



## OBERI OKAIME AND AFRICANISM IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP: THE MUSICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*Music plays a very important role in worship. This is evident in its employment by different religious sects for the enhancement of their worship. From chants to drumming accompanied by dance displays, the worshippers sing praises and worship a supernatural being. However, plurality in human race has led to differing modes of worship among these arrays of races. This has thrown religion as an institution into a state of bewilderment and sometimes leading to intermarriages of different worship styles by some religious settings. In Nigeria, for instance, there have been tendencies by some religious sects to have a juxtaposition of elements from Christian worship and the traditional Nigerian counterparts with music dominating these elements. If music pervades Christian worship and is one of the strongest instruments of transcendence, therefore, its nature and application are so paramount to an extent that they epitomize differing worship modes. This paper seeks to discover African elements in the worship by Oberi Okaime-a Christian Mission in Ibionlbon Local Government Area of AkwaIbom State with special reference to her musical conventions.*

**Keywords:** Multiculturalism, Musical acculturation, Religious worship and Intercultural music.

### INTRODUCTION

People the world over have been having strong quest to establish a relationship with God or god, their maker. Shrouded in the mystery of creation and existence of man, man seems to be helpless and requires a higher being to help him fulfil his destiny. The knowledge of this drives him into recognising this higher authority and he subjects himself to the worship of this being in whatever form he deems fit. According to [Cunningham \(2005\)](#), worship originates from the old English word 'Worship' denoting the worthiness of the one receiving the special honour or devotion. He sees worship as:

- Expression of one's devotion and allegiance pledged to God (deity);

- Religious rituals which salute, revere, or praise a deity;
- Human response to the perceived presence of the divine. [Cunningham \(2005\)](#), (Internet Source)

Worship implies that honour and reverence is given to the object of worship. It is the prerogative of the individual(s) to consider and choose their objects of worship. For those who imbibe the teachings as written in the Holy Bible, they accept Jehovah, the God Most High, as their God and Jesus Christ, His Son as the Messiah, the one who came to save them. This group of people are called Christians, probably because they follow the footsteps and teachings of Christ. They, therefore, engage themselves in Christian worship. [Cunningham \(2005\)](#) sees Christian worship as a response to the presence of God that implies the knowledge of who He is.

Christian worship is an offshoot of Jewish worship. It involves praising God in several ways. Music is one way of Christian worship, which involves singing or praising God in hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs or choruses. The singing may be congregational, or done by the choir or the worship band. However, music employed in worship in Oberi Okaime Christian Mission does not have in its entirety, the musical elements found in the Western Christian Music. This Christian Religious sect has its hymnal and a gamut of spiritual songs that are exclusively hers. Most of these songs are composed in the language of the Oberi Okaime and are embodiments of the characteristics of African vocal music and the accompaniments are simulations of African traditional drum practices. To describe the above musical setting more succinctly, we may conclude that the music of this religious sect is syncretic, having some sort of duality of European and African musical colourations. Another closer examination may also point to the music as being intercultural if not for any other reason but for the fact that instruments such as the keyboard, kit drum, guitar and the bass are used for the accompaniment of songs during worship.

### **Impact of Western Religion**

In Nigeria, the coming of the missionaries in the 1840s ushered in Christianity and Christian music. According to Omojola:

The historical process, which led to the growth of Western-influenced 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... European church and classical music were introduced through the church as well as through mission schools (p. 153).

The incursion of the missionaries into the Southern part of Nigeria brought some changes into the people's original religion, the traditional religion. [Idowu \(1973\)](#) describes African traditional religion as comprising belief in God, belief in divinities, belief in spirits, belief in ancestors, and the practice of magic and medicine, each with its own consequent, attendant cult. Pioneer missions after the incursion were Qua Iboe, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, and the Methodist, established in the coastal communities in 1887, 1903, 1846 and 1893 respectively ([Abasiattai, 2008](#)). Abasiattai

reports further that when the 'Spirit Movement', which came as a result of the Qua Iboe church revival services, broke out in 1927; other churches that emerged after them had joined the pioneer missions in pushing Christianity from the coastal enclaves to the length and breadth of the area known as Ibibioland. At some point, there was opposition to Western Christianity by those who still held on to traditional religion. This group of individuals made effort to preserve their religion in an attempt to break loose from the clutches and religious bondage imposed on them by the Western missionaries.

### **Oberi Okaieme Christian Mission**

A few authors have written on the origin of the *Oberi Okaieme* Christian mission (a.k.a. Obot Ono KeMfon, meaning, Free Gift Mission). As reported by [Abasiattai \(2008\)](#), this mission came out of the 'Spirit Movement' traced to revival services conducted by certain Qua Iboe Church teachers. Abasiattai's earlier report on Oberi Okaieme Christian Mission states:

The Oberi Okaieme movement was founded as an independent church in the late 1920's by Ibibio drawn from existing orthodox missions in the region. Independent churches are churches established by Africans seceding or separating for some reason from orthodox churches (those brought by Europeans) or founded independently by Africans as Christian leaders in their own right, without reference to White or other foreign missionaries, churches or agents. Besides seeking freedom from political domination, oppressive practices and attitudes, and the racism of the White missionaries and colonial rulers, most independent Christians desired to interpret and practice Christianity from the African cultural, religious, and cosmological point of view. They took cognisance of African beliefs, customs, and emotional and spiritual outlook, and they...used certain aspects of Christianity to strengthen that needed strengthening, and at the same time used traditional beliefs to strengthen aspects of Christianity where they were found wanting. Thus, they came out with what they sincerely believed to be a meaningful religion, and their Christianity can be seen as an expression of the African way of being religious...[an] indigenous Christianity. This Christianity, like African traditional religion, catered for every area of human life and needs, including healing, divinity, prophesying, and visioning, as well as controlling evil forces like witchcraft (*ifot*) and 'medicines' (*ibok*) whose reality White missionaries would not even acknowledge it counteracted such misfortune or adversity as barrenness, unemployment, failure in business or poverty. ([Abasiattai, 1989](#)).

The above report reveals the Oberi Okaieme Christian Mission's crave for an identity and desire to liberate Africans (Ibibio) from every oppression and religious slavery. It further gives a true picture of Africanism in Christian worship in this part of the world. The members are not those to reckon with. They are the *mecunus* and mendicants, (the wretched of the earth, illiterates, etc.). It is worthy to note that this mission depend solely on the power and workings of the Holy Spirit (speaking in tongues). This gave birth to the special language, the '*medefidrin*' language, spoken by her members. This, according to [Abasiattai \(2008\)](#), sprung out of speaking in tongues, which implied that strange utterances and eventually words early occurred in the experiences of the 'spirit men'

during 'spirit seizure' or visions. He states further that some 'spirit men' reputedly wrote these words down in strange characters on sheets of paper, leaves or barks of trees, without understanding their meanings, until the revelation of the words and scripts by Seminant (Oberi Okaime language, meaning Holy Spirit), later came to them.

The Oberi Okaime Christian Mission, at inception, gathered to worship Gizin (Jehovah God) on Sundays just like any other Christian church. This day of worship was later changed to Etaha (the principal Ibibio market/holy day). Some reasons had been advanced for this change in the day of worship. According to Rich meal Ekid (Jnr.), son to the late High Priest/Founding member of the movement, God revealed to one Prophet Inyang from Osuk Ediene, a Catholic, and sent him to Oberi Okaime Mission to change the day of worship to Etaha. His words:

The message came from one Prophet Inyang from Osuk Ediene, who was neither a member of this mission nor resident in the area where the Mission situated. History has it that this prophet came and told the leader of the church then, the encounter and revelation he had with/from God, that the day of worship should be changed to Etaha, Ibibio holy day, because Ibibio people worship their gods, deities, and ancestors on this day. God wanted it to be so to destroy the powers of darkness and strongholds that used to operate on this day holding people in Ibibioland captive. Our predecessors did not doubt this but obeyed (R. Ekid, personal communication, August 5, 2011).

[Abasiattai \(2008\)](#) reports that the movement's calendar has 512 days, 64 weeks (8 days in a week) and 16 months, which is the traditional Ibibio calendar, and their numerical system based on Ibibio counting system.

### **Oberi Okaime Music**

Music is very significant in worship. As mentioned earlier, music rendition in church worship may be done by the whole congregation, the choir, or the worship band. The Oberi Okaime Christian music includes hymns and spiritual songs, which, according to Rich meal Ekid (Jnr.), are the outcome of divine inspiration and revelations in dreams from Gizin (God). The mission maintains a choir, which at times, leads in hymns, and special choral renditions, accompanied with traditional musical instruments. Late Bishop Ekid, the High Priest, according to his son, Rich meal, was specifically given the song ministry. He took it as a point of duty to assemble converts and teach them the songs, which were mostly in the *medefidrin* language.

Song rendition in worship in this mission is attributed to the inspiration drawn from the impact music had on the people of old, specifically the Israelites in the Holy Scriptures, who were led by the Holy Spirit, sang songs, and played musical instruments whenever they had challenges. These songs empowered them and miraculous things happened in their time. In this mission, songs are received from revelation by the Holy Spirit, events or happenings in the area and the church, and finally from stories in the Holy Scriptures. Members are expected to subject themselves to the authority of the Holy Spirit who ministers and reveals to them what to be sung, when to sing and

why they should sing a particular song at a particular time. Some of the songs are incorporated into the mission's hymnbook while majority of the songs are spiritual songs, since the Mission is predominantly a Spiritual one. Through music, the Holy Spirit descends on who ever He wants, and reveals the secrets concerning the sick, the oppressed, and downtrodden. In the church services, no specific periods are assigned to song rendition by the choir, congregational hymn, or spiritual songs. The leaders subject themselves to the authority of the Holy Spirit, who ministers and reveals to them when singing should be done. His Royal Majesty ImeInyang, revealed that the songs are mystical, beyond the understanding of the ordinary man, and that during prayers people go into other tongues which no one understands (I. In yang, personal communication, August 5, 2011). Through the songs people receive their healing, liberation, deliverance, and other expectations are granted.

A brief story on how the hymnbook came into existence is written in Ibibio language on the first page of the book. The story reveals that the Holy Spirit of God came with great power in the year 1927 and distributed various gifts to people of which music was one. God chose the people and instructed them to put the songs down in written form albeit some good number of years of effort. This set of people was commanded by *Gizin* (God) to abstain from every form of immorality during this period of documentation. *Seminant* (Spirit) gave a command that these songs were to be sung in the gathering of 'spirit men', literates, or illiterates.

### **The Choir and Choral Training in Oberi Okaike Christian Mission**

Music in churches is worship and, therefore, requires the training of those who will lead in it. Oberi Okaike Mission differs remarkably from orthodox and other spiritual churches and prayer houses because no notation, sol-fa or staff is utilised in the documentation of the hymns or choral pieces. Choral pieces are textual and in *medefidrin* language. Some pieces shown to the authors of this work bore no indication of the tune, key, or metre. The mission provides no formal musical training. Therefore, songs are learnt through rote procedure whereby the choirmaster employs the sing-after-me method of song learning. Interaction with Reverend Rich meal Ekid and the choirmaster revealed that effort is being made presently to notate the songs in sol-fa so that other people can sing the songs at a glance.

Choral songs are composed in textual form while the composer knows the tune. Any one given the revelation in choral songs writes the lyrics down, if literate, or gets someone who can read and write to write for him while he dictates to him. Members of Oberi Okaike sect believe that when *Seminant* reveals and gives a song, the lyrics and the tune of the song can never be lost. This also points to total dependence of the members on the unction and power of the Holy Spirit. During rehearsals, the choristers write down the lyrics of the songs dictated to them. Thereafter, the one who had the revelation sings for all to hear and possibly learn. He or she may decide to have taught the choirmaster first before bringing it to the choir to help simplify his work. Then, he must be there to avoid any alteration in the original tune handed down by *Seminant*.

Singers in the choir are not assigned to parts by the choirmaster. Rather, singers listen to the melody and harmonise, as they like. Those who harmonise the song the same way are then brought to sit together. So, the conventional four-part arrangement is rarely adopted here, though, according to the choirmaster, they sing in four parts.

### Transcription and Analysis of Selected Oberi Okaike Songs

Form in music refers to the basic structure, overall plan a piece of music has. Music is of different structural forms and complexities. One can identify the musical form by labelling the sections with letters such as A, B, C, etc. Some common musical forms include through-composed, strophic, variations, rondo, binary, ternary, etc. The songs used in Oberi Okaike worship have the characteristics of African songs with short melodic ranges, with most of them in the pentatonic modes. Identifiable musical forms include the solo and chorused refrain; call and response and the mixed structural forms.

## SE MMON DO

The musical score for 'SE MMON DO' is presented in two systems. The first system shows a Solo part and a Chorus part. The Solo part begins with the melody 'Se mmon do 'ko - yom i - dim mmon u - wem,'. The Chorus part begins with 'Se mmon do 'ko -'. The second system, starting at measure 5, shows the Solo part repeating the melody 'Se mmon do 'ko - yom i - dim mmon u - wem,' and the Chorus part repeating 'Se mmon do 'ko - yom i - dim mmon u - wem.'

**Form:** The musical excerpt above is in solo and chorused refrain. In this piece the soloist sings a given musical phrase and the chorus repeats same after him. In actual performance, the solo and chorus refrain is repeated ad libitum.

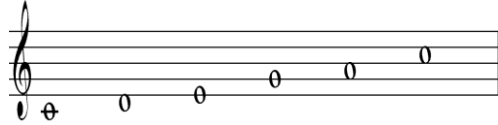
**Meter:** The music is in simple duple ( $\frac{2}{4}$ ) time.

**Melodic Range:** The melodic range is a major sixth as shown below:

The musical notation shows a single melodic line on a five-line staff. It starts with a treble clef and a common time signature. The melody consists of two notes: a G4 (G) and an E5 (E), connected by a double-headed arrow indicating the interval. The notes are quarter notes.

The notes have short durational values which is one of the characteristics of African melodies.

**Scale Structure:** The music is in the Pentatonic scale as shown below:



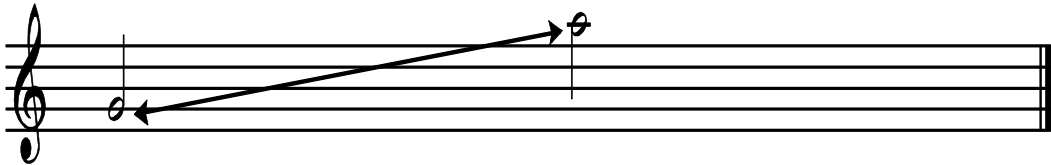
## HYMN 32

E - biet e - mi Te - ttiae - di - du - de, E - biet e - mi Te - ttiae - di - du -  
 8  
 de, E - biet e - mi Te - ttiae - di - du - de, O - du k'i - son I - bi - bio.

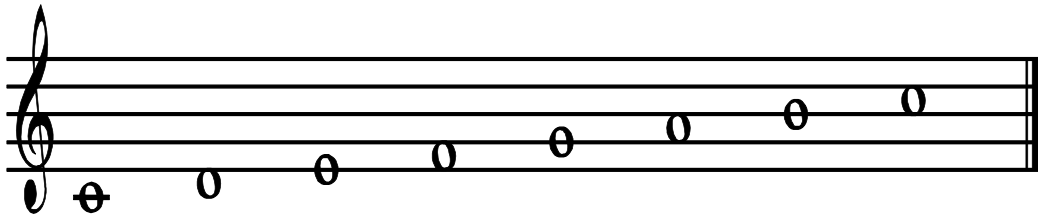
**Form:** Just as traditional hymn tunes, hymns of Oberi Okaime worship setting are strophic in nature. However, there are instances where some notes are augmented or shortened depending on the metrical units of the lines of the individual verses.

**Meter:** The music is in simple duple ( $\frac{2}{4}$ ) time.

**Melodic Range:** The range of this melody is a ninth as shown below:



**Scale Structure:** The scale employed in this song can fit appropriately into the diatonic major scale system as shown below:



# BIU OZEN

$\text{♩} = 100$   
Refrian I

Solo/Chant

Me - du-bian,

Refrian

Chorus

Biu o - zen; Biu o - zen; Biu o - zen; Me - du-bian.

9

Solo/Chant

Chorus

Biu o - zen; Biu o - zen; Biu o - zen; kin in - tio e - max.

17 Chant I

Solo/Chant

Gi - brant Se - mi - nant O - be - ry O - ka - i -

Chorus



20 to refrian Chant II to refrian

Solo/Chant

me. O! Gi - zin - brant o - zen ke - nod

Chorus

25 Chant III to refrian  $\text{♩} = 60$

Solo/Chant

Cle-fac - to biu co-li manc Fai. Ri \_\_\_\_\_ to, \_\_\_\_\_

Chorus

33

Solo/Chant

Mu-beld du perd bau - gin \_\_\_\_\_ n - tai pro - ki - said, Vad ens -

Chorus

39

Solo/Chant

ran ca-pium bri-zard - ed, O - ba - rais e - ne swis e - fi - tot

Chorus

46 Refrian II

Solo/Chant

Mam - frez Ri - to.

Chorus

**SPOKEN**

1. *Biu Museldanintyduperdebledsitrikedifuda; Obaraisene Swisefitot.*  
*To Refrian II*
2. *Biu MuseldanintydaspeddioObot Ekom; Obaraisene Swisefitot.*  
*To Refrian II*
3. *Biu Museldduperdbaitiuim, intirrensdwedtabagin; Obaraisene Swisefitot.*  
*To Refrian II*
4. *Biu Colimanc Gizinombtistdfekeamfrent Ettia; Obaraisene Swisefitot.*  
*To 29-45*

**Medefidrin Language and Ibibio/ English Translations of the Lyrics**

<b>MEDEFIDRIN LANGUAGE</b>	<b>IBIBIO</b>	<b>ENGLISH</b>
<b>CHORUS</b>		
Biu ozen Medubian	Nnyin imedi, Hallelujah	We have come, Hallelujah
Biu ozen kin intoemax	Nnyin imedi ke enyin fo	We have come in your name
<b>SOLO</b>		
Gibrant seminant obery okaime	Edisana ofum uwem ono ke mfon	Divine breath of life you give free of charge
O! Gizinbrant ozen knod Clefacto biu columanc Fai Ri – to	O! Edisan'Ete suhode di Andibot nnyin imokom fi O-bong	O! Holy Father come down Our Creator we praise thee O! Lord
<b>CHORUS</b>		
Mubeld duoerd baugin ntai prokisaid	Ti bana uyo oro-o-ko- nwonode	Remember the promise you made
Vad ensran - capium - brizarded		You gave your last words
Obarais ene swis efitot	A-ma etin o-nyun o-kure	There is church service today
Mam- frez Ri - to	Ufok Abasi – odu mfin emi So – son'Obong	Thank you Lord

**Ibibio/English Translation of the Spoken Part of the Music**

1. Nnyin imeti nkpo ibana isua 1927  
Ufok Abasi odu mfin emi.  
We have remembered the year 1927  
The church is established today
2. Nnyin imeti nkpo ibana ubok nnasia fo ke Obot Ekom  
upon this  
Ufok Abasi odu mfin emi  
Mountain of praise  
The church is established today
3. Nnyin imeti ibana ndutuh, ukut, ye mkpa  
and  
Ufok Abasi odu mfin emi.  
We remember the torture, affliction,  
death  
The church is established today
- Nnyin Imokom Akwa Abasi oyoho ubon itiaita  
eighth  
We praise Amighty God of the



When the above musical instruments are used, there are always synergistic musical outputs. These do not only portray the musical traits of one culture but create a sort of intercultural musical situation. Intercultural music according to Akpakpan (2011) is... "a cross-fertilization of musical elements from two or more cultures as well as practitioners from one culture performing or composing in idioms other than that of their culture" (p. 25). The cross-fertilization situation has a very close link with the musical instruments that are used in the music production.

## CONCLUSION

Although *Oberi Okaimé* is a Christian religious group whose principles are according to the Holy Bible, several African traditional elements besides music are fused together in their worship. The musical practices of this Church to a greater extent are African in context. However, there seem to be some degree of inter-culturalism in the musical aspect of her worship. Notably, the use of the electronic keyboard and the guitar alludes to this fact. The adaptation or Africanisation of 'appealing' tunes from Christian English hymnbooks is another strong essence of intercultural music. In a broader sense, it is possible to state that the concept of worship in *Oberi Okaimé* appears in name because of the reference to Jesus but further inquiry will reveal that the totality of music and most other aspects of worship in the Church have more allusion to Africanism. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that this church worships Jesus in an African way.

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