



Contemporary Ideas in African Art Music Composition: An Exploration of the Vocal and Instrumental Works of Seun Owoaje

Kadupe Sofola

Kabarak University, Kenya

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Abstract

African art music continues to evolve through the contributions of contemporary composers who build on the legacies of their progenitors. Despite its growth, there has been a gap in the literature regarding its contemporary appeal, especially with respect to the works of modern African art music composers. Anchored on postcolonial theory, this study investigates the contemporary ideas shaping African art music composition by exploring the works of Seun Owoaje, a Nigerian composer known for his innovative integration of African musical idioms with Western structures. It aims to identify stylistic elements, thematic concerns, and compositional techniques employed by Seun Owoaje in his vocal and instrumental works. Adopting a qualitative design, data were sourced through in-depth oral interviews with the composer, coupled with analysis of his selected compositions. Seun Owoaje's music is informed by open-mindedness, creative ethnomusicology, social commentary, and inspiration from non-musical experiences. His works exhibit a deliberate blending of diverse musical traditions, reflect Yoruba cultural values, and offer philosophical insight on contemporary social issues through music commentary. The study contributes to the understanding of African art music as a platform for cultural reclamation and modern artistic expression, while providing valuable insights to teachers of music composition regarding blending innovative thinking with musical devices in the training of African art music composers. Research-based compositions should also be encouraged to blend indigenous elements with formal music training to ensure authenticity and innovation.

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Introduction

African art music is a meeting point between traditional African music and Western classical music techniques. As a hybrid form, it emerged during the period of Western colonialism in Africa, with the musical fusion reflecting the broader socio-political developments taking place across the continent (Obijiaku, 2024). More particularly, it emerged through the activities of European missionaries and the establishment of the church. The establishment of the church later led to the founding of formal schools which contributed to the training of indigenous musicians for the church, who would later become choirmasters and composers who sought ways of bridging indigenous music and the need for liturgical music in the church, preparing the way for the emergence of a unique art music style



rooted in African character (Owoaje, 2014; Onyeji, 2016). Euba (1995) noted that in missionary schools and churches, students were exposed to various aspects of Western classical music, including its history, theory, and performance on Western musical instruments such as the piano and vocal works.

Within the Nigerian context, Sadoh (2010) observed that these two powerful institutions led to the training of potential musicians who had their formative tutorship and foundation in Western classical music. Africans were taught to play the piano and organ in European schools and churches. They were also trained in both classical singing and choral directing. Herbst et al. (2003) maintained that African art musicians emerged in this Western-oriented religious education to compose what can be referred to as African art music. These composers engaged in writing both sacred and secular choral works, most especially in the form of hymns and/or madrigals. While choral music formed the bedrock of music teaching in schools, choral work was emphasised in teacher training. The Christian missionary enterprise played a particularly significant role in the development of African art music, particularly in countries such as Nigeria. As missionaries established churches and schools across Africa, they introduced European musical traditions, notation systems, and instruments. The desire to create more culturally relevant worship experiences led to the incorporation of African musical elements within Christian contexts, which Omibiyi-Obidike identifies as a crucial period when "Nigerian creative music was developed in response to the need to reshape Christianity to suit African customs" (Ibude, 2020).

Considering its colonial roots, Onyeji (2016) described it as a form of written music that was imposed on Africans without regard for their feelings, as they were not part of any negotiation to adopt such musical culture in Africa. Describing it further, Onyeji noted that African art music 'is distinguished into the secular and the sacred types, the vocal and instrumental forms as well as the operatic and theatrical forms' (p. 12). Of importance is its patronage, which has remained within the elite class, as it is essentially not a common type of music featured in traditional societies. In addition, it was used as a symbol of social sophistication, identity and psychedelic display of superiority (Onyeji, 2016). This, however, is changing with the emergence of new choral groups in major cities across Africa. Major characteristic features that distinguish African art music from indigenous African music are the identification of composers and the distinction between the composer/arranger and performers of a work. Whereas art music is characterised by individual ownership of composed music and proper recognition of the composers and arrangers when applicable, indigenous African music usually lacks recognition for the composers, primarily due to the communal nature of music composition and performance. The emergence of African art music represents more than just a musical development; it reflects broader processes of cultural negotiation and identity formation during and after colonialism. It exemplifies a deliberate effort by Africans to creatively transform what would have been a colonial legacy into a medium of cultural expression and musical identity. This is achieved by deliberately combining elements from both African traditional music and Western classical traditions, culminating in a musical language that could speak to local cultural realities while engaging with global musical developments (Sofola, 2023; Obijiaku, 2024).

African art music has continued to advance due to several factors, such as the rise in music literacy and the increase in music training institutions across Africa where composers are trained to write music using the Western notation system, as well as the topicalness of the works of several composers (Owoaje & Sofola, 2021a). Like other musical styles, African art music has continued to evolve, influenced mainly by indigenous musical traditions in which composers were raised, the advancement of theories, and composers' quest for contemporary appeal in their musical works. For instance, the advancement of "African Pianism" as a theoretical framework in African art music has

channelled a way for the emergence of piano compositions in African idioms by African art music composers. African pianism represents a multifaceted approach to piano music that integrates African musical traditions, techniques, and aesthetics into the performance and composition of piano works (Annan, 2024, Bolaji, 2022). This sub-genre of African art music transcends mere piano playing, instead exploring the intricate rhythms, melodic structures, and harmonic sensibilities of African music. This genre often incorporates elements of speech surrogacy, where instruments communicate in a manner akin to spoken words, reflecting indigenous African instrumental music practices (Owoaje, 2025).

Within the atmosphere of innovation and exploration of techniques in African art music, there has emerged a need to examine contemporary practices by prominent composers as they seek to align their work with changing times to remain relevant, thereby contributing to the advancement of the genre. In doing so, the study examines contemporary ideas in African art music, with a focus on the vocal works of Seun Owoaje, a prominent Yoruba art music composer whose vocal and instrumental compositions have made significant contributions to the advancement of art music in Nigeria and Africa.



Seun Owoaje on the piano during the recording of "Ma di Olowo"

Born into a musical family, the late Pa Moses Oluyomi and Madam Comfort Owoaje, on March 25, 1970, in Lagos, Nigeria, Seun began his musical journey through his membership in the choir at Christ Apostolic Church, Yaba, Lagos, which he joined at the age of 8 under his father's leadership as choirmaster. This was augmented by his participation in the Boys' and Girls' Brigade, as well as informal piano training from his elder brother, Tolu Owoaje, which would later prepare him for a music career. He attended Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, where he obtained both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Music. He is currently rounding up his PhD studies in Music at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, where he also works as an adjunct lecturer. He also works as a lecturer of music at Mountain Top University, Ibafo, Ogun State, Nigeria. Apart from these, he performs at concerts and other musical engagements as a concert pianist and conductor. As a composer, he produces both commissioned and self-inspired compositions and arrangements. He is the founder and director of Urban Peace Choir, Lagos, and the Managing Director of Centre Techniques Limited, Alagomeji, Yaba, Lagos, a piano supply and music consultancy firm. A few of



his compositions include – *Lojiiki gaari ati bota*, *Ore mi se pelepele*, *Ma di Olowo*, and *Ole Olojukokoro*. He has also published both vocal and piano works in print.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, interpretive methodology to explore Seun Owoaje’s compositions within the African art music tradition. Data were obtained through a semi-structured oral interview with the composer, complemented by an analytical review of five selected compositions. The interview focused on his creative influences, cultural motivations, and compositional ideologies, as well as his lived experiences. These insights were thematically coded and interpreted in relation to the analysed works. The chosen works were purposively selected for their relevance to the themes discussed in the study. The musical analysis adopted a culturally sensitive lens, blending Western theoretical tools with African musicological insights, particularly in examining text-music relationships, tonal structures, and rhythmic idioms. This approach mirrors the qualitative approach employed by Ekpo (2023) in reviewing the research approach of Christian Onyeji in art music composition. Morohunfola (2022) has also used this approach in examining aspects of art music compositions by selected Nigerian composers. Together, these strategies ensured the methodological rigour, credibility, and cultural relevance of the study's findings.

Literature Review

Some scholars have examined contemporary techniques in African art music. For instance, Obijiaku (2024) and Ofuani (2014) have engaged the role of hybridity and syncretism in the sustenance of African art music. Hybridity often involves the fusion of African traditional music with Western classical music. Apart from being one of the founding principles of the genre since the colonial era, it has continued to drive composers’ reflections on the socio-political realities of Africa (Obijiaku, 2024). Aligning with contemporary times, hybridity has driven the expansion of musical ideas to incorporate urban cultures, leading to new compositional forms that reflect the diversity of urban spaces in Africa. According to Obijiaku (2024), this goes beyond the traditional binary of African and Western music. Syncretism, a related concept that refers to the blending of different musical traditions in creating a new musical language, also comes into play in the discourse of contemporary trends in African art music.

As noted by Ofuani (2014), syncretism is evident in the works of composers who draw on both African and Western musical elements to create innovative compositions. For example, the use of African rhythmic patterns within Western harmonic structures is a common technique in contemporary African art music. For instance, Okafor (2020) demonstrated the use of the melodic structure of the song text “Ovie” as thematic material for composing “Ovie” for E-flat Saxophone and Piano accompaniment. This action presents a contemporary framework in African art music composition, given the modern nature of “Ovie,” which is part of a series of traditional choral-dance styles associated with the ordination ceremony of a king in the Ethiope West Local Government area of Delta State, Nigeria, and is typically used for entertainment (Okafor, 2020). Another example is the use of the Dagaaba gyil, a traditional xylophone from Ghana, in contemporary compositions to create syncretic works that blend traditional and modern elements (Acquah & Boahen, 2015, 2017).

The term “creative ethnomusicology” has also been used to describe the process of combining knowledge and experience of various musical styles and cultures in creating original art music. As noted by Brukman (2017), this approach is evident in the works of composers like Anthony Caplan, who has successfully merged African musical elements with Western classical music. For example, his works “Wood and Clay,” “Kundi Dreams,” and “Umrhubhe Geeste” showcase the integration of African instruments, such as the udu, Kundi harp, and umrhubhe, with the oboe, resulting in



compositions that transcend conventional musical boundaries. Similarly, Oluranti (2012) discusses the use of creative ethnomusicology, noting the concept of “African Pianism” that has been explored by composers such as Akin Euba, Joshua Uzoigwe, and Seun Owoaje. Composers of this sub-genre have developed a unique style that blends African rhythmic patterns with Western harmonic structures. Beyond this, the sub-genre has begun to incorporate deeper African musical elements, such as speech surrogacy, in a manner closely resembling spoken words, and indigenous drum surrogacy (Owoaje & Sofola, 2021b; Owoaje, 2025). This further reflects indigenous African instrumental music practices. Having explored these works, there is a need to focus more on the works of prominent contemporary African art music composers to provide reference materials for advancing theoretical positions in African art music, as well as the training of upcoming African art musicians. This study is therefore a vital contribution to this gap in the literature.

Theoretical framework

Postcolonial theory critically examines the cultural, political, and artistic legacies of colonialism and how once-colonised societies assert their identities in the postcolonial era. While Ashcroft et al. (2002) laid the foundation for it, contemporary scholars continue to affirm its relevance, emphasising postcolonialism as a critical lens to challenge the impacts of colonialism and advocate for the revitalisation of indigenous cultures (Chiorean, 2022; Carey & Silverstein). In musicological studies, the theory offers a framework for analysing how African composers negotiate the imposition of Western musical systems with indigenous traditions. It highlights power dynamics, cultural hybridity, and resistance through creative expression. Applied to African art music, postcolonial theory reveals how composers like Seun Owoaje subvert colonial musical structures by integrating African idioms, thereby reasserting cultural autonomy and popular culture.

This theory enables a nuanced understanding of how African vocal art music transforms Western compositional models into localised, meaningful forms of expression that resonate more profoundly with indigenous listeners, while also aligning with global music practices. As Diko (2024) noted, postcolonial theory in the field of African literature involves an active interrogation of heritage and a powerful assertion of voice that challenges established narratives. This theoretical approach offers a nuanced understanding of how African vocal art music transforms and reinterprets Western compositional models, thereby creating localised, meaningful forms of expression. These forms resonate with indigenous listeners and contribute to global music practices, often by explicitly addressing issues of identity, creativity, and cultural reclamation.

Data presentation: Compositional ideologies of Seun Owoaje

This section examines the compositional ideologies of Seun Owoaje, integrating his musical ideologies with his musical background. The compositional ideologies of Seun Owoaje are discussed with a focus on open-mindedness, creative ethnomusicology, social commentary, and non-musical inspiration.

Open-Mindedness

Seun Owoaje’s compositional ideas come from several sources. He mentioned open-mindedness as one of his strengths in generating new ideas for music composition. This is primarily evident in his music consumption. Right from his undergraduate days, he would listen to lots of musical genres and styles that many of his colleagues would consider weird and awkward, or unbecoming of their taste. While listening to the works of foremost Yoruba and African art music composers, he would also listen to the music of Avant-Garde composers such as Igor Stravinsky, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Arnold Schoenberg and Sergey Prokofiev. These were unconventional works that his colleagues would consider unusual when choosing music to listen to. Given his open mind, he believed all of these works to be valuable musical resources. He would listen diligently to these works and justify his



listening to them with the fact that the names of those composers were usually mentioned in his Western music history class.

In addition, Seun Owoaje loves traditional music and listens to numerous conventional music performances, such as the Dundun and Bata ensembles. He also listens to traditional Yoruba popular genres like Juju, Apala and Fuji, many of which were not the catch for young people of his age who had grown up in the kind of environment where he was raised around the time. His father had a particularly profound influence on his love for these genres. According to Seun Owoaje, “my dad had collections of recordings of Western classical music, and indigenous popular artists, such as the juju music of I. K. Dairo, Victor Olaiya and Adeolu Ogunsanya, as well as Nigerian and Ghanaian highlife music of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s”. All of these formed his musical background as a young, growing child, creating a balance between indigenous and Western music consumption. He tries to absorb the melodies, rhythms and philosophies of the various traditional music styles, enriching his creative arsenal. All of these reflect in both his vocal and instrumental compositions. According to him, his music compositions are based on inspiration and artistic expression, rather than just fulfilling academic theories. In addition to the aforementioned music styles that shape his creative mind, Seun Owoaje actively listens to a wide range of jazz and calypso, which are also reflected in some of his works. The list of musical styles to which he listens and enriches his creative mind is endless.

Open-mindedness has been viewed as a creative device. For instance, Verducci (2016) noted that open-mindedness, as a valuable creative device, operates within three components: openness to new ideas, critical assessment of these ideas, and the eagerness and willingness to revise one's views in the face of substantiation. For Seun Owoaje, open-mindedness is a personal philosophy that drives his appetite for listening to diverse musical styles, both conventional and unconventional, thereby developing a broad, cross-cultural musical mind. According to him;

“I would always listen to the works of Nigerian art music composers such as Fela Sowande, Adams Fiberesima and Ayo Bankole, alongside the music of Western art music composers such as Handel, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Rachmaninoff and Chopin. I was just compelled to start imitating what these people were doing”

For instance, his *Four African Folktales*, a publication consisting of four piano pieces based on Yoruba musical idioms, follows the works of foremost African art music composers like Fela Sowande and Ayo Bankole, while also reflecting the expressive musical language of Western composers like Frederick Chopin. Shown below is an excerpt from “Jomijo”, an arrangement based on a Yoruba folktale song. It shows how Seun Owoaje employs the piano to express scenes from the folktale “Jomijo”, a tale of the tortoise, shrew, and squirrel. The tortoise, while trying to stop a physical fight between the shrew and squirrel, got bitten by the shrew in the nose. Measure 38 is marked “Maestoso” to depict the increase in the motion of the tortoise as it looks for help after being bitten by the shrew. Measure 41, with the use of a diminuendo followed by soft and moderately soft, signifies the changing dynamics in the cry of the tortoise, due to the pain that accompanies the bite.



37 *Asin bites* **Maestoso** ♩=87
ljàpá's pained cry!
ff

40 **Piu Mosso** ♩=92
p mp

An excerpt from Seun Owoaje's Jomijo

Open-mindedness plays a significant role in music composition and creative arts education. It allows composers and students to embrace a wide variety of musical ideas, styles, and traditions, thereby broadening their creative minds. As Rink (2019) notes, open-mindedness fosters broad musical thinking and enriches creative output by encouraging engagement with diverse sound worlds. Burnard (2012) also noted that open-mindedness expands a composer's creative space, enabling them to draw inspiration from different musical systems. In Seun Owoaje's case, open-mindedness is not just a personality trait; it is a deliberate creative strategy employed to furnish the mind with valuable music resources, especially given that open-mindedness contributes to the enriching and broadening of one's world view within the music soundscape. His appetite for listening to a wide range of musical styles, from Yoruba traditional music and Juju to avant-garde works by Schoenberg and Stravinsky, shows how open-mindedness can shape a composer's musical identity and expression. It reflects his belief that valuable ideas can come from any musical tradition, so long as the mind is open to receiving them.

Creative ethnomusicology

As earlier mentioned, creative ethnomusicology entails combining knowledge and experience of various musical styles and cultures to create original art music (Brukman, 2017). To ensure a blend of Western composition techniques and Yoruba traditional music, Seun Owoaje undertakes research into the elements and characteristics of specific African music traditions concerning Western music. With this, he can ground himself in the proper interpretation and expression of styles. To ensure a blend of his array of musical knowledge in his compositions, Seun Owoaje creates an outline of the musical ideas upon which he wants to situate his work, developing pre-compositional considerations – a brief that predetermines the characteristics of the composition, with emphasis on elements such as harmony (conventional, diatonic, jazz), rhythm, and time signature. Through this, he can marry various styles and ideas together, blending the multiple techniques of those musical styles.



His piano composition titled “*Groove for the master drummer*” was composed to replicate the traditional master drummer in Yoruba drum ensembles, expressed through a soprano solo and the piano. As noted by Seun Owoaje, the music intends to honour the master drummer who is represented in the composition by the piano. This composition relates to Onyeji’s (2008) concept of drummistic piano composition, a concept that seeks to provide a pedagogical basis for students of African music in piano composition. This concept is anchored on the postulation that African countries south of the Sahara are drumming societies. Putting the role of the drums in sub-Saharan Africa in perspective, Akpabot (1986) noted that the drums play the exact dominant/lead roles the string section plays in a Western orchestra. Seun’s “*Groove for the master drummer*”, being a voice and piano composition incorporating the *Dundun* drum (*Isaaju and Iya ilu*), replicates the role of the traditional master drummer in a *Dundun* ensemble, with the piano playing a significant role like the master drum. It is important to note, that this composition aligns with the position of Akin Euba who had in 1989, in respect of African Pianism, proposed a compositional technique for the piano, which employs the performance techniques of African instruments such as xylophone, plucked lutes, thumb piano, as well as the polyrhythmic methods used in playing African percussive instruments (Oluranti, 2012).

2

GROOVE FOR THE MASTER DRUMMER
SEKERE L'OSA N TO

SEUN OWOAJE

$\text{♩} = 120$

VOICE

PIANO *mf*

ISAAJU

IYAALU

5

PNO.

IY

An excerpt from Seun Owoaje’s Groove for the Master Drummer



Social Commentary

African musicians have long served as social commentators, using their music to critique political injustice, address social issues, and advocate for societal change. Artists such as Fela Kuti exemplify this role, embedding messages of resistance and consciousness in their lyrics and performances. As Agawu (2003) notes, African music often functions not only as entertainment but as a vehicle for communicating social, political, and ethical concerns within the public sphere. Through his vocal compositions, Seun Owoaje aims to address social issues, with the hope that they will improve the lives of both listeners and performers. He believes in the philosophical power of words, which he employs in coining his lyrical contents towards achieving his aim of teaching his intended lessons. He draws on philosophical ideas from Yoruba traditional culture and also incorporates biblical verses that support his intended ideas. This, for instance, is demonstrated in one of his popular compositions titled *Ole Olojukokoro* (The Covetous one), which addresses covetousness and encourages modest living, and *Ma di Olowo* (I must be rich), which discourages the “wealth without enterprise” mindset that seems to be a significant issue in the Nigerian society, especially among young people.

The need to make social commentaries in his works stems from his desire to contribute to the well-being of both his immediate and larger society, given the visible social dysfunction that has led to a state of moral and ethical decay. By addressing these issues through music, Seun Owoaje aligns with the African tradition, where musicians are often regarded as custodians of societal values and conscience. As demonstrated in this study, his compositions serve not just as artistic expressions but also as tools for social reflection, correction, and transformation, reinforcing the age-old role of the African musician as both entertainer and moral instructor (Agawu, 2003). Beyond the lyrical context of his vocal compositions, he considers the need to either marry several musical elements, switch between musical styles, or make use of entirely different musical ideas in expressing his musical thoughts. To him, the most important thing is that the lessons in his compositions have clarity and are well delivered as they relate to his audience.

For instance, his composition “*Ole Olojukokoro*” is a blend of classical and contemporary harmony and tonality, as it employs functional diatonic harmony with a touch of modern chords. It features parallel 7ths, modern anticipations, Sus (suspended) chords, and chords built on fourths. Seun Owoaje described the piece as a “hybrid piece”. The use of parallel 7th chords is shown below in the second measure, where chords I⁷, ii⁷, and iii⁷ are used successively, while maintaining the same intervallic direction and distance. The lower notes on the right hand of the piano, C# - D - E, are the 7th of each of the successive chords I-ii-iii. The same measure also demonstrates the use of chords built on fourths in the right hand of the piano. In addition, the chord stack in the second measure shows the use of modern anticipation. This is further demonstrated in measures 8, 12, 18, 23, and 51. Given Seun Owoaje's intention to use the lyrics of the composition to address covetousness in contemporary society, the blend of functional diatonic harmony with modern chords is a deliberate attempt to convey the intended message to diverse listeners, while appealing to their musical sense.

2

Ole Ol'ojukokoro

Seun Owoaje



Con brio

Voice

mf E! *mp* O un t'o je t'e ni l'o je t'e ni. K'a fo ju s'o un o lo un 'o da.

Con brio

Piano

f *mf* *mp*

Moderato Cantabile

An excerpt from Seun Owoaje's Ole Olojukokoro

Non-Musical Inspirations

Non-musical inspirations play a significant role in the creative processes of composers, often providing the raw material for unique and personal artistic expressions. In African art music, everyday experiences, conversations, and cultural practices frequently serve as stimuli for composition, reflecting the holistic nature of creativity within African epistemologies. As Nzewi (2005) affirms, African composers often draw from the totality of lived experience in crafting musical works, thereby blurring the boundaries between the musical and the non-musical. This is evident in Seun Owoaje's practice, where mundane yet culturally resonant elements, such as food and casual dialogue, inspire musical creations that are at once humorous, innovative, and deeply reflective of his environment. He picks inspiration from non-musical sources, which are fashioned into making valuable musical sense. His composition "Lojiiki gari ati bota" (The logic of Gari and butter) was inspired by a discussion he once had with his wife during one of his playful moments, about mixing gari (Cassava flakes) with butter to form a unique recipe.

According to him, it struck his mind that this idea could form the basis of a vocal music composition, so he went on to experiment with more food combinations such as:

"gari can be taken with beans
bread can be taken with beans
bread can be taken with butter,
if so, one should be able to combine gari with butter"

Given that the ideas behind the work resonate more with food permutation and innovative thinking, he pays more attention to the solo voice and the choir, making the piano mirror the choral harmony.

LOJIJKII GAARRI ATI BOTA

WORDS AND MUSIC BY 'SEUN OWOAJE

SOLO VOICE
 MODERATE ♩ = 62
 mf MO LE FI BU RE DI J'E WA... MO LE FI GA RRI J'E WA... SE SI WON FI BU RE DI

CHOIR
 mf MA... FI BU. BU RE DI J'E WA O LO YIN

PIANO
 MODERATE ♩ = 62
 mf

SV
 3
 JE SO TA... O YE KIN LE FI GA RRI JE SO TA... MO LE FI E FO J'E KO... MO LE FI E FO

CH
 JE SO TA O SE SA TE SO TA NI MI. MA... RO 'FO. MA FI

PNO

An excerpt from Seun Owoaje's Lojiki Gari ati Bota (The logic of Gari and butter)

It is essential to note that the combination of these food items is best understood within the context of Nigerian food culture. It was this idea that he fashioned into a thoughtful music idea, which culminated in the composition of “*Lojiki gari ati bota*”, a composition written for baritone solo and choir, with piano accompaniment. Seun Owoaje cherishes both musical and non-musical ideas that, during his formative years as an undergraduate at Obafemi Awolowo University, he often carried with him a manuscript and a pencil, in preparation for compositional ideas that could flow into his mind at any time.

Conclusion

African art music is growing in popularity, especially as a result of the influence of contemporary composers who endeavour to incorporate elements of the changing times and philosophy into their compositions. Seun Owoaje, being one of such composers, demonstrates the use of contemporary elements in his works, as he strives to match his composition with modern practices. His works,



especially those referenced in this study, reflect a blend of musical and non-musical elements as the bedrock of compositional inspiration. Within the scope of post-colonial theory, Seun Owoaje's research into the elements and characteristics of specific African music traditions, vis-à-vis Western art music, portrays a deliberate effort to employ Western art music practices, which are the bedrock of African art music, as a medium for expressing African musical identity. This is while using the medium as an alternative route to transmit indigenous African musical idioms to the rest of the world.

For music composition teachers, the study's findings offer valuable perspectives on training African art music composers whose works are deeply rooted in cultural significance, while also reflecting the changing times and contemporary practices in the music industry. The study also encourages openness to non-musical ideas as compositional devices, highlighting the need for innovative thinking and the ability to combine innovation with musical devices in the composition of African art music. Music educators should organise workshops and forums where composers can share techniques and collaborate with students, to foster a network of innovative African art music creators. Research-based compositions should also be encouraged to blend indigenous elements with formal music training to ensure authenticity and innovation. Lastly, music curriculum developers should include the works of modern African art music composers, such as Seun Owoaje, in theory, composition, and performance courses to foster appreciation and deeper engagement with contemporary African art music.

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