

A STUDY OF BABA MIMO BY BODE OMOJOLA AS AN EXEMPLAR FOR NIGERIAN ART MUSIC COMPOSITION

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Abstract

This paper examines Baba Mimo, a choral composition by Professor Bode Omojola, as a pivotal example of Nigerian Art Music. It provides an analytical overview of the piece's melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic configurations, showcasing Omojola's innovative techniques, including quasi-bitonality and African pianism. By situating Nigerian art music as a genre that bridges African traditions with Western classical structures, the study argues that these works retain their Africanness despite external influences. It highlights the pressing need for proactive documentation of living composers to safeguard Nigeria's rich musical legacy. By dissecting Omojola's composition, this paper contributes to the understanding of NAM and inspires future musicologists to explore similar endeavours.

Keywords: Baba Mimo, Bode Omojola, Nigerian Art music, Composition, Techniques

Introduction

Many lives have been affected either by contacting or contracting music through the lives of those who music has made.¹We have only found this statement to be true from firsthand experience in our years of adventure as student musicologists and as music teachers at various levels of education up until the university. The life and music of music practitioners (Music teachers, composers and performers) has been very influential either directly or in directly on their students or those who appreciate their music when they are alive and long after they are gone. This ripple effect has continued to mould many people both in learning and character to become what they are today and also help them to continue the chains of influence.

Most of the known composers in the history of Western music, took a cue from an earlier composer. Maybe not in totality, but adopts one or two characteristic features from a senior colleague they admire. In some cases, a composer's life style is also reflective of his or her role model until he or she becomes a "clone" of the earlier composer. However, it will be almost impossible for us to appreciate the works of earlier composers if some people have not saddled themselves with the responsibility of exploring these works, engage in scholastic analysis and adopting the inherent feature that characterize them in creating another music. In actual fact, some of us in this generation would have known nothing about our ancestors in the art, and that would have hampered our capacity to do more in the present. So, it is expedient for us as music literates to dive into researching about the life and works of our forebears so as to preserve their legacy for future generations.

Professor Bode Omojola is a unique composer in his own rights, an erudite music scholar and a fantastic teacher who has greatly influenced younger musicologists in Nigeria and around the world. His works has been performed at many times in many places making him a well-known composer to people he hasn't even met. Although still living, he has done quite well-enough in the world of music that will outlive him. As Henahan opined, "someone who studied the life of a composer has a better chance of getting to the heart of a piece of music than someone who treats the score as an abstract piece of document"², this paper presents a brief biography of Bode Omojola because a closer gaze into the personality of the man may be helpful in grasping some of the environmental and emotive factors that might have influenced his works at various stages of his life. The foregoing, forms the justification for this scholarly effort that studies the composition of Bode Omojola.

Over the years, substantial efforts of Scholars like Omojola,³ have been geared towards the research of earlier Nigerian art music composers such as T.K.E. Philips, Fela Sowande, Ayo Bankole and the rest, but not much research has been done about some living legends amongst us. We believe that the research conducted about these ones while they are alive will be more valid than the research done after they are gone. The former will contain direct information from the primary source while the latter will only rely on secondary sources of information that may contain some elements of propaganda that will generate controversies. Very little has been done in the analytical study of Omojola's compositional works, therefore it is an open field of exploration for researchers and we consider it an honourable quest for us to embark upon.

This paper aims to document the autobiography of Professor Bode Omojola, elucidate his compositional style, and showcase notable techniques exemplified in his works. This paper is designed to contribute significantly to musicology in

Nigeria, especially in the area of Nigerian Art music. It showcases the ingenuity and innovations of Professor Bode Omojola as a leading Nigerian art music composer; highlights his compositional techniques; and encourage upcoming composers to adopt his compositional style.

The Need to Study Composers and Their Works

Bennet described musicologists as scholars of music who consider the relationship between music and various subjects including geography, aesthetics, politics, race theory, gender theory, neuropsychology, and more.⁴ Although he didn't specifically mention history and archaeology despite being a decorated forensic musicologist, We have chosen to count these as part of the "and more" because without the history of music, there is definitely a fault in musicology, this is affirmative in the American musicology society's definition of the word "musicology" as the study of music, encompassing all aspects of music in all cultures and all historical periods. History on the other hand, is the study of the human past as it is described in the written documents left by human beings.⁵ This definition with respect to music, implies that just as we could not possibly have had much to say about the music of the past if it had not been documented, there will be Little or nothing to say about the music of today if we do not document it.

As Huntington opines, that great music outlives the individual who created it.⁶ This is well said, but in reality, we have known the composers of virtually all the great music the world has ever heard because of the efforts of some people who have kept their record. Thus, the composer lives as long as the music lives. In the same vein, the coming generations will not know about the great minds that created the music of today if we don't keep a record of their life and times just has we have known about Guillaume De Machaut of the medieval period, Josquin Des Prez of the Renaissance, J.S. Bach of the Baroque, Beethoven of the Classical, Wagner of the Romantic era and Schoenberg of the 20th century – all owing to some people's effort. Although there has always been a part of the musicology profession that dwells on the essential irrelevance of biography in the study of a composer's work such as Legendary music historian, Eric Werner⁷ who wrote the biography of Felix Mendelssohn. Nonetheless, Elliot posits that it is extremely questionable to say that the personal circumstances or even the character of a composer adds nothing to the elucidation of the mysteries of their artistic creation.⁸ One can only agree with Elliot when we consider the documented analysis of Beethoven's *Fur Elise* and Mozart's *Cos I Fantutte* (to mention a few).

Nigerian Art Music (NAM) Composers

The phrase "Art music" in the context of this paper encapsulates all written or scored music, composed in line with certain universally accepted conventions and

guidelines,⁹ and it is the same in meaning with the term "classical music" as well used in this work. A glance at Africa from without and a view from within both stage Nigeria as being in the frontline of classical music in the continent. UK based Nigerian pianist, Rebecca Omodiah submitted that Nigeria Could be the Centre of Classical Music in West Africa, and one can only concur to that considering the massive array of quality art musicians (Composers and performers) that the country has produced in the span of one century.¹

Omojola parades a good number of prominent NAM composers beginning from the early twentieth century to the tail end of the same,¹⁰ letting us into their life, works and legacies. Bello presents a classification of the composers into four generations,¹¹ adding more to Omojola's compendium. Drawing from these scholars and the current realities, this paper presents a classification of Nigerian art music composers into five generations with a brief mention of their peculiarities and contributions to the Art music continuum in Nigeria.

The pioneer generation of NAM composers emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, heavily influenced by the advent of Christianity and the introduction of Western classical music through missionary activities. Known as 'Saros',ⁱⁱ these composers utilized their training to produce hymns and anthems that integrated Nigerian dialects into Western melodic frameworks.¹² Figures such as Josiah Jesse Ransome-Kuti and T.K.E. Phillips laid the foundation for NAM by blending traditional Yoruba influences with Western structures, paving the way for future innovations.

The second generation of composers thrived during the colonial era, playing a pivotal role in shaping NAM through the incorporation of indigenous musical elements like folk tunes. Culminating in the works of Fela Sowande, regarded as the father of modern Nigerian art music, this generation championed trends such as indigenous hymnody and native airs.ⁱⁱ Sowande's compositions, including organ, orchestral, and choral works, exemplify a sophisticated fusion of traditional Nigerian elements with Western classical techniques.¹⁴ Other key figures include Thomas King Ekundayo Phillips, whose advocacy for Yoruba tonal systems enriched the harmonic language of NAM.

The third generation, advanced NAM in post-colonial Nigeria by introducing modernization and international exposure. These composers, many of whom received formal training abroad, expanded the genre's scope by integrating non-functional harmonies and operatic forms.¹⁵ Prominent figures such as Ayo Bankole and Akin Euba demonstrated innovative approaches like African pianism, which redefined the piano's role by reflecting African rhythmic and tonal textures.¹⁶ Other contributors, including Joshua Uzoigwe and Lazarus

Ekwueme, further diversified NAM by exploring new harmonic frameworks and thematic narratives.

The fourth generation emerged in the late 20th century from the academic institutions established by their predecessors. Trained largely within Nigeria, these composers contributed to the popularization and diversification of NAM by exploring secular themes and incorporating indigenous instruments.¹⁷ Techniques such as Quasi-Bitonicity and Idolor's Vertical Pentatonic Harmony,¹⁸ were prominent during this period. Notable figures include Wole Adetiran, Bode Omojola, Dan Agwu, and Femi Faseun, whose works demonstrate a commitment to preserving Nigerian cultural identity while embracing new creative possibilities.

The fifth and contemporary generation, reflects the dynamic evolution of NAM in the 21st century. This group includes both musicologists and professionals from diverse fields who have received formal or semi-formal training in music. They have expanded the horizons of NAM by integrating contemporary trends from both Western and popular music traditions. Innovative techniques such as Drumistic Pianoⁱⁱⁱ and African Vocalism^{iv} exemplify the creative potential of this generation. Composers such as Christian Onyeji, Stephen Olusoji, Tolu Owoaje, and Chinedum Osinigwe have successfully bridged the gap between NAM and popular music, enriching the genre's repertoire and cultural relevance.

From its origins in missionary activities to its present-day sophistication, NAM has continuously evolved as a genre that bridges tradition and modernity. Each generation of composers has contributed to this remarkable journey, ensuring that NAM remains a dynamic and reflective art form within the global musicological landscape.

A Brief on Bode Omojola as a Fourth Generation Composer¹⁹

Olabode Festus Omojola, born on June 6, 1958, in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria, is a globally recognized musicologist, and a prominent figure in the fourth-generation composers of NAM with a career spanning four decades across three continents. After completing his primary and secondary, Omojola pursued his passion for music at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, majoring in composition. His decision to study music was largely inspired by J. Faremi, the organist of the cathedral church in his hometown. Graduating as the best in his class in 1980, he briefly served at Ibadan Polytechnic before enrolling at the University of Ibadan for a Master's degree in African Music, influenced by Professor Sam Akpabot, who later motivated him to pursue a Ph.D. at the University of Leicester, England, focusing on Nigerian art music composers.

Upon completing his Ph.D. in 1988, Omojola returned to Nigeria to teach at the University of Ilorin, balancing academic contributions with activism. He was

instrumental in founding the Association of Nigerian Musicologists (ANIM) and served as its secretary from 1993 to 2004. After losing his position in 2002 due to union activities, Omojola's career found new global avenues, including prestigious fellowships at Harvard University, the University of Cologne, and the University of Ghana. Presently, he holds a distinguished position as a Five College Professor in the U.S., contributing to African Studies and musicology.²⁰

Omojola's compositional achievements are significant, with notable works like *Ìrìn Àjò (Odyssey of a Dream)*, an opera blending African percussion and symphonic elements, and *Studies in African Pianism*, a landmark project featuring pieces such as *Scenes from Yoruba Moonlight* and *Agidimo Dances*. His academic legacy includes six books, numerous articles, chapters, and reviews, alongside compositions and research that explore the intricate balance between African traditions and global music practices. His ability to synthesize indigenous Yoruba musical idioms with Western frameworks solidifies his reputation as a transformative force in NAM.

Analytical Study of *Baba Mimo* by Bode Omojola

Leave Us Not Holy Father (*Baba Mimo*) is the first among the *Three sacred Yoruba* pieces by Bode Omojola, which he published in 2003. It was composed for the Mount Olives Church in Ilorin. The piece has a unique form *A B C B A* which can be referred to as an arch form which is a structure for a piece of music based on repetition, in reverse order but the sections are not repeated verbatim but share thematic material. It can also be classified as a symmetrical *rondo* without intermediate repetitions of the main theme. *Baba Mimo* is a sacred choral work for *S.A.T.B.* choir and piano. The piece is in the key of *Eb* Major and started in common time with an anacrusis, having 74 bars.

Structural Format

SECTION	TEXT / MUSICAL THEMES	MUSICAL STYLE / ELEMENTS	STRUCTUTAL FUNCTION OF SECTION
Bars 1 - 15	Section A	All voices progressed in harmony, while the piano provided chordal accompaniment in the same rhythm with the singing voices, then did a bit of slow drumming pattern with the left hand	The lyrics is a plea for God's presence, hanging on his promises, while the solemn soundscape expresses a mood of surrender and helplessness.
Bars 16 - 37	Section B	A contrapuntal section with a phrasing	Continues in the same mood and feel with

		reference done by the Soprano and Alto, then a phrase that unites all four parts twice rhythmically	the first section only that the words express a deep worship to God and a declaration of his fatherhood.
Bars 38 - 51	Section C	Another contrapuntal section with plenty of melodic imitations and rhythmic sequences. The piano also joins the singing in counterpoint.	Brighter in color. Expresses confidence in God and the fact that there's none comparable with him.
Bars 52 - 59	Section B repeat	A repetition of section B with a different ending.	
Bars 60 - 74	Section A repeat.	An exact replica of section A with a slight difference in the Cadence.	

Melody

The melodies in this work are undulating, building from a lower pitch and ascending to a perfect 5th and major 6th before descending to end somewhere before (or higher than) the starting note. This style is obvious throughout the pieces of music until the end where the melodies return to the starting note or a note in the tonic chord.



The first four bars of the soprano part in “Baba Mimo” (Bars 1-4).

Omojola in this work, abundantly uses repetitions to emphasize new thematic statements and this also enables the listener to grasp the important lyrical messages an example of this is seen in the figure above.

Unitary motions are also employed to build up tension or heighten the anticipation of another thematic statement.



The alto part's unitary motion in "Baba mimo" (Bars 21-22).

There is also an abundance of sequential movements in the architecture of the melodies. There are both Rhythmic and melodic sequences throughout these work that makes the melodies memorable and easy to get along with.

It is worthy of note that Omojola's melodic contour in this work largely exhibit the tonal inflection of the Yoruba language in which the texts are written – although not strictly – but quite evident in the selection of the words he used to express the melody. This fact points out that his method of composition is melogenic. He writes down the melody first, and then sets words into the music. For example,

Melodic Intervals and Range

The pitch range of the main melodies are compound perfect 5th (19 semitones) for Edumare and compound Perfect 4th (17 semitones) for Baba mimo respectively. This range is spacious enough to make the melodies expressive.



The compound Perfect 4th range (B3-E4) of soprano melody in "Baba Mimo".

The minor and major seconds are common in this work and also the leap of a 3rd and that of a 4th are judiciously used. However, in most cases, the melody usually descends after the leap of a 4th and wider intervals. Another style that is noticeable in Omojola's work is how he craftily makes use of steps and leaps. The stepwise movements make the melodies tuneful and catchy while the leaps to create an excitement while ascending, and to create a kind of restraint in the mood when it descends rather unexpectedly.

Harmony and Texture

Primary chords are prominent in Omojola's harmonization of these two pieces. Conversely, there are few suspensions, extensions and secondary chords that makes the music simple and yet interesting. Unisons are used to pronounce the importance of the lyrical message in a particular section just as Handel did in the Hallelujah chorus despite the contrapuntal nature of the work.

Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass
Piano

Ba - ba mi - mo ma fi wa si le o Q - ba

V vi I IV iib IV I

mp

V vi I IV iib IV I

The vocal and piano harmony in bars 1-3 of “Baba mimo”.

He deployed the piano effectively and efficiently contribute to the overall harmony in this work. He managed to make the piano harmony functional despite its rhythmic percussiveness and awkwardly large intervals.

Pno.

The piano movement in bars 15-17 of “Baba mimo”.

In this choral work, Omojola showcases his expertise in free counterpoint by shifting occasionally from tonal harmony to free counterpoint (or fugue) and then goes back to maintain a stable homophonic or chordal progression (tonal harmony). This piece texturally displays a juxtaposition of polyphonic, homophonic and contrapuntal textures.

S.
ko s'Q-ba bi I-re ko s'Q-ba bi I-re ko s'Q-ba bi i ti Je-su

A.
ko s'Q-ba bi I-re ko s'Q-ba bi I-re ko tun s'Q-ba bi je-su o

T.
o ko ma si ko s'Q-ba bi I-re ko s'Q-ba bi I-re

B.
ko s'Q-ba bi I-re ko s'Q-ba bi I-re

Pno.

The contrapuntal (fugal) texture in bars 39-40 of "Baba mimo"

Scale and Modality

The main melody in this work is modal while the harmony is functional, establishing a feeling of bitonality. In an exclusive interview with him, Omojola explained this concept and gave reasons for this. According to him, indigenous Nigerian composers are fond of building their melodies on a pentatonic scale of 5 tones (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th degrees of a diatonic scale) and this makes our music sound alike, and if we continue like that, we will only be reinventing ourselves. Consequently, the concept is to place the main melody which is still pentatonic against other harmonic melodies that are wholly tonal. He named this concept of juxtaposing two separate but related systems as "Quasi Bitonality". As it is evident in this selected work, Omojola usually maintains the predominant use of 5 tones (pentatonic mode) in the main melody while the other melodies that harmonizes move freely across the diatonic scale and at times - a flake of chromaticism to flesh it up.

The E^b pentatonic scale used by the soprano melody in "Baba mimo"



The E^b major scale used in the harmony in “Baba mimo”

Rhythm

Similar rhythmic patterns are seen in all the parts. This adds to the simplicity of the overall soundscape. Polyrhythmic movements are seen between the singing voices, between the voices and the piano, and also between the left- and right-hand progressions in the piano part. The bass voice has a special treatment in this composition, especially in section B where it is given an independent rhythmic movement in its.

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S. a - wa o ma yin Q Ba - ba Ba - ba

A. wa gbo-pe gba - yin Ba - ba Q - lo run o

T. a - wa o ma yin o Q - lo run o

B. lu - wa lo - ke a wa a yin

Pno.

Polyrhythm in bars 18-19

Professor Bode Omajola presents himself in this work as a virtuosic exponent of Akin Euba’s concept of African pianism. He beautifully expressed the rhythmic feature of this concept that Christian Onyeji²¹ later theorize as “Drummistic piano”. He was able to synthesize the pulsative rhythm of the African drums and the bell rhythm of the idiophones with the piano and yet, produces a functional harmonic accompaniment for the singing voices.

Omajola also featured diminution and augmentation of short musical ideas (like a sub-phrase) between parts as a technique in his compositional buildup. This technique adds color to the music both rhythmically and harmonically. Also in

the rhythm, Omojola strategically uses dotted notes and syncopations to give his work a bouncy or hopping effect.

Textual Analysis

The beauty of African music as an art is not just perceived in the sounds but more importantly, it is seen in the message conveyed via the instrumentality of the text. In this section, the text of the work is examined in terms of the Language(s) used, the message it is communicating and then the translation of the text in English language.

Language

The matrix language in this work is the Yoruba language of southwestern Nigeria. There is no trace of code switching or code mixing. Textually, Omojola portrayed himself as a reserved composer because he did not only maintain the matrix language, he also avoided the effluence of modern-day contemporary Yoruba language that has been somewhat modernized. He firmly maintained his stance on the use of the language without any form of ambiguity. However, this rigidity in language can be tied to two factors. The first being the fact that this work have a serious theme and the words carry messages that are peculiar to, and are best expressed in that dialect. The second factor is that of the geographical location. Omojola was born and bred in an environment where the undiluted Yoruba is being spoken, and he was there at the time of the composition and more so, *Baba mimo* is specifically written for a church in that vicinity.

Interestingly, in consonance with the ideal Yoruba way of addressing God, Omojola in the text of this work always start the name(s) of God as a noun – or in any pronoun used to replace his name – with an uppercase letter. He is also fond of using interjections which either emphasizes the importance of a statement in his texts, or serve as a rhythmic fill-up. In *Baba Mimo*, "o" and "ye" are used as textual emphasis. This too, supports my suspicion of a prevalent use of the melogenic method of composition wherein the tune is composed first, and the text is written to fit into the melody. This may warrant the use of interjections to fill up apparent loopholes in the rhythmic configuration when the chosen words seem not to fit in perfectly.

Theme and Message

African music bursts with meaning. It functions chiefly as a carrier of messages, passing across a variety of emotions or feelings.²² In the texts, Omojola tended towards the Nigerian perception of God (the Supreme being) and their sense of worship. God in the scope of the Nigerian culture is believed to not only be the creator of all things, but sovereign, mysterious and yet, compassionate. Their dependence on him knows no boundaries, they practically wait on him for provision, safety, change of status and any need they can ever think of.

Translation of the Text

The tables below show the texts in *Baba Mimo* and their meanings in English language respectively.

SONG TEXT IN YORUBA LANGUAGE	TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE
<p>Section A</p> <p><i>Baba mimo ma fi wa silẹ o</i> <i>Obamimo ma fi wa silẹ o</i> <i>Iwo lo nipe ka maa sin O</i> <i>A be Oye Olorun</i> <i>Ma maje ka riya</i> <i>Iwo lo ni pe ka ma mi kan o</i></p>	<p>Leave us not, holy Father! Leave us not, holy King! You have told us to continually serve you We plead with you O God! Do not let us experience suffering You have told us not to be afraid</p>
<p>Section B</p> <p><i>Olorun o awa n juba re</i> <i>A ho a yo awa o ma yin O</i> <i>Baba Baba Baba Baba Baba</i> <i>Baba Awa n juba re</i> <i>Jesu wa gba yin wa</i> <i>Wa gbope gbayin Baba</i> <i>O ye ka ma yin</i> <i>Ka le niayo kikun Baba o</i> <i>Jesu wa gba yin wa</i> <i>Wa gbope gbayin Baba</i> <i>Baba o...</i></p>	<p>We adore You, O God! With a shout of joy, we will continually praise You Father, Father, Father, Father, Father We adore you Jesus, accept our praise Accept our Thanksgiving and praise It is our duty to praise You That our joy may be full Jesus, accept our praise Accept our praises Father O Father!...</p>
<p>Section C</p> <p><i>Ko s'Oba bi re</i> <i>Ko s'Oba bi iti Jesu</i> <i>Ko s'Oba bi Ire o rara</i> <i>Ko s'Oba bi iti Jesu</i> <i>Ko ma silayeyitabi orun</i> <i>Rara rara rara rara rara rara...</i></p>	<p>There is no king like You There is no king like Jesus No! there is no king like you There is no king like Jesus There is none, neither in this world nor in heaven Never, never, never, never, never...</p>

Findings and Conclusion

This paper underscores the importance of Nigerian Art Music as an artistic blend of African cultural identity and Western compositional techniques. By analysing Bode Omajola's *Baba Mimo*,²³ the research illuminates his unique methods, such as quasi-bitonality, African pianism, and the utilization of Yoruba linguistic tonal inflections in melodic structures. The findings accentuate the necessity of preserving and documenting the works of Nigerian art music composers while they are alive, emphasizing their monumental influence on cultural heritage and contemporary musical practice. Furthermore, it reaffirms the authenticity of

NAM as a genre deeply rooted in African tradition, employing Western methods without compromising its distinct cultural ethos.

Generally, this paper reveals that Nigerian art music has evolved significantly over the past 120 years, undergoing notable changes shaped by the collective efforts of individuals who have composed remarkable works, conducted extensive research, and championed its preservation through various platforms. Despite employing Western musical elements, NAM remains undeniably African at its core, retaining its distinct sound and expressing the unique cultural identity of its composers. Western forms and methods serve merely as tools to convey the essence of African musical art.

To critique Nigerian art music solely through European standards is to risk overlooking its unique fusion of African tonal inflections, harmonic depth, and rhythmic ingenuity, which vividly reflect the spirit of African artistry. Omojola, through his innovative concept of quasi-bitonality and his adept use of African pianism and vocalism, has successfully advanced the genre, firmly establishing its Africanness while distinguishing it from Western music and other world cultures. His efforts have ensured the preservation and continual development of Nigerian art music as a vital component of African cultural heritage.

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