

AFRICAN THEATRE:

STUDIES IN THEORY AND CRITICISM



EDITED BY
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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The Theory of Music in the Dramaturgy of a Play Production

Taiye Shola Adeola

Preamble

The use of music in a play production is governed by theories (principles) that must not be in tangent with the theoretical preoccupation of the play production but must directly amplify and buttress the intentions of the playwright been projected by the production crew. Play production as a process is enhanced by the appropriate use of music backed up with sound theory. Blending theory with practice will be more productive than practice void of theory. The use of music as a product of sound music theory must align with the theoretical preoccupations of a play production implied by the playwright in the script or adopted by the production crew as they try to realize the script. Alignment of both the musical and dramatic theories is therefore important for a successful play production.

Introduction

The symbiotic relationship of the performing arts (Music, dance and drama) manifests in the interdependence and interrelatedness of these trio in a play production. According to Folajimi (2014, p. 94) music is often inextricable from Nigerian drama. Nigerian dramatists often embellish their plays with songs and dances. Music in particular, be it vocal, instrumental or both have been found to contribute to the success of a play production in many ways. This same view has been expressed by Ikibe (2012, p.18) in his work, "Theatrical musicality in the works of Ayo Akinwale". According to him, Ayo Akinwale has distinguished himself with the use of music to develop and actualize his plays. Ikibe observed that as a playwright and artistic director, Ayo Akinwale made use of music extensively to actualize his plays to the extent that one would almost take his plays as operas although he is not academically trained as a musicologist or a music composer. Ikibe's observation about Akinwale amplifies the use of music by dramatists in a play production.

The complementary role of music as it relates to drama or a play-text cannot be over-emphasized in its uses and functions. This is a carryover of the manner of presentation in the traditional African setting. Kofoworola and Yusef (1987, p.66) are of the opinion that "The theatrical manner of presentation is consistent with the traditional context and concept of presentation and any separation of the various elements involved can be seen as being out of tune with the traditional concept of aesthetics". In discussing the relationship of music and dramatic presentation, Bowskill (1973, p.47) states as follows:

Music is a major weapon in the theatre and can be put to powerful use. It can arrest the attention of the audience. It can also work with such skillful subtlety that the audience can be unaware not only of the music but also of the effect it is having on them.

Music performance is however, guided by certain principles whose application determine the effectiveness of the use of music in a play production just as theatre production is equally governed by basic principles. Therefore, the use of music in a play production is governed by theories (principles) that must not be in tangent with the theoretical preoccupation of the play production but must directly amplify and buttress the intentions of the playwright being projected by the production crew. The challenge of applying theory to practice in the performing arts is a reality that must be confronted especially in cross disciplinary approach to a single production in the context of a total theatre to which the African society is predisposed. The focus of this is therefore to discuss the theory of music in the dramaturgy of a play production by focusing on the uses and functions of music in a play production as well as the principles that guide the usage.

Theory of Music

A theory gives the premise or basis for thinking or reasoning about a thing, it is a general principle that guides or relates to a subject. Theory as a concept in music can be scientific or an abstraction borrowed from other fields or formulated within the confines of music as one of the humanities. The theory of music as used in this write up covers both theory as a technical term in the scientific study of music as it applies to scales, harmony, intervals, forms and so on as well as the application of ideas or principles from related fields like the social sciences to the arts and theories formulated in the musicological study of music especially in the area of performance studies.

Dramaturgy of a Play Production

Brockett and Ball (2004, p.307) opine that the scope of dramaturgy varies from one company to another but can be divided roughly into two parts namely: Literary management which involves finding, developing, or shaping scripts and production dramaturgy which involves working with directors on specific production of plays. Adeoye (2012, p. 26) asserts that dramaturgy ties the knot within the material and immaterial cultures for the physical interpretation of life. He states further that the process of realizing the product of all forms of performance can be located in dramaturgy; the dexterity, skill and technique used in theatricality. Cardullo (2005, p.4) submits that dramaturgy is the art of dramatic composition and the representation of the main elements of drama on the stage. We use dramaturgy of a play production here to mean the methods employed in the process of execution or

practical realization of a play script. This involves helping the playwright to achieve the full potential of their script as they conceived it or even more than they did through performance. The generation of conflicts and the resolution of same which are usually the preoccupation of any script and the deployment of dramatic elements to realize them on stage constitute the dramaturgy of a play production. According to Dasylva (2004, p.31) 'conflict and, in most cases conflict resolution, are central to a good drama. It is in the light of this fact that the heightening of conflict at the level of subject matter and topicality distinguishes drama from other literary genres'.

Theory of Music and Play Production

The use of music in the dramaturgy of a play production involves the practice or practical application of a theory of music to a play production to achieve the intention of a playwright as reflected in a script. Martin (1995, p.172) citing Howard Becker observes rightly that, all artistic work involves the collaboration of a whole range of people (musicians inclusive). Musicians and playwrights or directors do collaborate together for a successful play production. Bocket and Ball (2000, p.42) cited in Obianene (2007, p.128) has made reference to Aristotle's enumeration of the parts of the elements of drama in the discourse of the methods of organizing dramatic action as plot, character, thought, diction, music and spectacle. Plot, character and thought being basic subjects of drama are conveyed to the audience by the playwright through two means at their disposal: sound and spectacle. Sound includes language, music and other aural effects. That music was mentioned by Aristotle as one of the elements of drama underscores the importance of music to a play production. Bocket and Ball (2000, p.47) discussing music as an element of drama state that:

Music, as we ordinarily understand the term, does not occur in every play. But if the term is extended to include all patterned sound, it is an important ingredient in every product, though wholly silent.

The performance of music and its use in a play production is rooted in the mastery of the theories that guide it. Transferring theory into practice or demonstrating theory in practice strengthens and adds great value to performance. Obafemi (2008, pp.23-24) in his discourse on "The fundamentals of drama, theatre and performance" states as follows:

In distinguishing between play text and performance, between drama and theatre, one factor is of utmost importance: the relationship between practice (practitioners) and theory (theoreticians). In many instances, the dialectics of theory and practice exists in the same theatre protagonist.

Theory strengthens performance; therefore a theory based performance follows a set of rules and stands out because sound theory also helps in the realization of set or desired goals in performance. Having a theoretical basis for a play production clearly distinguishes between the traditional, popular and literary theatre practitioners demarcating the academically trained from the uneducated. Proper grounding in theory is important in realizing the thematic ambition of the playwright and actualizing the performance concepts and aesthetics of the production crew. However, transferring the theory into practice is of equal if not more important.

Folajimi (2014, p.95) is of the opinion that when music is incorporated into drama, the purpose is not often only for entertainment but also to enhance the realization of the playwright's thematic objectives. The music does not only add to the aesthetic and entertaining virtues of the play, it also contributes significantly to the playwright's realization of his thematic ambitions, there must therefore be a convergence and alignment of intentions in the dramatic and musical theories ensuring that both work in consonance to achieve the same purpose in a play production.

Music, when used is employed as one of the vehicles to drive the play to the destination intended by the playwright and must be guided by basic theories in music reflected in the choice of songs, text of the songs in the case of vocal music; the styles and genres of music, the choice of scales, moods, tempo, dynamics and so on; all of which must align with the dramatic theory or theories applicable to the particular play production. For example all of the components of music mentioned above are defined by the genre of play in which music is to be used. Obafemi (2008, p.20) submits that seven major dramas are often given in dramatic studies namely: Tragedy, Comedy, Tragic-comedy, Melodrama, Farce, Absurd and Epic. When music is deployed in executing a tragedy, its application will certainly not be the same as in a comedy or satire. With particular reference to scales which can be diatonic, chromatic major or minor, the mood, feeling of characters, actions, intentions and meanings of movements in a play production can be depicted in the choice and application of the scales. Whereas brilliant modes and scales can be used in comedy, the choice of minor modes, chromatics and atonality will punctuate a tragedy and heighten the impact on the audience. This is because each scale has its own peculiarity and generates special effects when rightly employed in a play production.

Grout and Palisca (1996, p. 155) in their writing on the power of modes assert that "The ancient philosophers held that composers could tap the listener's emotions by their choice of mode. Both Plato and Aristotle insisted that the various modes had different ethical effects". Modes refer to a type of scale system used during the medieval era on which western music of all types was based until about 1600.

It should be noted that historical occurrences in the development of music and drama at various periods or eras had influences on each other. Developments in the arts, literature, painting, sculpture and architecture especially overlap in their impacts. As expressionism, impressionism, classicism or romanticism, humanism and so on developed in literature with their characteristic features, they were also embraced in music, drama and other disciplines. Sadie and Latham (1985, p. 104) implied this in their discussion on renaissance music when they submit that:

Their music shows a change of approach, as compared with the previous generation's, analogous to that of Renaissance art... Such a change is not of course sudden; in painting, it is already hinted at in the work of Giotto (c1266 -1337) and his contemporaries, as it is in the writings of Dante (1265 -1321)... and in music (although parallels might be seen in the work of such men as Landini or Dunstable) it is only with the generation of composers active in the late fifteenth century that such a 'humanistic' element is regularly found.

To further illustrate the importance of theory in musical practice as it applies to play production and historical connectivity, we take for example the production of an Elizabethan play. Having a parallel music of the Elizabethan age to be used in a play production of the same era should not be a problem for a theoretically grounded musician because the same way the drama for that era existed, the music of the period also existed. Schofield (2012) identified theatre music as one of the five types from the Elizabethan Era. Others are England Court Music, Street Music, Town Music and Church Music and that music in this era reflected moods and emotions so they linked with arts and everyday pastimes. However, knowing what Elizabethan music sounds like with its peculiar features and the appropriateness for a play with the setting in that age will be a product of sound theoretical foregrounding.

As the dramatist thinks about the costume, props, designs, make up, language and so on of the Elizabethan age, the musician also gives serious thoughts to the musical instruments, style and genre of music, types of scale and harmony to be used that must fit into the era of the play production. Writing on "Elizabethan Music" *Gale Student Resource in Context* (Web.31 May 2016) states that:

Elizabethan music was comparatively more refined and sophisticated. Many new musical forms, including the madrigal and ayre, and instruments, including the viol, were introduced. Influenced by the development of theatre, music in this period became more expressive overall, echoing many types of moods and emotions.

About the use of music in play production in the Elizabethan period, the same source made the following submissions:

Music was also used to accompany the plays that had become a popular form of entertainment in the Elizabethan era. While music had been used to accompany poems in the medieval times, music began accompanying plays as they became more fashionable in the theatre, music was used to heighten the mood and plot, emphasize the drama, and sometimes provide special sound effects. The most prominent Elizabethan playwright, William Shakespeare, made hundreds of references to music in his plays and poems. His plays *As You like It* and *Twelfth Night* each included six songs.

Spens (1922) and Neilson (1909) identify the types of plays recognized in the Elizabethan era as histories or chronicle history, comedy and tragedy. Spens (1922) identified three characteristic features of tragedy of this era namely: 1. Tragedy must end in some tremendous catastrophe involving in Elizabethan practice the death of the principal character. 2. The catastrophe must not be the result of mere accident, but must be brought about by some essential trait in the character of the hero acting either directly or through its effect on other persons and 3. The hero must nevertheless have in him something which outweighs his defects and interests us in him so that we care for his fate more than for anything else in the play. The point being made here is that there is corresponding music that is suitable for the periods, settings, styles, genres and so on of a play production which music theory will enhance both in conception and realization.

Uses and Functions of Music in a Play Production

Decisions on how to deploy music in a play production by the musician takes the processes of studying and analyzing the script to know the musical demands; understanding the theories guiding the play production like the genre, directorial images, style of production and so on. This influences the decisions on styles of music to be used. Other processes include getting to understand the production requirement of the play; taking decisions on the choice of cast/singers which is done in conjunction with the play director as well as the choice of musical instruments and instrumentalists.

In making use of music in a play production dramatists bring in music at different points which can vary from one playwright to another. The uses of music in a play production are basically at the beginning of the play to open the performance. Dasylva (2004, p.112) commenting on Ogunde's drama states that "Ogunde's drama, which is characterized by long musical opening glees, stock cultural dances, acrobatic display, coupled with direct audience intrusion/participation, has come to be known as "Ogunde's tradition". Music is also used as part of the story line to emphasize or heighten the impact on the

audience; it is used as interludes to form bridges or fill gaps as well as sustain the interest of the audience and at the end of a play production as a climax. As we have observed in a previous work:

Music has been employed in the theatre over the years by theatre practitioners both at the level of conception and realization. While some playwrights conceive music alongside their script thereby writing out musical texts and tunes that are appropriate, others see music merely as an embellishment which is only adapted either at the point of writing the script or at its realization in performance (Adeola, 2000, p.189).

These four basic uses of music in a play production serve several functions as we have pointed out in this write up. Among the key functions of music in a play production are the following: entertainment, setting of mood and tempo, expression of feelings, punctuation of symbolic actions, heightening of emotions, reinforcement of dialogue, interludes to bridge gaps, sustaining the interest of the audience, announcement of key characters, building the plot, running commentaries or reacting to actions on the stage.

Conclusion

We have tried to discuss the place of music theory in the dramaturgy of a play production with emphasis on the uses and functions of music in the performance of a play. Conceiving dramaturgy of a play production in this discourse as the methods employed in the process of execution or practical realization of a play script which involves helping the playwright to achieve the full potential of their script as they conceived it through performance. Our submission is that play production as a process is enhanced by the appropriate use of music backed up with sound theory. It is our position in this chapter that blending theory with practice will be more productive than practice void of theory. With particular reference to music, it is our submission that the use of music as a product of sound music theory must align with the theoretical preoccupations of a play production implied by the playwright in the script or adopted by the production crew as they try to realize the script. Alignment of both the musical and dramatic theories is therefore important for a successful play production. It is therefore recommended that proper balance should be maintained between theory and practice in music and drama departments in order to produce balanced practitioners who can practically apply their theory in practice. The training of performing artists especially in the academic setting should be tailored towards creating sufficient platforms for grounding in theory and practice. A proper understanding of music theory will determine the appropriate use of music in a play production to achieve the desired functions of music in a dramatic performance.

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