

The IGBA Dance of IJELE Masquerade and the Role of ONYE OJA (The Flutist): A Musical Note and Sculptural Representation

Ephraim Ugochukwu¹ and Olusola Samuel Akintunde²

¹Ph.D, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of Environmental Science, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi, State, Nigeria

²Department of Music, Faculty of Humanities, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi, State, Nigeria

Abstract: A festival is a friendly event that presents a variety of performances and exhibitions at different venues or at one venue but at different times. The duration of festival may be one day or many eventually span to days or weeks depending on the content and sponsorship (Mokwunyei, 2005). Virtually, every festival has its characteristics or associated music and dance which can be found to occur along with other ubiquitous music and dances to give colour and tone to the festival. It appears that the issue of some of our cultural heritages are going into extinction and gradually becoming a thing of the past. At present, we find a lot of people especially those living in urban cities, travelling back to their various home towns to take part and celebrate festivals like the new yam festival, traditional masquerade festival, marriage ceremonies among others. As various scholars clamored for cultural revival, less emphasis or attention is given to the analyses of these cultural display, especially the *Igba Ijele* masquerade dance festival activity and the flutist who add pep to the *igba* dance, which also contains the total summary of the philosophy of the northern Igbo Anambra world view. The flutists adds flavor to the dance, this is what inspires this gentle giant to move, dance and glide freely as the spirit thrills the audience and spectators. It was also discovered that during the *Ijele*'s performance, less attention is always placed or given to the *Igba Ijele*, also known as *Igba memo* (dance of the spirit). No other masquerade dances to the *Igba Ijele* except only the *Ijele*. The paper seeks to analyze the music derived from the *Igba Ijele* and what makes it different from other *Igba* dance, while It also creates a miniature sculptural piece of the flutist. The nature of reportage would be analytical, descriptive, and also more of documentation.

Keywords: Department of Music, Faculty of Humanities, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi, State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The general belief of the African people about masquerades is, they are spirits of dead people, who have come back to stay with the people, intervene, provides protection and punish offenders before the eyes of the people. As it is rightly defined by Akubor. Most African society's masquerades are associated with ancestors, good will and governance. They defended and safeguarded society and accordingly prevented all potent threats to their existence and that of related institutions. In every culture there are certain ideas explicit in the interaction of different elements which in turn sometimes act as an instrument of social control with which different cultural segments held together, this is why the people believe in a complex structure of spirits and ancestors influencing the living (Akubor, 2016).

In traditional African believe system, sound and music in masquerade display, plays an important role. This is cherished, utilized, and sometimes avoided as it is implicated in Igbo life to such a degree that "at any time of night or day in Igbo land, somewhere some music is sounding" (Emeka, 1991). It is an avenue of expression in Igbo land that can easily be traced to the ceremonies, festivals and social activities, which not only are replete in Igbo life but also are integral with their attendant music and humanly organized sounds (Okafor, 2005). Apart from

music playing important part in ceremonies, one cannot rule out the vital part of the visual aspect which makes the ceremonial display come to actualization and most time the performance is always successful, such as the apparatus used by the performers. These are always visible in masquerade displays which vary from culture to culture.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The origin of the Omambala people is not quite clear, and history has it that it was as a result of the Exodus, mass movement of the tribe of Israel, following the instruction from God, which led to their migration from Egypt to various parts of the world. Some of them came to the confluence of River Niger, known as Omambala River. According to 2006 Census, Omambala people were more than four million, and ranked 10th of the 36 states of the federation (Jannah, 2014).

Anambra State is an anglicized version of the original Omambala; the native name of the Anambra River. The origin of its name is derived from the Anambra River (Omambala) which is a tributary of the famous River Niger. The capital and the seat of government is at Awka. The indigenous ethnic groups in Anambra state are the Igbos, which form 89% of the population and a small population of 2% of the Igala, who live mainly at the north-western part of the state. The

people of Anambra State share boundaries with Delta State to the West, Imo State and Rivers State to the South, Enugu State to the East and Kogi State to the North. This northern part of the Omambala area is where the *Ijele* masquerade activity is most popular, (Maduagwu, 2013).

Origin of the Ijele Masquerade

A dance group called Akunechenyi from Umuleri and Aguleri community in Omambala area started the practice of the *Ijele* masquerade. The first village in which the dance was introduced was Umuatuolu village of Umueri, followed by Igboenu Aguleri, Nsugbe, Nneyi Umueri and Naando. *Ijele* masquerade activity is popular among the communities of the Omambala area of Anambra State, which comprise; Anaku, Awka, Omor, Nsugbe, Aguleri, Umuleri, Awkuzu, Nteje, Ogbunike, Nkwelle-Ezunaka, Umunya, Achalla and other neighboring communities (Nwa-Ikenga, 2011).

Nwanna (2007) believes that, the origin of the *Ijele* is similar to that of most Igbo masquerades, which is still obscure, while Okachi (2015) is of the view that, in ancient times about forty-five masquerades performed on top of the *Ijele* masquerade.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The problem of this study is that the researcher has not seen or encountered scholarly writing on the *Igba Ijele* (musical tunes), and what makes up the instruments. They have also not been able to highlight the role of the *Oja* flutist who adds flavor to the performance, but have made attempts to talk about the *Ijele* and performances alone. The *Igba* is actually the sound that the *Ijele* listens and dances to, *Ijele* masquerade is not like other masquerades because of the unique nature, and accumulation which comprises of the interpretation of the Anambra *Igbo* philosophy world view. The ability to highlight and talk about the *Igba Ijele* would draw more attention to *Ijele* as a music fit only for the *Ijele*. *Ijele* represents joy, love, peace, amity, goodwill, friendship, harmony, togetherness, among others.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted was participant observation. The researcher observed masquerade

performances especially the *Ijele's* performance from a distance and participated in other group activities. Internet, personal interviews were granted, newspapers articles, journals, magazines, novels, books, televisions and radio programmers that viewed and aired masquerade activities were consulted and used for this research. Primary and secondary sources of data was adopted for this research. Studio creation of the miniature sculptural piece of the flutist.

Sources of data were the primary and secondary sources. The primary source was direct and firsthand evidence about *Ijele* activities and events. The researcher was introduced and acquainted with object of art works used for creating the *Ijele* through personal communication, historical documents, audio and video recordings were not left out. While the secondary sources are discussed with notable individuals that were artist and scholars that have written extensively on the *Ijele* masquerade. Information publications such as textbooks, magazine articles, book reviews, commentaries, encyclopedias were equally not left out.

Performance

***Ijele* Music:** The *Ijele* has its special music and dance popularly known as *Igba Ijele* (drums of *Ijele*) used for musical accompaniment when in performance musical instruments include four different sizes of drums, metal gong (*Ogene*), long drum (*Ubom*), Rattle (*Uyo*), wooden gong (*Ekwe*), and flute (*Oja*) among others.

The study lays emphasis on *Igba Ijele* and the *Oja* (flute), and attempt to analyze *Igba ijele* and the important role played by the flutist, onye oja. The Igbo **Oja** is known as **flute** in English translation. *Oja* is a musical instrument used by the Igbo ethnic group residing in south east region of **Nigeria**.

Analysis of Igba Ijele Music

- Men, women and children are involved in the performance.
- More audience/performers are involved.
- Here, about four different rhythms are displayed:

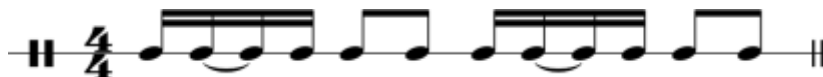
- a) The first rhythm has this timeline played by two musical instruments – shakers and tambourine:



b) The second rhythm goes with this timeline by shakers:



c) Rhythm three has the same timeline as Igba Eze:



d) Rhythm four is an augmentation of the timeline used in rhythm three. (Augmentation is a compositional technique used to double the value of notes in a melody, theme or motif than were previously used)



In *Igba Ijele* the values of tones are being doubled. Compound notes are used in the music according to the score, there are other instruments including the shaker that played the time line of the music.

Significance of the *Oja* (Flute)

A flute is a musical instrument that produces sound when a stream of air is directed against the edge of a hole, causing the air within the body of the instrument to vibrate (See Plate: 1). Most flutes are tubular, but some are globular or other shapes. Some flutes are played by blowing air into a mouthpiece, which directs the air against the edge of a hole else-where in the flute. These instruments, known as whistle flutes, include the tubular recorder and the globular ocarina. Other flutes are played by blowing air directly against the edge of the hole. Flute is one of the oldest instruments around, and one of the most diverse. Flutes have existed since prehistoric times. A fragment of a cave bear thigh bone containing two holes, discovered in Slovenia in 1995, is believed by some scientists to be part of a flute used by Neanderthals more than 43,000 years ago. It can be found in every culture and parts of the world. Among many health benefits, it notably promotes good posture, proper and healthy breathing, core strength and control, and finger dexterity. Flute playing requires a high degree of patience and discipline, The flute is not just an instrument for the orchestra. It is found quite frequently in jazz, folk, and world music. It can be used effectively in settings ranging anywhere from a church service to a home recital to a rock concert. The flute has been proven to increase cognitive and perceptual skills.

(Encyclopedia.com, 2018, and Powell, 2017). As seen in fig. 4. According to Schoolmusiconline.com (2023), when a flutist play, the lower lip is rested on the lip-plate to blow air across the blowhole. The flute has three main parts: the head joint, the body and the foot joint. The system works with the keys to make sure the right keys go up or down, this is quite deferent from the wooden *Oja*.

The *Oja* is an African flute. It is a small wooden aerophone musical instrument. It is about 18cm in length. See fig. 3 and Plate 1. It is carved and perforated with two pitch holes on the sides with a hollowed cavity that runs through it. The mouthpiece is designed in a “U or V” shape. The pitch holes are controlled with the first and index finger of the player to determine the pitch. The usage of *Oja* is mostly for chanting and praise singing and eulogizing than it is for playing songs. Just like some few African musical instruments, the *Oja* plays the role of speech surrogate. Unlike the European flutes, the *Oja* is just a one-piece musical instrument. It does not have any detachable part. *Oja* has its origin from eastern Nigeria and is often used with Nigerian instruments such as the *ekwe*, *udu*, *igba*, gong and shakers. This unique whistle ‘talks’ while drummers drum and dancers dance. During masquerade dances in eastern Nigeria, the *Oja* player leads the drumming and praise singing. An *Oja* master is be able (sic) to produce several sounds directly analogous with spoken words. Dancers also move to the tune of the *Oja* flute as if it were a drum or other rhythmic instrument. If an

important person enters the performance space, the *oja* flutist may use this instrument to announce the name of such person. (Motherland.com 2022). For one to understand the *Oja*, one must be attentive, calm, and calculative. According to Chukwudera (2021) “The ability of the *Oja* to communicate with a person is deeply tied to spirituality, since the music does not involve the use of spoken words, just the same way two people deeply connected, can communicate through sign language and silence”. He further enumerates, that Igbos have this fictitious narrative about a great wrestler called *Oja Adili*, who after beating every wrestler known in the land of the living, led by the

music of the *Oja*, he headed to the land of the spirits and successfully wrestled with some of the finest wrestlers in the land of the spirits. He refused to return home and bragged that he wants to wrestle with their best and finest wrestler. The spirits came together, deliberated on how to stop *Oja Adili*, and sent him his *chi*, a wiry erratic spirit who lifted him up with one hand and flung him on stony earth. The *Oja* is so enchanting, and its spirit intoxicating, that it can lead men to perform great extraordinary deed, and at the same time it can lead a man to destruction. This is what the Igbo mean when they say “*Oja a dufuo dike*” (the *Oja* leads a strong man astray or destruction).



Fig 1: Igba Ijele performers with the Igba drum



Fig 2: Igba Ijele performers with the wooden gong



Fig 3: Igba Ijele performers with the iron gong and shakers



Fig 4: "Igba Ijele performers with the Oia flute



Fig 5: "Igba Ijele performers with the Ozuru-igbo gong



Fig 5: Igba Ijele performers with the Igba drum

The creative process was quite an experience, where the researcher engaged self in studio creation. Various steps and stages were taken to actualize this process. The first stage was, a mental contemplation of what form the flutist would appear, after gathering the information materials, there was no drawing, it involved a holistic approach, where the researcher modelled the form in clay. The image of the flutist has already been imagined and conceived then actualized.

1. The construction of armature with flexible mild steel rod.
2. Application of clay on the constructed armature
3. Systematic and gradual buildup of clay
4. Finished clay modeling
5. Prepared detergent with water ready to be used to aid the application of silicon on the finished clay model.
6. Silicon ready to be applied to the finished clay model
7. Application of silicon gel on the finished clay model, with the aid of the detergent for ease of manipulation.
8. Sim-line is created on silicon gel, already dried and ready for mother-mold making.
9. Plaster of Paris is applied on the second part of the mother mold, with the aid of the spoon
10. Removing the clay used for sim-line separation on the Plaster of Paris, in readiness to apply the second part of the plaster of Paris mold for mother mold.
11. Creating a lock on the sim-line separation, on the Plaster of Paris, in readiness the second part of the plaster of Paris application for mother mold
12. Removing the chipped-off particles of the Plaster of Paris for ease of lubricant application in readiness for mother mold making.
13. Application of lubricant on the Plaster of Paris for ease of separating the mother mold.
14. Separating the mother mold with a bread knife.
15. The Plaster of Paris, mother mold is separated and ready for the liberation of the trapped clay.
16. Silicon is cut at the sim-line with a sharp knife to enable it separated from the cast.
17. The clay is revealed inside the silicon, with the mother mold holding intact the flexible silicon
18. Silicon is properly washed with clean water, in preparation for casting.
19. Silicon is properly positioned inside the mother mold, properly tied in preparation for casting.

20. Polyester resin is mixed and poured inside the silicon, which was properly guided and secured inside the mother mold.

21. 22 The polyester is revealed inside the silicon and ready to be liberated from it.

22. 23 Finished filled cast of the flutist. Ready and fully patinated as presented in plate 1 below.

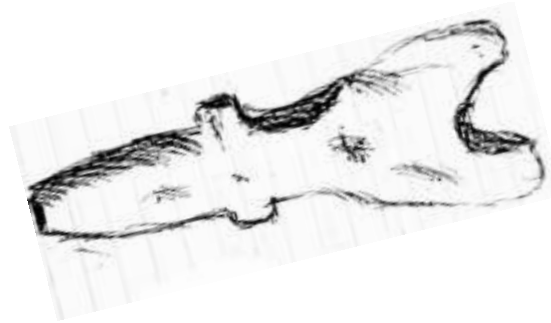


Plate 1: *Oja* drawing
Size: 15cm x 4cm
Medium: Pen on paper
Year: 2023.
Artist Collection



Plate 2: the finished cast flutist
Size: 18cm x 8cm
Medium: Fiberglass filled cast
Year: 2018.
Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study was able to do justify that the subject matter, which are the *Igba* music of the *Ijele* masquerade, the flute/ flutist and the sculpture inspired by the flutist. More traditional culture and their practices should be encouraged, this would project our African society to the larger world, this would eventually lead to preservation, documentation and posterity. If we do not begin to talk about our own, no one will tell the story better. Other sources reportage may not be accurate except when it is gotten from the right source.

More jobs can be created if cultural heritages can be identified and replicated in 3 dimensional miniature sculptural piece by artists. This would also generate revenue for the artists and the country at large. Likely beneficiaries are museums, students of arts, collectors and art lovers.

REFERENCES

- Cunliffe, A.L. "Reflexivity, Learning and Reflexive Practicereflection And Reflexivity." Sage Publications. http://uk.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/32441_01_Bolton_3e_Ch_01.pdf (2009).
- Emechete, I.A. "The concept of the Deity in Africa Poetry." Ibadan, A.Y.S Press, Nigeria (2008): 65
- Ikwuemesi, C. "Uli renaissance in modern art." Crossroads: Africa in the Twilight. Abuja: National Gallery of Art (2000):10.
- Maduagwu, B.O.J. "Revised History of Umunze with Thee Intelligence Report of 1929 the Communities in Orumba North and South Local Government Area." Umunze, Anambra State: ANNYCO Publishers (2013): 422.
- Neff, K. D. "Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself and Identity." <http://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/SCtheoryarticle.pdf> (2003).
- Nwa-Ikenga, O. E. C. "Ijele Masquerade. Odinani the Sacred Art and Science of the Igbo People." www.igbocybershrine.com (2011): 2-5.
- Ogbechie, S, O. "From Masks to Metal Cloth Artists of the Nsukka School and the Problem of "Ethnicity." University of California Santa Barbara. http://www.aachron.com/editions/critical_interventions/components/com_p2dxt/data/03_07_ogbechiensukka.pdf (2009): 134.
- Okachi, E. W. "Rural Tourism Mophology: An Examination of Masquerades and Artistic Elements in the Rivers State Carnival." Zaria: The Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University. An Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis (2015):15-19.
- Okafor, C. "Female Power: Corner Stone or Central Subject in Igbo Mask Performance." Emergent Themes and Methods in African Studies: Essays in Honor of Adiele. Trenton: Africa World Press. <http://www.chiwrite.com/female%20power.html> (2008): 8.
- Widjaja, M. "Masquerades and Festivals." from <http://www.igboguide.org/HT-chapter9.htm>. www.thisdaylive.com (2011).
- Powell, D. "Ten Reasons why the Flute is an Incredible Instrument." <https://amimusic.org/10-reasons-flute-incredible-instrument/> (2017).
- Encyclopedia.com. "Music: Forms, Theory and Instruments." www.encyclopedea.com (2018).
- Chukwudera, M.C. "Oja, The Musical Instrument which Mirrors Igbo Individuality and Spirituality." <https://www.afrocritik.com/oja-musical-instrument-igbo/>. (2021).

Source of support: Nil; **Conflict of interest:** Nil.

Cite this article as:

Ugochukwu, E. and Akintunde, O.S. "The *IGBA* Dance of *IJELE* Masquerade and the Role of *ONYE OJA* (The Flutist): A Musical Note and Sculptural Representation." *Sarcouncil Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies* 2.2 (2023): pp 1-7.