



PROJECT MUSE®

African Pianism as an Intercultural Compositional Framework: A Study of the Piano Works of Akin Euba

Bode Omojola

Research in African Literatures, Volume 32, Number 2, Summer 2001, pp. 153-174 (Article)

Published by Indiana University Press
DOI: [10.1353/ral.2001.0060](https://doi.org/10.1353/ral.2001.0060)



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/29586>

African Pianism as an Intercultural Compositional Framework: A Study of the Piano Works of Akin Euba

Bode Omojola

The musical landscape in Nigeria has continued to witness the emergence of new musical idioms. These new idioms range from those that are practiced within the contexts of religious worships (both Christian and Islamic) to those that are performed as part of social ceremonies and in concert halls. The advent of both the Western-Christian and the Arabic-Islamic cultures in Nigeria has provided part of the basis for the emergence of many of these new idioms. The objective in this study is to focus on modern Nigerian art music, one of such new idioms. Specifically, we shall be studying the piano works of Akin Euba, one of the leading Nigerian composers of Art music. The phrase “modern Nigerian art music,” as used in this article, refers to the works of Nigerian composers that are conceived in or influenced by the tradition of Western classical music.¹

Composers from other parts of the continent, including Ghana, South Africa, Uganda, and Egypt, have also been writing works that are similarly conceived. In Nigeria, performances of such works usually take place in concert halls, church buildings, and college halls, following Western concert conventions. This new tradition of musical practice represents a significant change within the context of Nigerian musical tradition if we take into consideration the nature of audiences as well as the contexts of performances. This is an important point to which we shall return later in this study. As the foremost Nigerian composer of piano music and the man who first advanced the concept of African pianism, Euba presents the most articulate examples of the tradition. It is for this reason that this paper focuses on his works.

In addition to analyzing the structures of selected works, I shall be relying extensively on the views of the composer himself as a means of understanding the relevant conceptual origins of his compositions. Elsewhere, I have provided a fairly detailed exposition on the historical process that precipitated the emergence of new musical idioms in Nigeria, as well as a general introduction to their stylistic features (see my *Nigerian Art Music*). It is, however, necessary to locate the present discussion within the cultural framework of the musical situation in Nigeria. I shall therefore briefly summarize the historical process that led to the growth of the new idioms. Furthermore, although my *Nigerian Art Music* provided a biographical introduction to the lives and works of Akin Euba, there is need to relate my present analysis of his works to other elements of his composing career, especially those which bear direct relevance to the works under discussion. Brief biographical information is therefore presented here.

The historical process, which led to the growth of Western-influenced modern musical idioms in Nigeria, assumed greater dynamism with the

establishment of Christian Missionary stations in Badagry, near Lagos, and Calabar (southern Nigeria), in 1842 and 1846 respectively. The stations were two important points from which Christianity spread to other parts of the country. Lagos represented the city where most of the factors that shaped contemporary music in Nigeria were set in motion. The establishment of the European-imported Christian Church and the British political authority in Nigeria both facilitated the growth of European music. European church and classical music were introduced through the Church as well as through Missionary schools. The activities of both the Church and Missionary schools were complemented by the efforts of private philanthropic bodies that organized concerts and various musical and cultural activities especially when raising funds for the establishment of new schools. Such societies were formed and led not only by European missionaries and businessmen, but also by Nigerian ex-slaves who returned from the West Indies to settle in Lagos (see Leonard). In addition, the Church as well as missionary schools provided musical training for Nigerians in both the theory and practice of European music.

But the cordial relationship that existed among the various cultural groups in nineteenth-century Lagos and that had facilitated the growth of European music was not to last for long. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, many Nigerians, especially in Lagos, began to resent the dominance of the Europeans (see Crowther). The Christian Church became an important focal point for Nigerians to express their discontent. For example, Nigerians began to demand that Nigerian music, which had been banned by European missionaries, should be incorporated into Christian worship. Thus, although the church earlier provided an important medium for the introduction of European music, it later constituted the avenue for the emergence of Nigerian nationalist composers who sought to replace European liturgical music with a more culturally relevant corpus. Some of the early Nigerian composers of Church music were Ekundayo Phillips, the Reverend Canon J. J. Kuti, Akin George, Rev. T. A. Olude, Emmanuel Sowande (father of the late Nigerian composer, Fela Sowande), and, much later, Nelson Okoli and Ikoli Hacourt-Whyte (see Achinivu). These musicians later encouraged and trained a younger generation of musicians and composers who, with the benefit of professional musical training both in Nigeria and abroad, have composed considerable number of works in which African and European elements are combined. Composers within this new tradition include Samuel Akpabot, Fela Sowande (1905-87), Ayo Bankole (1935-76), Laz Ekwueme, Adam Fiberesima and Akin Euba, the focus of this study.

Euba was born in 1935, in Lagos, and was formally introduced to Western Music by his father, who was a pianist. He later attended the Church Missionary Society (CMS) Grammar School (now Anglican Grammar School), Lagos, where he received music lessons. In addition, Euba had private piano lessons from Major J. C. Allen, a colonial administrator in Lagos to whom he later dedicated his piano work *Scenes from Traditional Life* (1970). In 1952, Euba proceeded to study at the Trinity College of Music, London. He later obtained FTCL (piano, 1957) and

FTCL (composition, 1957). Euba's composing career began at Trinity College where he wrote an orchestral piece, *Introduction and Allegro* (1956), and *String Quartet* (1957). In both works he experimented with atonality. In 1962, Euba went to the United States to study Ethnomusicology at the University of California. According to him:

The atmosphere at UCLA was very suitable for composers wishing to experiment with non-western resources. We not only had theoretical courses in several of the world's musical cultures, but also had actual ensembles from these cultures in which we would play. My studies at UCLA indicated to me in what ways I, as a composer, could proceed. (qtd. in Uzoigwe 23)

It is no surprise that many of Euba's post-UCLA works maintain stronger links with traditional Nigerian, in particular Yoruba, musical procedures. Those works include *Three Yoruba Songs* (for baritone and Iya-ilu, 1963), *Igi Nla So* (for piano and four Yoruba drums, 1963), *Four Pieces (for African Orchestra, 1966)*, and *Olurombi* (for Symphony Orchestra, 1967). Prominent features of these works include the incorporation of the rhythmic nuances of Yoruba music and the use of European-derived atonal techniques. Euba has written for a variety of media, including solo songs, opera, orally conceived works, chamber works, and piano works. He belongs to the relatively new generation of African musicologists who are both researchers and composers. As pointed out elsewhere, there is a constant interaction between Euba's research work and his composing career (see my *Nigerian Art Music* 59). Publications emanating from his research have often helped to shed light on the nature of his compositional style, as will be evident later in this discussion. Following his study in the United States, Euba returned to Nigeria in 1966 and initially worked as a broadcaster in the Nigerian Broadcasting service before taking up appointment as a university teacher, first at the University of Lagos and later at Ife. Euba was the one who set up the music department of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), devising a program in which the teaching of African music occupied a central position.

An active research profile and a consistent composing career characterized his teaching positions at the universities of Lagos and Ife. In 1974 he gained a PhD in ethnomusicology after submitting a dissertation on Yoruba Drumming at the University of Legon in Ghana. His compositions of the period included *Chaka* (for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, 1970), *Dirges* (for speakers, singers, and African instruments, 1972) and *Two Tortoise Folk Tales* (for speakers and Nigerian instruments, 1975). What is significant about these works is that, unlike his previous compositions, they all explore the multimedia element of African music through presentations that adumbrate the total-theater tradition found in many African performances. Elements of that tradition, as found in his works, include the incorporation of the Yoruba Alo (music and storytelling) tradition, the incorporation of dance and costume, and the use of music to reinforce an extramusical theme. For example, the poem to which *Chaka* is set is homage written by Léopold Senghor to a famous nineteenth-century Zulu

warrior.² From 1986 till 1991, Euba worked as a research scholar at the University of Bayreuth, Germany. He is presently the Andrew Mellon Professor of music at the University of Pittsburgh in the United States.

Euba's professional career summarized above reflects a pattern within which European rather than African traditions dominated his earlier musical activities. For example, although he was born in Yorubaland, his first musical instrument was the piano. But in addition to Western music, Euba also became familiar with the syncretic works of Nigerian composers of church music as well as the works of pioneering composers of art music in Nigeria, notably Ekundayo Philips and Fela Sowande. The works of these composers were very popular in Christian and educational circles in Lagos especially in the 1940s and 1950s, the period when Euba was growing up in Lagos. It was not until he returned to Nigeria to work at the Broadcasting Corporation that he began to take an active interest in traditional Yoruba music. He further developed that interest at UCLA when he went there to study ethnomusicology. That interest eventually led to his PhD research in Yoruba drumming. Euba later realized the impact of Western tradition on his initial musical development and the need to make his works culturally relevant to his African background. But rather than abandon Western music, his interest in projecting African music led to his evolving a bicultural composing style, similar, at least conceptually to that of Philips and Sowande. We must, however, note that while the works of composers such as Phillips and Sowande provided initial models for those of Euba (for example, in the use of Nigerian melodies as thematic materials), Euba was to later develop a more Afrocentric style in his compositions. That style, as defined in African pianism, is a product of deliberate experiments that often reflect Euba's knowledge of Western and African (especially Yoruba) styles.

Euba's approach to musical composition reflects a strong desire to reinterpret elements of his native Nigerian, especially Yoruba, musical tradition in contemporary musical terms. His compositions often outline a bimusical approach in which European and Nigerian elements constantly interact. While his creative experiments reflect a liberal approach that is generally open to the use of foreign, especially European, elements, Euba has constantly been seeking fresh means through which the essence of Yoruba musical tradition can be effectively captured in his compositions.

As observed at the beginning of this paper, Euba articulated the concept of African Pianism in 1970 when he stated that:

For those composers interested in cross-cultural musical synthesis (there is) a line of evolution in the use of the Western Pianoforte in combination with African drums and other instruments of percussion. The Piano already displays certain affinities with African music, and by creating a type of African Pianism to blend with African instruments it should be possible to achieve a successful fusion. ("Traditional Elements" 55)

Almost twenty years later, Euba reiterated the concept:

A number of Western instruments have been adopted by Africans and may be on the way to assuming new identities as 'African' instruments. The behaviors of the lead guitar, rhythm guitar and bass guitar in neo-African types of pop music in Western, central and southern Africa are examples of the successful Africanization of Western-originated musical instruments. The Western piano is to my mind, another instrument that may well assume African characteristics. (*Essays I*: 149)

Akin Euba has gone further to define, in great details, his concept of African Pianism. As a result of its percussive potentials, the piano is particularly suitable for capturing the percussive and rhythmic nuances of traditional African instrumental music. According to him:

The piano, being partially a percussive instrument, possesses latent African characteristics. Techniques in the performance of xylophones, thumb pianos, plucked lutes, drum chimes, for which Africans are noted, and the polyrhythmic methods of African instrumental music in general would form a good basis for an African pianistic style. (*Essays I*: 151)

Euba has also articulated some of the stylistic ingredients of African pianism. According to him, they include:

Thematic repetition, direct borrowings of thematic material (rhythmic and/or tonal) from African traditional sources, the use of rhythmic and/or tonal motifs which, although not borrowed from specific traditional sources, are based on traditional idioms and percussive treatment of the piano. (*Essays I*: 151-52).

Close to thirty years since Euba introduced the concept of African Pianism to the music world, some African composers have written works that reflect the concept, while others have borrowed the term to describe their own creative experiments with the piano. The most notable example is the Nigerian composer Uzoigwe, who wrote a thesis and later published a book on the works of Euba. In Nigeria, Uzoigwe can be described as the foremost disciple of Akin Euba. Some of Uzoigwe's compositions for the piano (for example, *Sketches and Four Nigerian Dances*) have, like those of Euba, been conceived to simulate Nigerian (especially Igbo) drum language. Composers from outside Nigeria have been motivated by Euba's concept of African pianism. For example, in 1994, Kwabena Nketia, the leading African musicologist and composer, together with another Ghanaian composer, Gyimah Labi, released a recording of their piano works under the title *Studies in African Pianism*. Labi has also recently (1997) released a publication of his piano works under the title *Dialects in African Pianism*.³ The American composer Roy Travis, who became interested in African music partly through his meeting with his former student Akin Euba at UCLA, has also composed piano works that employ African procedures. A notable example of such works is the *African Piano Sonata*. Akin Euba himself has continued to promote African Pianism by performing his works inside and outside Africa. He has, for example, given

recitals of his works in Bayreuth (1989), Glasgow (1989), London (1990 and 1994), and Pittsburgh (1993).

The concept of African Pianism as articulated by Euba and explained above represents an intercultural compositional approach. Euba's compositions consequently belong to the category of intercultural music, since African (especially Yoruba) and European elements are often combined in them. According to C. T. Kimberley and Euba in *Intercultural Music, Volume 1*:

Intercultural music is that in which elements from two or more cultures are integrated. The composer of this music usually belongs to one of the cultures from which the elements are derived. (2)

It must be noted that there has always been an intercultural element in many examples and styles of music. We know, for example, that musical traditions from different parts of Europe and the United States have helped to shape the identity of Western classical music. The adoption of folk materials in works that are conceived in the idiom of Western classical music also represents some form of intercultural activity:

The music of Bartok, in which elements of Hungarian Folk music are employed, comes under this category. [. . .] Furthermore, the act of extracting folk elements from their local ethnic or social contexts and placing them in an international context where they have relevance for people outside the indigenous society is a fundamental aspect of interculturalism. (Kimberly and Euba 3)

Today, composers from different parts of the world, including Asia, Latin America, and of course Africa, have continued to enrich the European classical tradition by using elements from their own native musical cultures in combination with European elements. Furthermore, the popular musical traditions of the various parts of the world often represent different shades of intercultural activities characterized by a variety of musical elements from different corners of the world. But an intercultural musical activity derives not only from a syncretic musical structure:

For example, when an African composer writes a fugue in the style of Bach, in which he or she makes no use of African resources, intercultural activity takes place, but the music itself is not intercultural. (Kimberly and Euba 2)

It has already been observed that the intercultural character of the piano works of Akin Euba is bimusical, with African and European elements interacting together. We must add that African elements of his works are predominantly Yoruba in origin. There are, however, examples of his works in which elements from modern, pan-Nigerian or pan-African syncretic idioms are featured alongside Western elements. For example, materials derived from the West-African Highlife are featured in his *Waka Duru* (1987).⁴ The intercultural nature of Euba's compositions is therefore often multidimensional. On one level is the interaction between European

and African elements. Within the corpus of African elements employed in his works, however, considerable variety also often exists, with the result that another level of intercultural relationships is perceptible within the African elements of his works. For example, in the opera *Chaka*, two levels of intercultural interaction are decipherable. On one level is the interaction between African and European elements and on another level is the intercultural rapport within materials derived from different parts of Africa, including Nigeria (Yoruba), South Africa (Zulu), and Ghana.

The intercultural element of the works of Akin Euba and other similar African composers must also be seen from the perspective of the performance contexts of such works. As noted earlier, the growth of European and European-influenced classical music in Nigeria represents a fundamental musical change in the country. This is because the contexts of performances and the nature of audiences of Western classical music and of course modern Nigerian art music differ substantially from what obtained in traditional, precolonial societies. European as well as modern African art music is mainly designed for aesthetic listening. Thus, from the point of view of musical change in Nigeria, the conception of works along the contemplative tradition of European concert music is, on its own, significant. Unlike many traditional performances, modern Nigerian art music is seldom conceived as an essential part of social or religious ceremonies. The appreciation of modern art music therefore often calls for a greater element of contemplation, since members of the audience are usually clearly separated from the performers. In traditional contexts, it is not unusual for the audience to join in a performance, as a way of showing greater appreciation. Furthermore, in line with the nature of the music, audiences of modern art music are themselves intercultural in outlook and often have to rely on their knowledge of African music as well as Western music for full appreciation of the music of modern African composers. Thus, contexts of performances as well as audiences are themselves indices of musical change. In view of the discussion above, we shall now examine selected works of Euba, paying particular attention to the structural manifestations of African pianism in works that are representative of his style and also exploring the nature of the intercultural rapport that takes place in Euba's works and the way that rapport has provided the basis for the formulation of a distinctive and personal style.

Works in which elements of African Pianism have featured and which shall be examined are *The Wanderer* (for cello and piano, 1960), *Igi Nla So* (piano and Yoruba drums, 1963), *Saturday Night at the Caban Bamboo* (Piano, 1964, revised 1991), *Scenes From Traditional Life* (piano, 1970), *Waka Duru* (1987), and *Themes From Chaka* (1996).⁵ The dates of these compositions cover a period of close to forty years, making it possible for us to assess the pattern as well as the process Akin Euba's piano style has undergone over the years.

We shall begin our analysis from one of Euba's earliest works, *The Wanderer*.⁶ This work was written ten years before Euba publicly articulated the concept of African Pianism, but it is clear that the whole idea of using the piano to interpret elements of Yoruba music predates 1970.

The Wanderer, in its thematic and structural features, validates this position. The title of the work is derived from its central theme, a Yoruba traditional lament that focuses on the odyssey of a barren woman in search of a child. The connection between the title of the composition and the woman's travails is apparent. The words of the song, translated into English, are as follows:

I met three stones on the road to Ijofio,
 One pierced my foot, another told me to proceed with care,
 A third demanded, "where are you going in the dead of the
 night?"
 I replied that I am making rituals in respect of a child. (Euba,
Essays I: 132).

Euba's *The Wanderer* is a tone poem that focuses on the miniature plot presented in the song. It is difficult to miss the correlation between the often-restless character of the work and the story of the song. The preponderance of dynamic and metric changes is particularly crucial to the agitated character of the piece. Yoruba and Western influences combine to define the structure of the piece. These influences are noticeable in the formal conception of the piece as well as in its pitch structure

The formal outline of the piece can be seen as an *abridged-sonata form*, framed by a process of continuous variation. The work divides into two broad sections, the second being a variation of the first. Virtually all the thematic materials of the first section recur in the recapitulation. The absence of a development is compensated for in the continuous variations of thematic material. While the use of the Western-derived abridged sonata form helps to provide a structural anchor for the piece, there is a general freedom of approach in the presentation of material. This freedom is defined mainly by the use of a varied pitch structure that ranges from chromatic passages to those that feature Yoruba tonal elements. It is in the Largo section of bars 97-105 (Ex. 1) that the Yoruba theme appears in the cello part. In its charm and solemnity, the theme represents a perfect example of a Yoruba chant-song. Its distinctive features are a free chant-like rhythm and a modal identity noted for a general absence of semitones. The Yoruba identity of the theme is reflected in the accompanying textures, mainly through repetitive and parallel harmonies, usually in fourths and fifths, used as punctuating phrases. The use of repetitive and parallel harmonies continues until the end of the section. So does the anhemitonal element of the main theme. These two vestiges of Yoruba modal procedures, however, feature within the overwhelming chromatic language of the work. The interaction between anatonally directed chromatics, Yoruba-derived modal elements, and residues of Western tonality is a pervading element of the work, representing a principal means of generating and sustaining tension.

The piece consists of rhythmic and metric features commonly found in Yoruba traditional music. These include polyrhythm, syncopation, and staggered entries of phrases. In the exposition, these features are used within a structural framework in which there is a progressive complexity and

95

Largo

mf rubato

100

que- - - - -

imp senza rubato

cres. - que- - - - -

mf

5

105

dimo.

f

5

7

© 1974 by Akin Euba, Inc. All rights reserved.

Example 1. *The Wanderer*, by Akin Euba, bars 97-105, largo section.

stratification of texture. One notable feature of the three subsections of the exposition is the dominance of successively shorter durational units of movement in each. These are: a quaver in the first subsection (bars 1-56), a semiquaver in the second (bars 57-96), and a demi-semiquaver in the third (bars 96-132). Although the largo tempo of bars 97-132 offsets the tendency for an increasingly fast pulse in the exposition, the piece derives a more

active character in the second and third subsections through the abandonment of the unisons of the first subsection. Considerable tension is also generated through metric and tempo changes. Metric changes pervade the piece right from the opening bars till the very last bars. Furthermore, in addition to the constant dialogue between the cello and the piano, the piece, through an integrated use of dynamics, articulation (notably in the juxtaposition of legato and staccato phrases) and registral contrasts, evokes a multitimbral instrumental performance.

Considering the predominantly Western formal and pitch character of the piece, the Yoruba elements of *The Wanderer* are marginal to the total conception and style of the piece. What is significant about the piece is that it presents those germinal elements that were later to become more prominent in Euba's piano works.

In 1963 and 1964, Euba wrote at least four piano works. They included *Igi Nla So*, and *Saturday Night at the Caban Bamboo* (mentioned earlier) as well as *Four Pieces from Oyo Calabashes* (1964) and *Impressions from Akwete Cloth* (1964). A common feature of the titles of these works is their connection to some extramusical idea. The Yoruba phrase *Igi Nla So* refers to a major happening with a dramatic connotation. The phrase *Caban Bamboo* refers to a popular nightclub in Lagos, in the 1950s and '60s. The club was owned by the late Bobby Benson, one of Nigeria's most popular Highlife musicians. *Oyo* (a Yoruba town) *calabashes*, mentioned in the title of the third piece, are well known all over Yorubaland for the beautiful drawings or carvings usually found on them. *Akwete cloth*, mentioned in the title of the fourth piece, refers to a type of native handwoven cloth popular in Nigeria especially in the '60s and '70s. Was Akin Euba attempting a musical painting or a program of these extramusical references in each of the works? We shall answer this question as we take up each piece for discussion.

The Nigerian (especially Yoruba) connection of these pieces exists not just in name. Structural elements that reinforce their Nigerian background abound. *Saturday Night at the Caban Bamboo*, for example, is, in its opening section, striking for a formal arrangement in which the right hand plays an improvisation-like line over a persistent ostinato pattern of the left hand, as Ex. 2 illustrates. The ternary form of the piece is delineated when a metrically restless middle section relieves the ubiquitous ostinato pattern. The opening section is repeated, with slight variation, as the closing material. Other formal elements of the piece include the employment of a pitch structure in which there is no binding tonal goal, syncopation, a consistently percussive texture and polyrhythms. To illustrate the general features of these 1963-64 piano works, we shall examine *Igi Nla So*, the only one of the four works to combine the piano with traditional Yoruba instruments.

In addition to the use of Yoruba drums, *Igi Nla So* (for piano and Yoruba percussion instruments: *Gudugudu*, *Kanango*, *Iya-Ilu Dundun*, and *Kerikeri*) is also significant for another important reason.⁷ We have noted earlier that the phrase *Igi Nla So* (A big tree blooms) is a Yoruba phrase commonly used to describe an important, usually dramatic event.

According to Euba, in a personal communication with this writer, within his composing career, the work signaled the dawn of a new era and the choice of the title was

inspired by the break-through which I made in 1963 in discovering that I could give my music a strong African identity, by using African instruments in combination with Western instruments. It took some time sometime before I could hit on the idea. The idea was for me (at that time), like a big tree finally growing fruits.

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE CABAN BAMBOO
Akin Euba (1964 revised 1997)

$\text{♩} = 96$

The musical score is handwritten and consists of four systems of music. Each system is written on a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper line and a bass clef on the lower line. The first system begins with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 96$ and a dynamic marking of *f*. The second system includes a dynamic marking of *mp* and the word *sempre* written twice. The third system includes a dynamic marking of *mp*. The fourth system includes a dynamic marking of *mf*. The music features a complex rhythmic structure with many triplets and sixteenth notes, characteristic of Euba's style.

Example 2. Excerpt from *Saturday Night at the Caban Bamboo*, by Akin Euba.

In the work, traditional Yoruba drums are used to reinforce the African roots of a musical dialogue which relies considerably on the parameter of rhythm.

The four drums employed in the work are, as in traditional Yoruba contexts, conceived in a hierarchical order. Both the *Iya-Ilu* and *Kerikeri* are assigned their idiomatic roles: a continuously changing and fairly extensive melorhythmic line.⁸ The *Gudugudu* and the *Kanango*, on the other hand, tend to have a much more varied rhythmic line in Euba's work than usually obtained in traditional Yoruba ensemble contexts. The parts of the drums in the work are written in clefless notation. This is because the pitch vocabularies of these drums are not absolute, as they may change from one drum to another. In other words, the tuning procedures for these instruments are relative, changing from one instrument maker to another. The assignment of a limited number of tone levels to each instrument (see Ex. 3) is suggestive of a row system. In addition, as a result of the fact that the vertical and horizontal juxtapositions of drum melorhythms are not conditioned by the need to confirm a tonal center, the overall texture suggests an element of atonality. We can therefore conclude that the use of a random atonal procedure in the piano part of the work represents a parallel dialogue to the quasi-atonal tendency of the Yoruba drums.

An important feature of the work is the rapport between recurrent elements and those that undergo variations. This feature represents the hallmark of Yoruba drumming and constitutes the principal method on which the continuity of dialogue in Euba's work relies. The rapport occurs in many dimensions: i) between the repetitive tone levels of *Kanango* and *Gudugudu* on one hand and the relatively varied tones of the *Iya-Ilu* and *Kerikeri* on the other; ii) the balance between repetition and variation in the parts of both the *Kerikeri* and the *Iya-Ilu*. In the piano part, two recurring elements are used as unifying agents. These are the use of an unvarying interval sonority (such as the augmented fourth) and the use of recurring motifs.

The work is also characterized by a dynamic and highly stratified rhythmic texture. Notable elements of this texture include cross rhythms constant changes in meter and offbeat phrasing of melodic accents. One major element on which the rhythmic language of the work relies is the hemiola pattern which occurs on different levels: i) the juxtaposition of both the triple and the duple divisions of the beat as in bars 13 and 14; ii), the alternations of both the triple and duple meters, as in bars 31-32 (3/4, 2/4); and iii), the use of asymmetric meters as in bar 24 (5/8).

In the use of the rhythmic procedures outlined above, three main types of passages are presented: i) Passages that consist of regular pulse movement within an irregular metric background. Such passages are common in the piece. An instance is in the opening bars where although the meter changes, the quaver remains the dominant unit of movement. ii) Passages of irregular meter and multilayered pulse structure, as in bars 10-21, where, in addition to changes in meter, the division of the beat often combines triplets and two quavers. iii) Passages of relatively consistent pulse

IGI NLA SO

for Gudugudu, Kanango, Iya-ilu dundun, Kerikeri, and Piano.

for my Father Akin Euba (1963)

Moderato $\text{♩} = 120$

The score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes staves for Gudugudu, Kanango, Iya-Ilu, Kerikeri, and Piano. The second system includes staves for Gd, Kg, I-Ilu, Kr, and Piano. The piano part is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs).

Example 3. Excerpt from *Igi Nla So*, by Akin Euba, with assignment of instruments.

movement within a consistent metric background. This category is rare; the most notable one being the passage in bars 56-59.

The prevalence of the first two types of passage emphasizes the pervasively elastic rhythmic motion of the piece. It highlights the flexibility and tension inherent in the overall rhythmic flow of the piece. The location of passage iii in bars 56-59 is part of a wider rhythmic progression in the piece. Towards the end, there is a progressive reduction in the vertical density of texture. For example, from bars 52ff., the four-layered texture of the drums becomes less consistent, reduced to occasional punctuation of the piano part by the drums. Since the dynamic rhythmic character of the piece derives significantly from its stratified texture, the progressive reduction in vertical density lends to the piece an overall tendency towards a relaxed character in the last bars. Of importance, in this regard, are the shift of emphasis from the interval of the tritone to the unisons of bars 56-59 (also part of the reduction in vertical density of texture) and the focus on the perfect fourth in bars 61-63. These features (the cessation of two

important recurring motives, the shift of emphasis from the tritone to the perfect fourth, as well as the thinning down of vertical density) take place toward the end of the piece, providing a resolution to the preceding tension.

As mentioned earlier, it was in 1970 that Euba articulated the idea of African Pianism. Three important piano works written since then are *Scenes from Traditional Life* (1970), *Waka Duru* (1992), and *Themes from Chaka* (1996). *Scenes from Traditional Life* was the first work to be written after Euba's first public articulation of his concept of African Pianism. We shall therefore highlight some of the major features of the work.⁹ Commenting on *Scenes from Traditional Life* Euba states that:

The connection between the title and the work is nebulous and I do not now remember which came first, whether the title interprets the work or vice versa. More likely, the title developed in the course of the composition.

The composer admits the similarity between the title and Schumann's *Scenes From Childhood* adding that:

There was no intention then to depict specific scenes or even to objectively make a pictorial connection. What connection there is, is in the rhythmic composition and less apparently, in the percussive style.⁹

The title of the work (see Ex. 4) therefore reflects not a programmatic representation of traditional Yoruba life, but a pianistic evocation of the musical traditions that characterize Yoruba traditional music. From the level of conception, therefore, the work represents a continuation of the stylistic objectives of the previous piano works such as *The Wanderer* and *Igi Nla So*.

The work possesses a strong Nigerian character notably in its "rhythmic style and percussive use of the keyboard" (Euba, *Essays I*). Despite the generally atonal orientation of the piece, the regular use of ostinato and the recurrence of a stock of melorhythms in the work often help to create transient tonal allusions. The work consists of three pieces that, viewed collectively, outline a formal pattern in which the second provides the climax. The third provides a resolution mainly because of its repetitive dance rhythms. The third piece is particularly striking, its two most distinguishing features being the consistent use of ostinati and a structural outline that, as in *Saturday Night at the Caban Bamboo*, evokes an improvisational idiom. As a corollary to its improvisational character, sectional divisions in the third piece are vague. The piece moves in a cyclic form defined by the use of repetitive referential patterns (such as the ones shown in Ex. 2x and y). In addition, the piece is characterized by staggered entries of phrases within the bar and a frequent use of rests. Both of these accentuate the improvisation-like identity of the work.

The dynamism of the piece derives from the continuous invention of new motivic material while maintaining links with the preceding bars through regular references to such elements as Ex. 2x and y. The piece

Scenes from Traditional Life
for Piano

AKIN EUBA

$\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 60$

Example 4. *Scenes from Traditional Life*, by Akin Euba.

also derives expressive coherence from the fact that the interval properties of its phrases are united through their relationship with the row from which pitches are generated. The unity often relies on the regular use of certain intervals, especially the tritone, which is derived from the row. The prevalent use of an invariant chord color as a unifying element, in the midst of relatively diversified melorhythmic phrases, is integral to the total conception of the piece. Other features include the percussive use of the piano and a generally contrapuntal approach to rhythmic organization. As in the previous works, the use of these features emanate from Euba's attempt to capture Yoruba drum language.

The dual cultural heritage of Euba's compositions is clearly articulated in the title of his next major work for the piano, *Waka Duru*. The first part of the title, *Waka*, is a Hausa word meaning song, while the second part of the title, *Duru*, is the Yoruba coinage for organ and piano. We could therefore translate the title to read *Songs for the Piano*. Since all the themes

of the work are Nigerian-derived, the title could still read *Nigerian Songs for the Piano*. Unlike the previous works that rely mainly on the use of Yoruba traditional materials (in addition to Western elements), *Waka Duru* makes use of Nigerian musical materials from outside the Yoruba tradition. Furthermore, the work incorporates stylistic themes and forms associated with the Pan-Nigerian (and indeed) West African Highlife music. In addition, although most of his previous works generally retain a Western-derived atonal structure, Euba makes use of conventional tonal and formal structures that can be more readily appreciated by Nigerian listeners. Comparing the work with his previous works, the composer states:

I have introduced one or two new ideas, namely the use of actual Nigerian songs as thematic material and of a tonal style of melodic writing and less dissonant style of harmony. I have incorporated these ideas in an attempt to make the work more approachable to listeners in Africa. (*Essays I*: 154)

Waka Duru consists of three pieces. The first is based on a folksong of the Gbari people of Paiko in northern Nigeria, while the second piece is based on a Yoruba folktale song. The third piece is based on a popular Nigerian Highlife tune by Ambrose Campbell. The folk origins of the thematic material of the first and second pieces can be perceived in the overall structure of the pieces. For example, the call-and-response structure of the Yoruba song of the second piece receives considerable prominence throughout. That structure is also articulated in the cyclic pattern of the accompaniment in which a recurring rhythmic pattern is emphasized. In the third piece, the formal, harmonic and rhythmic features of the Highlife origin of the theme are pervasive. These features include the evocation of an improvisational idiom, the preponderance of diatonic harmonies and the use of harmonic-rhythmic ostinati.

The last work to be examined in this study is Euba's most recent piano work, *Themes from Chaka*. It is particularly instructive to examine Euba's latest approach to African pianism as reflected in the work. The opera *Chaka*, which provided the thematic and structural basis for *Themes From Chaka*, illustrates the different intercultural dimensions of many of Euba's works. First, the libretto of the opera is, as already noted, derived from a poem by Léopold Senghor. The focus of that poem and of course the libretto is the famous nineteenth-century Zulu warrior. Second, the operatic conventions employed in *Chaka* follow modern Yoruba neotraditional theatrical practices within which Yoruba chanter and dancers feature prominently. Third, the instrumental score of the work leaves room for different combinations of Western and African instruments. A recent performance of the work in Birmingham, England, featured Ghanaian bamboo flute, atenteben, Yoruba drums, and Western instruments, mostly woodwind and brass.¹⁰ The multidimensional intercultural musical element of the opera *Chaka* provided the basis for the conception of *Themes from Chaka*. According to the composer, the piano work does not represent a mere transcription of the musical materials of the opera. In a preface to the score of *Chaka*, Euba explained:

Themes from Chaka is not simply a piano reduction of the full score (Chaka), but an attempt to articulate some of the themes of the Opera in pianistic terms.

The pianistic style of the work is conceived along the lines of African Piansm since the work, like the other piano works by Euba, is conceived to imitate the rhythmic, formal, and percussive style of traditional African instruments. He added:

The themes used in this piano version are taken from the prelude, which like the instrumental idiom of the opera in general, consists of an integration of African (mostly membrane drums and idiophones) and Western instruments.

The pianistic realization of Themes from Chaka presented two problems, one of which was to give tonal structure to motifs which in the opera are assigned to instruments with limited pitch capabilities and whose tunings are not necessarily coordinated. The second was to realize within the limited two-handed (pianistic) performance polyrhythmic structures designed for 4-5 instruments.¹¹

Two stylistic modes are discernable in the structure of *Themes from Chaka*. These modes can be referred to as the song mode and drum mode. The different passages of the work can be seen to derive from either the song mode or the drum mode. In some sections of the work, however, these two modes are interpolated. Passages that are conceived in the song mode are characterized by an emphasis on a melodic orientation and some tonal or modal identity. On the other hand, there is a predominant emphasis on the parameter of rhythm in passages that are conceived in the drum mode. In such passages, tonal identity is often vague while phrases tend to exist as rhythmic motifs and punctuating particles. One cannot but see a correlation between these two modes and the instrumental and vocal elements of the opera that the piano works attempts to capture. We must also note that the varied pitch structure of the piano work re-echoes the structure of *The Wanderer*. Thus, despite the absence of a pervading tonal focus, tonal allusions, usually of local structural significance, often exist partly as a result of the recurrences of tonally or modally directed passages and partly through the use of melorhythmic ostinati within which a particular note may attain some measure of prominence. The rather rhapsodic formal outline of the piece is defined by the integration of these two stylistic modes.

The structural features of the piece as summarized above are illustrated in the quasi-bitonal passage of bars 446 ff., Ex. 5, where there is a distinctive polarity between the modally directed right-hand material and those of the left hand in which there is no particular tonal focus. The main function of the left-hand elements is to provide a rhythmic accompaniment to the right hand. In bar 478, the song mode of the right hand is abandoned and the passage reverts to capturing a drum language in which there is no pervasive tonal goal. As in its previous appearance (in bars

- 28 -

Example 5. *Themes from Chaka*, by Akin Euba, bars 446 ff.

418-45), this passage (478 ff., Ex. 6) is characterized by a contrapuntal rhythmic structure, the use of ostinati, a strong percussive texture, and an element of stately dance. The lack of a distinctive tonal focus in the instrumental mode passages of the work derives from the emphasis that the composer places on the element of rhythm as a compositional parameter. As in *Scenes from Traditional Life*, the abandonment of tonal considerations in such passages could be seen as an attempt by Euba to free the dynamics of rhythmic motion from the constraints of tonality. Consequently, rhythmic devices such as syncopation, offbeat phrasings, polyrhythms, and ostinati (which abound in bars 478 ff.) derive their significance as compositional parameters without recourse to conventional tonal procedures.

As the discussion above has shown, the derivation of Euba's African Pianism is characterized by an intercultural approach that combines Western and African, especially Yoruba, techniques. The realization of that approach, however, varies from one work to another, although it is possible to identify certain common features. The adoption of a varied pitch structure, as germinal in *The Wanderer* and fully explored in *Themes from Chaka*, is particularly significant towards an understanding of the cultural basis of Euba's piano style. In these two works, tonally directed passages

— 30 —

Example 6. *Themes from Chaka*, by Akin Euba, bars 478 ff.

that are vocally generated provide regular foil to drum generated melorhythms that articulate no pervasive tonal goal. While song and drum modes tend to codominate in *Themes from Chaka*, one of the two modes predominates in other works. The nature of the interaction between these two stylistic tendencies constitutes an important structure-generating ingredient of Euba's style. In *Saturday Night at the Caban Bamboo* and *Scenes from Traditional Life*, the drum mode is predominant. For example, despite the transparently tonal character of the last bars of the first piece of *Scenes from Traditional Life*, the work, as a whole, attempts a generally atonal goal. The adoption of a quasi-atonal language in a work such as *Scenes from Traditional Life* thus sheds light on the importance attached to the parameter of rhythm. By freeing many of the sonorities of such a work from the constraints of tonality, Euba succeeds in creating a design in which the manipulation of rhythm represents a dominant form-generating procedure. Within such a musical process, pitch and interval structures, in both vertical and horizontal dimensions, are generally incidental to a musical dialogue that is propelled essentially in rhythmic terms.

The song mode predominates in *Waka Duru*. It is one of the few works by Euba to adopt a distinctly tonal and diatonic language. The last movement evokes Highlife idiom. The use of Nigerian instruments in *Igi Nla So*

helps to provide the appropriate musicocultural basis for understanding the nature and significance of Yoruba drum language in the work. The piano part retains an atonal style that, as explained, is conceptually related to the sonorities of the drums. The combination of Yoruba drums and the Western pianoforte in *Igi Nla So* is also significant in articulating some of the main elements of style from which Euba's concept of African Pianism would later take root.

The predominant basis for the formulation of a pianistic style, which evokes African styles and techniques, derives from Euba's desire, like that of other Nigerian composers, to make his works culturally relevant to his native tradition. As noted elsewhere, Nigerian composers such as Bankole, Ndubuisi, and Uzoigwe, to mention just a few, have all written works in which elements of African pianism are featured (see my *Nigerian Art Music*). Bankole's *Passion Sonata*, Ndubuisi's *Ikpirikpe Ogu* (war dance), and Uzoigwe's *Four Nigerian Dances* are but three of such works. Like those of Euba, these works are noted for their synthesis of European and Nigerian elements.

The styles adopted in these piano works should therefore be seen within the context of a general tendency for successive Nigerian composers, working within a predominantly European idiom of musical expression, to assert their native musical identity. The adoption of European elements by African composers should be understood as part of the age-old tradition whereby African musicians adapt their musicianship to suit emerging sociocultural changes. Thus, composers such as Euba, Bankole, Ndubuisi, and Uzoigwe are only reflecting musically the multicultural nature of life in contemporary Nigeria. This feature is itself a product of the colonial history of Nigeria, which has become an integral and permanent feature of the Nigerian heritage. The most important issue is for the works of modern Nigerian composers, whether adopted from foreign musical traditions or derived exclusively from precolonial Nigerian traditional music, to reflect the aesthetic-artistic aspirations of contemporary Nigeria. An intercultural synthesis, in which the deployment of African elements is neither superficial nor tokenistic, represents ONE of the compositional options through which contemporary African composers can make their works culturally relevant to their native audiences.

But the activities of these composers must not exist in isolation; there has to be a coherent national policy in Nigeria towards ensuring an informed patronage of traditional and contemporary musical idioms. We must note that as an intellectual idiom, similar to the equally intercultural works of Nigerian playwrights, novelists, and poets such as Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, the artistic disposition necessary for the appreciation of the works of modern Nigerian composers will benefit immensely from a well-focused and well-implemented educational and cultural policy. More than half a century since the earliest examples of works in the genre were written, it is time to move the nature of discourse on modern African Art music from the level of casual observations and anecdotes to critical and detailed analyses. It is only through such critical studies that a proper understanding of these works can be developed. Materials generated from

such studies will be of immense value to scholars as well as musicians who want to gain a more comprehensive insight not only into the Western art music tradition but its extensions in the non-Western world.

NOTES

1. By using the term *art music* here, I do not intend to ascribe an inferior status to other idioms of music, for example, popular music. As a term that is generally preferred by other scholars, I use the term here only as a label to refer to the works of modern African composers who have been influenced by European classical music.
2. Léopold Senghor was a former president of Senegal.
3. A collection of piano works by Gymah Labi: *Dialects in African Pianism*.
4. Highlife is a West African popular genre. It rose into prominence in the '50s and '60s. For further information on this genre, see Collins. All musical examples used in this article are taken from Akin Euba's piano works.
5. For a list of Euba's piano works, see the appendix. For a full list of his works and those of other Nigerian composers, see my *Nigerian Art Music* 136-47.
6. Copies of scores as well as recordings of the works discussed in this article are available in the archive of Iwalewa Haus, University of Bayreuth, Germany.
7. For a study on the acoustic and musical characteristics of these Yoruba drums, see Euba's *Yoruba Drumming*.
8. The term *melorhythm* was first used by Meki Nzewi to describe percussive Igbo drum phrases that in addition to their rhythmic qualities also possess distinct melodic pitches. For further reading, see Nzewi 23-28.
9. For a more detailed analysis of this see my *Nigerian Art Music* 79-88.
10. This quotation is taken from the preface to the published edition of the work (1975).
11. That performance was staged by the the City of Birmingham Touring Opera and Symphony Hall, Britain, as part of the Africa 95 program.
12. This quotation is taken from a preface by Euba to the yet-to-be-published score of *Themes from Chaka* (1996).

WORKS CITED

- Alajah, Brown. "A. Ayo Bankole: His Life and Works" MA thesis. U of Pittsburgh, 1981.
- Achinivu, Achinivu Kanu. *I koli Harcourt Whyte, The Man and His Music: A Case of Musical Acculturation in Nigeria*. Beitrag Zur Ethnomusicology 7. Hamburg: Verlag der Musikalienhandlung Wagner, 1979.
- Collins, John. "The Early History of West African Highlife Music." *Popular Music* 8.3 (1989): 221-30.
- Crowther, Michael. *The Story of Nigeria*. Rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1980.
- Euba, Akin. "Traditional Elements as the Basis of New African Art Music." *African Urban Notes* 10.4 (1970): 52-63.

- . *Essays on Music in African, Vol. 1*. Lagos: Elekoto Music Center; Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies, 1988.
- . *Essays on Music in African Vol. 2*. Lagos: Elekoto Music Center; Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies, 1989.
- . *Yoruba Drumming*. Lagos: Elekoto Music Center; Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies, 1990.
- Irele, Abiola. "Is African Music Possible?" *Transition* 61 (1992): 56-71.
- Kimberly, Cynthia, and Akin Euba, eds. *Intercultural Music, Vol. 1*. Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies and Intercultural Music, Arts, 1992.
- Kubik, Gerhard. "Alo-Yoruba Chantefables." *African Musicology Current Trends: A Festschrift Presented to J. H. K Nketia*. Ed. Djedje and Carter. Los Angeles: U of California P, 1989. 129-59.
- Labi, Gyimah. *Dialects in African Pianism*. Legon: U of Ghana P, 1997.
- Lynn, Leonard. "The Growth of Entertainment of African Origin in Lagos." MA thesis. U of Ibadan, 1967.
- Mensah, Atta Annan. "Compositional Practices in African Music." *Africa: The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*. Vol. 1. Ed. Ruth Stone. New York: Garland, 1997. 208-31.
- Njoku, Johnston. "Art-Composed Music in Africa." *Africa: The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*. Vol. 1. Ed. Ruth Stone. New York: Garland, 1997. 232-53.
- Oyeweso, Siyan, et al., eds. *Badagry: A Study in History, Culture, and Traditions of an Ancient City*. Ibadan: Rex Charles, 1994.
- Olaniyan, Oluwemi. "Composition and Performance in Yoruba Dundun-Sekere Music." PhD Diss. Queen's U of Belfast, 1984.
- Omojola, Bode. *Nigerian Art Music*. Ibadan: Institut Français de Recherche d'Afrique (IFRA); Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies Series, 1995.
- Nzewi, Meki. "Melo-Rhythmic Essence and Hot Rhythm in Nigerian Folk Music." *The Black Perspective in Music* 2.1 (1974): 23-28.
- Uzoigwe, Joshua. "Akin Euba: An Introduction to the Life of a Nigerian Composer." MA thesis. Queen's U of Belfast, 1978.

A List of Euba's Piano Works

- The Wanderer* (for cello and piano), 1960.
- Igi Nla So* (for piano and Yoruba drums), 1963.
- Four Pieces from Oyo Calabash*, 1964.
- Impression from Akwete Cloth*, 1964.
- Saturday Night at the Caban Bamboo*, 1964.
- Scenes from Traditional Life*, 1970 (U of Ife P, 1977).
- Waka Duru*, 1987.
- Themes from Chaka*, 1996.