribute to esteemed individuals who are twins or have twins in their families. The song can also be used by the *Alaga* as a prophetic utterance for the new couple that their union will be fruitful.

The *Alaga* also adopts different kinds of songs from different genres, ranging from folk, fuji, juju, gospel, etc. For instance, when an *Alaga Ijokoo* wants the groom and his family to notice the beauty of the new bride, she may start by eulogising the girl- *omọ dara o dejo, omọdara oniwa, Funke t'okunrin ko lona to busekun, toni beleyi o ba jaya eni asi jale e ni* – (meaning, the beauty that got people talking, a beautiful girl with good character, Funke is so beautiful that every man would want to have her as a mistress if not a wife). She may eventually wrap up her praise poetry with a song like:

Song (Ada, First Daughter in Igbo)

Have you seen my beautiful baby?
Have seen my tomato baby oh (iye le)
Baby softly dey cool me temper Ada (Ada baby is softly cooling my temper)
Baby na sugar, sugar iyoo (This babe is sweet like sugar)

Everybody dey wait (Everybody is waiting)
Put a kene n'ogbo (Come outside)
Ife dimma amaka (Good thing is very good)
Better soup na moni kill am o (better soup is prepared with money)

This highlife song was originally recorded by Chinedu Okoli, popularly known as Flavour. It was released on the 30th of June 2013 by 2nite Entertainment. It is noteworthy that within a short time. The Alaga has shifted her performance from adopting praise poetry from the Yoruba orature to adopting the popular highlife song. In the adoption technique of the *Alaga*, love songs from any source become easy targets because the marriage engagement atmosphere presents itself as an atmosphere of love between two people and their families.

While adoption involves using the song in engagement as it had been composed originally, adapting involves substituting another text into any existing melody to make it fit into the marriage engagement situation. Thus, from experiential and epistemological evidence within the ambit of this paper, we can establish that the musical practices of the engagement coordinators majorly involve adopting and adapting music from:

- a. **Popular music:** *Popular music* constitutes modern commercial music, usually tuneful, up-tempo and repetitive, that is aimed at the general public and the youth market in particular. Popular music could be divided into secular and religious music. Secular popular music in Nigeria includes juju, fuji, apala, highlife, hip-hop, R&B, etc., while common religious popular music in Nigeria includes gospel music and Islamic popular music. A lot of songs have been adopted from secular popular music; for example, as the groom presents the engagement ring to the bride, the *Alaga Ijokoo* may sing a song to explain to the audience that he has sworn to love his bride forever:

Song	Translation
<i>Iyawo mi, ololufe mi</i>	My wife, my lover
<i>Ore mi, alayo mi</i>	My friend, my joy
I will love you forever	I will love you forever

Iyawo Mi

Timi Dakolo



This music is titled “Iyawo mi”. It was composed and performed by Timi Dakolo; the style is highlife, produced by Cobham Asuquo on the 12th of February, 2014. There are also songs adopted from gospel music (Christian religious popular music). An example of gospel music adopted when the engagement proposal letter was brought from the groom’s family: as the bride’s mother delivers the letter to her husband on her knees, the *Alaga Ijokoo* raises a song like:

Song	Translation
<i>A ti gba leta ayọ</i>	We have received the letter of joy
<i>A ti gba leta ayọ</i>	We have received the letter of joy
<i>A ti gba leta ayọ</i>	We have received the letter of joy
<i>Esu o ni fa leta wa ya</i>	Satan will never tear this letter

This is a gospel song that is very common among Christian folks. The song has been adopted by the *Alaga* to fit into the proposal letter delivery occasion.

- b. **Church Music:** church music constitutes songs that are fit for liturgical purposes in Christian worship. Adedeji (2007.p.92) identifies three forms of Christian music: psalms, hymns and spiritual songs—alluding to the bible in Colossians 3:16. The kinds of church music that have been involved in *Alaga* practices include hymns and praise-and-worship songs. Church hymns and praise-and-worship songs have grown to be commonplace music that resonates with the sensibility of the Nigerian populace because of a number of reasons. One of the reasons is that about half of the Nigerian population are Christians who live and interact with people of other religious affiliations. Another reason is that church music contributes a large chunk to the compositional resources of the popular music released by popular music artistes (who are Christians by religion), especially in genres like highlife, juju, reggae, etc. Such popular music artistes who have employed church music in their albums include King Sunny Ade, Chief Ebenezer-Obey Fabiyi, I. K. Dairo, Sunny Okosun, etc.

Thus, the use of church music in marriage engagement music by the *Alaga* is a welcome development among the Nigerian populace because the popular media houses such as the radio, television and various social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc. have contributed to the acceptance of church music consumption. Moreover, the practice of the *Alaga* (being a southern phenomenon in Nigeria) has been dominated by people from the Christian-based religion, as the Christian community constitutes a majority in southern Nigeria. These reasons contribute to the wide acceptance of church-oriented songs in marriage engagement music adopted by the *Alaga*. An example of an adopted praise-and-worship chorus includes:

Song	Translation
<i>Won yio la agbaye ja</i>	They will be known globally
<i>A o sin won bi oba ni</i>	They shall be served like a king
<i>Won de 'bi ti'ran won o de ri o</i>	They will get to where nobody has ever get to in their family
<i>Won yio la agbayeja</i>	They will be known globally

This chorus, which is an affirmation of faith, has been adopted in marriage engagement to prophesy greatness into the marriage of the couple. An example of hymns that have been commonly featured is:

Song	Translation
<i>O fun mi l'edidi</i>	He gave me a seal
<i>Gbese nla timo je</i>	I was owing a huge debt

B'oti fun mi o si rerin
Pe ma a se gbagbe mi

As he gave me, he smiled, he beamed
Saying don't forget me

This song, which is originally an affirmation of the salvation of the human soul sealed by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, has been adopted to portray the presentation of the betrothal ring as a seal of marital love.

Notably, there are modern institutional activities that have asserted their influences on modern institutions of social life that can never be overemphasised. For example, Western education has brought a school system, of which the first 9 years of attendance is mandatory by government directives. Thus, school culture is not new to the majority of people in Nigerian society. Some routine aspects of school life have been adapted into the music-making practice of the *Alaga*, including school activities like nursery rhymes and roll call. For example, there are many cases where the *Alaga* spices up the engagement using a nursery rhyme to shake up the groom and his friends.

Rhyme

Awon soldier kekere, won wankile
Won nkile lati 'danre titi de Ife

Translation

Little soldiers are matching
They are marching from Idanre to Ife

When this happens, they are to respond with a little military exercise, which in most cases sets the audience into a comical frenzy of laughter. In another instance, an example of class attendance roll call is adopted by the *Alaga*:

Call:

Alaga: Baba oko (Groom's Father)
Iya Oko (Groom's mother)
Egbon Oko (Groom's elder siblings)
Awon aburo oko (Grooms younger siblings)

Response

Present Ma
Present Ma
Present Ma
Present Ma

In this roll call situation, the *Alaga* acts as the class teacher while important figures in the groom's family are expected to act as her students—this is mostly done with an underlining rhythmic timeline, which contributes to an exciting but comic atmosphere.

Compositional Techniques

As Ammer (2004, p. 423) states, technique is a general term for the physical skills involved in singing or playing an instrument, such as hand and finger dexterity, breath control, etc. A musical composition designed to improve such skills is often called a technical study, exercise, or *étude*." Adedeji (2001) claims that individual compositional technique refers to the way each composer treats the materials at her disposal by highlighting one thing or the other. He further sheds more light on some African compositional techniques. Thus, on a broader scale, the technique takes a microscopic view of a particular element(s) of a piece of music, emphasising its uniqueness. Adedeji (2009) identifies compositional techniques employed in gospel music to include: repetition, improvisation and extemporization, variation (elongation, embellishments, and slurring), overlapping or interlocking arrangement, rearrangement, ostinato, imitation, parody, pathogenic source, dialogue, logogenic source,

coda/codetta, ululation, rap, bilingualism, multilingualism, onomatopoeia, nonsense syllables, stylistic jargons, 'kick-phrases', etc

In the works of the marriage engagement coordinators, the most prominent compositional techniques include repetition, extemporization, variation, parody, bilingualism (sometimes multilingualism), recitative, imitation, etc. For example, code-switching and code-mixing of Yoruba and English languages are very prominent in their speeches and songs (bilingualism). Sometimes, the presence of another tribe may call for a third language, creating a multilingual atmosphere. The use of gospel music also creates a multilingual atmosphere, as songs from other ethnic groups of Nigeria are sometimes featured. An example of bilingualism is shown in the song:

Song	Translation
Have you seen my beautiful baby?	
Have seen my tomato baby oh (iye le)	
Baby softly dey cool me temper Ada	(Ada baby is softly cooling my temper)
Baby na sugar, sugar iyoo	(This babe is sweet like sugar)
Everybody dey wait,	(Everybody is waiting)
Put a kene n'ogbo	(Come outside)
Ife dimma amaka	(Good thing is very good)
Better soup na moni kill am o	(better soup is prepared with money)

In this song, bilingualism is evinced in the mixture of Igbo and Nigerian English (a mixture of Standard English and Pidgin) languages. The Yoruba atmosphere in which the song is employed turns the whole linguistic interplay to multilingualism as the Alaga tries to interpret the text of the music.

Extemporisation is not only a compositional resource for the engagement coordinators but also a common practice. They do not strictly work with a finished script. For example, the presence of an important personality who is not part of the original script can alter the course of performance because ignoring such means losing the opportunity to make lots of money. In such an occasion, songs or poetry will have to be generated to praise the person, and little time will have to be created to accommodate that. This is one level of improvisation. Also, any impromptu demand by the clients of the *Alaga* has to be responded to with practised improvisatory skill. They must not be caught unprepared for any sudden demand. They have to find or create a suitable song to fit the occasion. An example of this is evident in this song by a protesting Alaga:

Song	Translation
Ara yin le n nalowo	You are lavishing money on yourselves
Ara yin le n nalowo	You are lavishing money on yourselves
Awa nko	What about us?
Tayelolu koju sibi	Tayelolu look here
Alaga lo n ba yin soro	Alaga is talking to you
Kowo b'apo ko nawo fun mi	Dip your hand into your pocket and lavish money on me

This song reflects the protest of a disgruntled Alaga who felt side-lined in the money-making scene.

Imposing new texts and new context on pre-existing tunes is also a commonplace in the *Alaga* practice. This constitutes parody as a compositional technique. In marriage engagement performances, *Alaga*, through this technique, can adopt melody from any genre of music: Highlife, Juju, Fuji, Senwele, Waka, Gospel, and folk songs. They impose new text on existing melodies to suit the occasion. Since parody is prevalent in marriage engagement coordinators' practice, it is pertinent to study it in greater detail.

The Use of Parody

Alaga in marriage engagement premise most of their compositions on existing melodies. They rely mainly on a method called parody for their compositions. For instance, when the *Alaga Ijokoo* wants to deliver the engagement items brought by the bridegroom and his family to the bride's family, she sings related songs to show the activity that is taking place at the moment. A song like this could be sung:

Song

*Ẹwa wohun tọkọ 'yawo gbewa,
Ẹwa wohun tọkọ 'yawo gbewa,
O fowo rẹ ra, ohun to dara,
O gbe wa sile ana rẹ.*

Translation

Come and see what the bridegroom has brought
Come and see what the bridegroom has brought
With his money he bought good things
And brought them all to his in-law's house.

This rendition is a parody, whereas the original version is an evangelical song which portrays God as a supernatural being who does not make empty promises. The song goes thus:

Song

*Ẹwa wohun ti Jesu se;
Ẹwa wohun ti Jesu se
Alewilese, Aleselewi
O ran iranwo rẹ siwa*

Translation

Come and see what Jesus has done
Come and see what Jesus has done
One who is able to fulfil all His promises
He has sent us His help

Another example of an adapted tune by the *Alaga Ijokoo* is heard at the arrival of the groom at the scene of the engagement ceremony. As the spokesperson for the bride's family comes out to welcome him, a song could be raised to show that she is bent on collecting the gate fee.

Song

*Ọkọ 'yawo show colour e
Niwaju alaga
Ọkọ 'yawo show colour e
Niwaju alaga
Ajo ma logba yipẹ o
Yungba yungba*

Translation

Bridegroom show your colour
Before the engagement coordinator
Bridegroom show your colour
Before the engagement coordinator
Our togetherness shall be forever
Enjoyment galore

The song was originally composed in the 1990s by King Wasiu Ayinde Marshal (KWAM 1), in one of his records titled *Consolidation*, whereas the original song is:

Song

Baby mi show colour e
Ka jo maa gbadun
Baby mi show colour e
Ka jo maa rocky
Ajoma logba yipe o
Yungbayunga

Translation

My baby, show your colour
That we may enjoy together
My baby, show your colour
That we may rocky together
Our togetherness shall be forever
Enjoyment galore

Having dissected the compositional techniques involved in the practices of the engagement coordinators, we can engage in some intellectual incubation in order to extract holistic relationships among the elements and determine the overarching styles embedded in marriage engagement music.

Styles in Engagement Music Performance

According to Ammer (2004, p. 423), in music, style is a term used for the composer's manner of treating the various elements that make up a composition—the overall form, melody, rhythm, harmony, instrumentation, etc.—as well as for the performer's manner of presenting a musical composition." The style of both composer and performer is influenced by many factors, personal and historical. As discussed and exemplified so far, *Alaga*, in marriage engagements, are versatile performers when it comes to anchoring ceremonies. This is so because of their exposure to current social trends, which they are able to incorporate some songs from various musical genres such as juju, fuji, gospel, highlife, Yoruba orature, etc. into marriage engagements of nowadays. Being a multi-genre phenomenon, it will be difficult to attribute a particular style to the practice of the *Alaga* in a simplistic form. Yet, it will also be an oversight not to comment on their style of performance. From the epistemological evidence discussed so far, we can attribute an eclectic style of performance to the *Alaga* based on Adedeji's attribution of eclectic style to gospel music artistes who feature many music genres in their works.

Yoruba praise poetry works are not just empty sound manipulations; many of them contain oral history. Thus, the use of lineage poetry and hometown poetry by the *Alaga*, for example, portray them as a modern repository of oral history like the traditional griots. Moreover, like the traditional griots, they do not just memorize Yoruba orature for the fun of it; they engage the knowledge to make money during their performances. However, unlike the traditional griots whose repertoires are limited to pre-existing oral corpus and extemporisation, the *Alaga* have inexhaustible resources from modern popular media to tap from. An avalanche of recorded music works exists in all kinds of transferable recorded media; live works can also be broadcast or streamed on the radio, television and the Internet.

Much like the traditional griots, every knowledge acquired by the *Alaga* becomes a tool to make money. From the foregoing, it is very pertinent to attribute griot style to the practice of the *Alaga*. Although they are paid to perform, they make more money in the course of performance by adopting the attributes of African traditional griots—or better put, Yoruba traditional griots. The griot's money-making mentality of the modern-day marriage engagement coordinators has thus earned them the attribution of the griot style.

Another style attributable to the practice of the engagement coordinators can be deduced from the drama involved. Style, as revealed in the definition given, is an 'overall' phenomenon—involving how all elements are presented as a functional whole or reflecting

on deductions from the patterns prevalent in their performances. Generally, African music has been said to possess multidimensional attributes involving drama, costume, dance, etc. The degree to which other extramusical elements present themselves in any musical event varies according to the context of the performance. In the context of the performance of the engagement coordinators, lots of dramatic elements (plot, scenery, diction, etc.) are involved from the beginning to the end; hence, their practice can be said to present itself in a *dramatic style*. In the overall structure, there is a subtle display of a reconciliatory protagonist-antagonist partnership between the two contending and complementing coordinators (*Alaga Iduro* and *Alaga Ijokoo*) in a peaceful rivalry drama.

Individual Style: Originality

Individual originality can be described as unique ways in which a musician or composer expresses personal creativity and innovation within the context of a musical tradition or genre. Wiggins (2020) posits that African musicians express individual originality through distinctive variations in rhythm, melody, vocal tone, and improvisational skills while staying connected to the cultural aesthetics and symbolic meanings of their community's music. This originality is seen in *Alaga's* music performance as they enhance communal music rather than depart from it, reflecting a balance between personal expression and cultural continuity.

There is a popular slang or street parlance among the Yoruba that says “*abinibi yatọ si ability*”, meaning that natural endowment is different from acquired skill. Some scholarly works also affirm the above statement. Langer (1948.p.191), for example, claims that physiological and intellectual instincts that incite musical composition and performance in a person can be from innate tendencies or genetic configurations. Kunst (1958.p.2) in Merriam (1965.p.85) proposes that a song could be composed by a person, some personalities or a group of people. Mosing et al. (2021) corroborated the above scholars by stressing that gene is associated with musical traits or skills that help in relating to auditory processing, memory, motor coordination, or creativity that could influence musical abilities such as pitch perception, rhythm perception, improvisation, or musical memory. Each person is born with an in-built ability for music, which could be developed with the help of training. Some people are specially gifted, which makes them exceptional. Most of the *Alaga* who perform during marriage engagement ceremonies are naturally talented, and most of them also undergo some training. For instance, in the oral interviews, some of them confessed that they were once choristers in their churches, and a few of them have music albums/tracks to their credit. These engagers also listen to music of different genres to broaden their horizon as far as music is concerned.

There is an adage in the Yoruba language that says: *aja iwoyi lo mo ehoro iwoyi le*, meaning that ‘it is only the dog of the present time that knows how to chase the rabbit of the present time’. In other words, those who will be relevant in anchoring marriage engagements today must be versatile with what is currently trending in the world of music. For instance, in most of the marriage engagements attended by the researcher, the *Alaga Ijokoo*, in one way or the other, sang *Ada, Ada*, by Flavour. This song is basically in Igbo language. Some of the spokespersons said that the song is popularly demanded by the brides; therefore, they have no choice but to learn the song and search for the meaning to know the appropriate application.

The *Alaga*, through listening to music (from the oldies to the present-day songs), go through self-updating all the time, apart from learning skills from their mistresses and having inbuilt abilities. Nketia (1975, p. 59) stresses that natural endowment and individual ability to

develop on his own are essential to improving musical skills. The *Alaga* makes use of the existing tunes and recreates them in a skilful way to pass the message across to their audience.

Having identified that the marriage engagement coordinators have a wide variety of materials to choose from as compositional resources, it will be easy to admit that their performance cannot be stereotyped. The main structure of events may be similar; the songs employed depend on *Alaga*, her peculiarity of what the audience demanded of her. For instance, Notably, individuals of significance such as the bride, groom, or distinguished family members may request specific songs from the *Alaga*. Additionally, the *Alaga* may proactively identify a person of affluence among the attendees, she will immediately dispatch apprentices to gather pertinent details such as their name, place of origin, familial lineage, and musical preferences. Armed with all this information, the *Alaga* skillfully tailors the musical selection to resonate with the identified individual's preferences, thereby enhancing the overall cultural ambience of the event.

Thus, originality is easy to attain. Some ideas are the original creativity of a particular *Alaga*, but since there is neither patent nor copyright, they become commonplace if they appeal to the sensibility of the people and the other *Alaga*. The kinds of songs an *Alaga* employs as she manipulates materials from the vast avalanche of compositional resources in a way that is not only unique but also commands acceptance become the yardstick to measure originality and individuality.

Ammer in *Facts on File Dictionary of Music* (2004, p. 407) also posits that “the performer’s style is influenced by talent and experience as well. Further, both composer and performer are influenced by history, by the music of the past and of their own time.” From this understanding, no two engagement coordinators can be talented in the same way; neither can they have the same kind of experience. For example, an *Alaga* who has been a lead singer since childhood has an edge over another who starts singing because she wants to be an engagement coordinator. Similarly, a woman who was born into the lineage of traditional griots well versed in the art of praise-singing poetry (*akewi*) cannot be easily rivalled in that art because of a few years of training as an *Alaga*. Thus, originality of style can only be better appreciated in singling out particular engagement coordinators in a comprehensive study, which is beyond the scope of this present work.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the musical practices observed in marriage engagement ceremonies in Ile-Ife, detailing the process of adopting and adapting music within these ceremonies. It highlights the remarkable abilities of the coordinators, commonly referred to as *Alaga*, who oversee traditional marriage engagements. These individuals possess a natural talent and skilful singing abilities, along with griotic capabilities enabling them to recite the oriki of the bride, groom, their parents, and notable attendees. Throughout their performances, they occasionally present original compositions to assess audience reception, swiftly transitioning to well-known pieces if necessary to maintain engagement. Some of them has their own composition, and they are willing to teach the audience, time constraints often limit their ability to do so extensively. Additionally, they exhibit a special talent for adapting songs to suit the specific occasion.

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