

Building Bridges Between African Traditional and Western Art Music: A Study of Joshua Uzoigwe's *Egwu Amala*

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It is a truism that folk traditions have been a source of inspiration for many art composers, particularly since the nineteenth century. This practice of investigating and using elements of folk music in Western art compositions is often ascribed to Béla Bartók (1881-1945), a Hungarian composer, ethnomusicologist, and pianist. Motivated by his interest in folk music and the contemporary renaissance of nationalism in general, Bartók and his close ally, Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967),¹ began collecting and researching old Eastern European (Magyar) folk melodies as early as 1906.² Their findings not only corrected some of the misconceptions of the time, but also gave some insight into the characteristics of folk songs, especially Magyar folk music.³ Moreover, Bartók's comprehensive study of these folk melodies enabled him to compose dozens of folk song settings as well as to incorporate folk tunes and styles into his compositions, sometimes even quoting folk songs directly and writing works derived entirely from authentic folk tunes.⁴ Bartók's style of art music composition thus became a fusion of folk music,

¹ Zoltán Kodály was a Hungarian composer, ethnomusicologist, pedagogue, linguist, philosopher, and close friend of Béla Bartók. Kodály is best known internationally as the creator of the Kodály Method. In 1905 he began to visit remote villages and to collect songs, recording them on Edison phonograph cylinders.

² Noteworthy, however, is that in 1904 Bartók made his first Hungarian (Transylvanian) folk song transcription. Bartók and Kodály's first arrangement was published in 1906.

³ Magyar folk music had been previously classified as Gypsy music, as exemplified in Franz Liszt's famous Hungarian Rhapsodies for piano that were based on popular art songs performed by Gypsy bands of that era. The folk songs are based on pentatonic scales similar to those in Oriental folk traditions, such as those in Central Asia and Siberia.

⁴ For example, Bartók's first large collection of folk song arrangements for piano, which consists of two volumes titled *Gyermekeknek* ("For Children") for Solo Piano (1908-10, revised 1943; Gillies 2007).

classicism, and modernism. Likewise, many African art music composers have responded to the immanent cultural and political landscapes and movements that created awareness of indigenous cultural interests and revivals that paralleled Bartók's nationalistic stance. This Bartókian compositional probing, on the one hand, has served as an additional motivational factor for many African composers (Euba 1999).

The Nigerian composer, musicologist, and ethnomusicologist Olatunji Akin Euba (1935-),⁵ in more recent times, has popularized this approach to music composition through his theory of "creative ethnomusicology," a concept he later expanded into his theory of creative musicology (Euba 1989). While the end product of ethnomusicological and musicological research is typically a scholarly article or book, the terminal result of creative ethnomusicology, by contrast, "is the composition of music in which elements derived from research are employed" (Euba, n.d.).

Bartók's creative philosophy and Euba's concept of creative ethnomusicology underscore the composition of many contemporary African art music composers including Joshua Uzoigwe.⁶ Uzoigwe's masterful coalescing of traditional African and Western art music idioms is exemplified in his many compositions, one of which is *Egwu Amala* from the anthology *Talking Drum* for Piano Solo, Op. 11 (c. 1991).

In this article I focus on this piece because Uzoigwe derived its sonic and core

⁵ Olatunji Akin Euba studied composition at the Trinity College of Music, where he obtained diplomas of Fellow of the Trinity College, London in Composition and the Fellow of the Trinity College, London in Piano. He received B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and the Ph.D. in ethnomusicology from the University of Ghana, Legon. Currently, Euba is the Andrew Mellon Professor Emeritus at the University of Pittsburgh.

⁶ An example is Halim El-Dabh (Egypt). Others elsewhere include Jose Maceda (Philippines), Paul Humphreys (USA), and Elaine Barkin (USA). For scholarly works discussing African art music, see Omojola (1995) and Konye (2007).

rhythmic structure from the folk music *Égwú Àmàlà*,⁷ a popular women's dance genre of my people, the Ogbaru of southern Nigeria, an area in which I have also conducted research. My goal here is to discuss how Uzoigwe's ethnomusicological scholarship and compositional skills articulate intercultural approaches to contemporary African art music creativity. Engaging *Égwú Àmàlà* as a pre-compositional resource, I analyze the musical components of this traditional dance to explain those unique folk characteristics that influenced the conception, creativity, and the structure of Uzoigwe's contemporary piano composition, *Egwu Amala*.

JOSHUA UZOIGWE: THE MAN AND HIS MUSIC

Born on July 1, 1946, in Umuahia, Abia State (formally Imo State), southern Nigeria, Joshua Uzoigwe was a performer, composer and ethnomusicologist. He died on October 15, 2005, in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. Uzoigwe was an archetype of African composers whose musical heritages are multiple and diverse. Influences from Africa (specifically Nigeria) and Europe both shaped his musicality and scholarly endeavors. His exposure to European art music equipped him with Western techniques and resources that basically shaped his ways of writing music. But, like Bartók in Hungary and other African art music composers including Fela Sowande, Halim El-Dabh, Olatunji, Nketia, Akin Euba, and Justinian Tamasuza, Uzoigwe became fascinated with the traditional music of his ethnic group. Many of his compositional resources were derived from the traditional

⁷ Henceforth, I will use the accented spelling, *Égwú Àmàlà*, to designate the traditional genre and *Egwu Amala* for Joshua Uzoigwe's composition.

music of his Igbo roots as well as that of other ethnic groups, including the Yorùbá with whom he trained and later worked.⁸

Figure 1. Joshua Uzoigwe (1946 – 2005)⁹



Uzoigwe began his formal studies in Western music in Nigeria, first studying the piano at King's College, Lagos; then at the International School, Ibadan (1965-1967), and later at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1970-1973). It was during his studies at the University of Nigeria that Uzoigwe wrote his song cycle, *Four Igbo Songs* for soprano and piano. Uzoigwe revised this song cycle in 1985 and later expanded it to *Six Igbo Songs* for voice and piano, Op. 1 (1996). These art songs draw heavily on traditional Igbo folk songs, with some of the lyrics and melody quoting from the original folk song. Uzoigwe's accompaniments to these songs are new and idiomatically simulate traditional instruments of the Igbo. Evidently, he may have been studying and performing the works

⁸ Igbo is one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria; the other two are Hausa and Yorùbá.

⁹ The photograph is from the following internet website and was accessed in October 2012:

http://www.unihildesheim.de/ntama/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=187&Itemid=52&limitstart=5

of other Nigerian composers, including Fela Sowande, Ayo Bankole, and Akin Euba, as the *Six Igbo Songs* demonstrate the compositional techniques of using African idioms in writing, traits embedded in the works of the preceding Nigerian composers.

In 1973 he went abroad to study at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London. Here, Uzoigwe composed several works that were performed by the Contemporary Music Society at Guildhall School of Music and Drama.¹⁰ After graduating from Guildhall, he proceeded in 1977 to Queen's University, Belfast, where he graduated with masters and PhD degrees in ethnomusicology in 1981, after studying under the distinguished ethnomusicologist John Blacking. At Queen's, he wrote the *Ritual Procession for African and European Orchestra* (1978), which was performed in 1980. This piece marked the beginning of an apparently distinct phase of his musical style: the fusion of African and Western musical idioms. This is not to say that this synthesis was not present in his former works; rather, it was the degree of maturity in his intercultural synthesis that distinguished these works from the previous ones. Indeed, and as I have already remarked, some of the melodies of his *Six Igbo Songs*, such as "Tuzu," were quoted almost verbatim from Igbo folk melodies. His rearrangement of the melody from the original folk song is not creatively exceptional, but his piano accompaniment is very inventive.

For his dissertation Uzoigwe returned to Nigeria to conduct fieldwork on *Ukom* music. *Ukom* is a ritual instrumental ensemble music that is performed at the *Okwukwu Nwanyi* funeral ceremony of a distinguished Igbo woman and at the *Iri Ji* (New Yam) Festival (Uzoigwe 1998). Typically, the *Ukom* ensemble consists of three musical instruments and four players. The instruments are *aria nkwa* (membrane drum row),

¹⁰ These works include *Nigerian Dances* for chamber orchestra (1976), *Sketches for Piano* (1977), and the *Lustra Variations* for symphony orchestra (1977). See also Sadoh 2007.

which is a set of ten tuned drums played by two master musicians; the *ebelu* (membrane drum), which has a very deep tone and serves to establish the musical pulse; and *ekere* (small wooden slit drum), which functions as a metronome (Uzoigwe 1998, 11).

During his research of *Ukom* music, Uzoigwe became an apprentice and learned to perform the music from two renowned *Ukom* teachers, Israel Anyahuru and Nwankwo Ikpeazu. While this participant observation research was in partial fulfillment of his ethnomusicological study with John Blacking, Uzoigwe had another ambition, namely that of revealing the compositional and theoretical techniques embedded in traditional Igbo indigenous knowledge and music. In his book *Ukom: A Study of African Music Craftsmanship*, Uzoigwe (1998) states, "For long I have believed in the need for an evolution of a systematic academic teaching of African music theory; the reason being that we have reached a point where the codification of the latter's principles can now be effectively disseminated." Consequently, his study of the *Ukom*, he continues, "serves as a working theory for the expansion of the composer's creative imagination since the theory is based upon the supreme guidance of Igbo cultural roots" (Uzoigwe 1998).

In the above book Uzoigwe discusses in detail his observance of the rich social, compositional, and performance structures and practices of *Ukom* music. My task in this article is not to discuss *Ukom*, as this has already been accomplished elsewhere (Uzoigwe 1998; Uzoigwe 2005). Suffice it to say that his profound ethnographic experiences in learning *Ukom* guided, informed, and influenced Uzoigwe's creativity in subsequent compositions. Notably, he took account of the context and remained conscious of the socio-cosmological concepts of the specific culture from which his compositions are drawn. He identified some theoretical perspectives and compositional techniques in the

traditional music he studied and later incorporated some of them into his compositions. For instance, he distinguished variation as the core principle of musical organization and noted four main types: perpetual variation, limited variation, ostinato variation, and chain song variation (Uzoigwe 1998; Agawu 2001). These compositional elements are apparent in his works, including *Egwu Amala*. His theoretical perspectives are based on indigenous knowledge and the kinds of frameworks advocated by Nzewi (1997), Agawu (2003), Dor (2005), and other scholars. From this study, Uzoigwe composed the piece *Ukom* for solo piano as the first of five works of his *Talking Drums*, a repertoire that derives from Nigerian drumming and dance traditions. The other four pieces in this anthology are titled *Bàtá*, *Ilulu*, *Dùndún* and *Egwu Amala*. These works draw from the melodic and rhythmic traits inherent in the repertoire that indigenous Nigerian master musicians perform on instruments, including the *Ukom* membrane drum row of the Igbo, the *Iyaalu* tension drum in the *Dùndún* genre of the Yorùbá, and the small slit drum (also woodblock) in *Égwú Àmàlà*, a dance genre of the Ogbaru (Igbo) of Nigeria.

Of the five works in this set, three are derived from the traditional folk music of the Igbo (east and west) of southern Nigeria and two from the folk music of the Yorùbá of southwestern Nigeria. The shared selection of sources for Uzoigwe's piece demonstrates the multiplicity of his Nigerian heritage. He was born in Igboland, and he studied and later taught in the area. Similarly, he was conversant with the Yorùbá tradition since he subsequently studied in Lagos and held tutorial positions at the University of Ife, in Ile Ife, both major cities in Yorùbá land.

All but one of these five works, *Egwu Amala*, traditionally utilizes drum(s) as the main instrument in their respective instrumental ensemble. The three works from

Igbo land—namely, *Ukom*, *Ilulu*, and *Egwu Amala*—are associated in one way or the other with women, earth, and water, all of which belong to and/or are linked to *Ana* (the earth deity) and *onye mili* or *mami-wata* (the water goddess). Of these three pieces, two (*Ukom* and *Ilulu*) belong to *Ukom* music. Unlike the other genres represented in *Talking Drum*, *Egwu Amala* does not use any membrane drums. Rather, the small slit drum is the most significant instrument in the ensemble. One may then question the seeming oddity of *Égwú Àmàlà* in this group. Was the addition of *Egwu Amala* simply to augment or conclude the anthology with another female dance genre typical of an actual *Ukom* performance?¹¹ What could possibly justify the presence of *Egwu Amala* in this repertoire? Could the rationale be found in the Igbo cosmological and religious worldview?

According to the Igbo religious worldview, the human world is conceived as three-dimensional: the sky (*Igwe*), the earth (*Ala*, with water bodies—sea, rivers, lakes, and lagoons—under the purview of the earth),¹² and the spirit/ancestral world (*Ime-Ala*). Each of these dimensions is perceived to function as a place of habitat for various deities and, as such, is treated with respect (Nwoye 2011; Kalu and Kalu 1993; Ejizu 1987).

Cosmologically, the Igbo view the sky as the dwelling of the Supreme Being (*Chukwuezi*) and a host of divinities;¹³ the earth is where the earth deity, human beings, and other minor divinities reside; and the underworld is the abode of ancestral spirits, numerous

¹¹ According to Uzoigwe, *Ukom* music has three compartments: *ilulu nkwa*, *ogbe nkwa* and *ilu nkwa*. The third compartment, *ihu nkwa*, indicates the main ritual event and involves musical group—that is, the players—but also the active dance participation of the audience (Uzoigwe 1998, 36–38). See also Uzoigwe 2005, 247–66.

¹² Due to phonetics and dialectical differences of the Igbo language, *Ala* can be spelled and/or pronounced as *Ana* and *Ani*.

¹³ These divinities include the deities of thunder, lightning, sun, etc.

disembodied spirits and other personified forces (Tuche 2009; Chukwuezi 2008; Arazu 2005). In Nwoye's view, Igbo deities are organized spatially in four levels:

1. Sky – male
2. Earth – female
3. Water – female
4. Ancestral – male

According to this structure, male deities dominate the first and fourth levels while female deities prevail in the second and third levels. Thus, the deities in the sky whose abodes are close to *Chukwu* and those of the ancestors are male, whereas deities of the earth and water are females (Nwoye 2011). That said, it ought to be noted that this divide does not make the male deities superior to the female. Conversely, the Igbo people believe that

the two principles [*Chukwu* and *Ani*] are needed and in the right balance in their contributions to the welfare of humans. In some expositions of Igbo religion, its core is the polarity between *Chukwu* and *Ana* (or *Ani*)—a polarity in which both poles are, necessarily, crucial. In this way, the belief is that cosmological imbalance of male and female, *Chukwu* and *Ani* causes drought or disease (Nwoye 2011, 309).

A similar cosmological balance is equally observable in Uzoigwe's selection of folk music in his *Talking Drums*:

Sky	<i>Bàtá</i> (the music of the Yorùbá god of thunder, called Sàngó or Shango ¹⁴)
Earth and water	<i>Égwú Àmàlà</i> (all women's dance in honor of the water goddess, popularly known as <i>oyne mili</i> or <i>mami-wata</i>)
Ancestral world	<i>Ukom, Ilulu</i> (music that celebrates the death of a prominent woman and the music also plays a prominent role in the festive celebration of the New Yam, <i>Iri Ji ofuu</i>)

If Uzoigwe wanted to take a breath from writing more music on the *Ukom*, yet maintain a connection to the music without drifting too far away from the ideas of the *ihu nkwa* as music that honors prominent dead women, or if he wanted to maintain the

¹⁴ Note that Sàngó or Shango is a deity and not a Supreme Being in the Yorùbá society.

cosmological connections observed in the other works in this collection, then *Égwú Àmàlà*, the prestigious all-women's dance of the Ogbaru people, was a good choice.

The Ogbaru (also Ogbahu or Ogbesu) are located along the east and west lower banks of the River Niger in southern Nigeria. They reside in four different contiguous geo-political areas in the southern states of Anambra, Delta, Rivers, and Bayelsa.¹⁵ Linguistically, the Ogbaru speak various dialects of Igbo language. The Igbo, who are located in the southeastern region, are one of the largest ethnic groups of Nigeria; the other two are Yorùbá and Hausa. See Figure 2 for the location of the Igbo and Ogbaru people.

Figure 2. Map of Ogbaruland



¹⁵ Today, the only geo-political area referred to as Ogbaru Local Government Area (LGA) is found in Anambra State. The Anambra State Government created this LGA on August 27, 1991.

Égwú Àmàlà is a dance genre performed mainly by Ogbaru women, although men play supporting roles including playing of musical instruments. In Igbo language the term *Égwú Àmàlà* means “paddle dance.” Nonetheless, the genre is sometimes called *égwú onye mili* or *égwú mami-wata* (mermaid dance) because it is ritually association with *onye-mmili* or *mami-wata*, the water deity whose habitat is the River Niger or *Òsùmìlì* (also *Òshìmìlì*), as the Ogbaru people call the river. *Égwú Àmàlà* is at the heart of Ogbaru performance structure because it documents and enacts the socio-cultural life of this people and is a repository of information about their artistic traditions. Thus, the main goal of the genre is the depiction of the Ogbaru lifestyle through the combination of language, music, dance, drama, and belief system (see also Ozah 2010, 2008).

The instrumental ensemble that accompanies *Égwú Àmàlà* performance comprises the *òkpòkòlò* (small slit drum), *ùdùdù* (clay pot drum), *ìchàkà*, (gourd rattle), the *ogéné* (metal clapperless bell) and hand clapping. These instruments play percussive roles in the ensemble. Although they are considered melorhythmic, these percussive instruments are not used to simulate spoken language. Rather, it is the *òpì* (the gourd horn), the only blown instrument in the ensemble, that functions as a speech surrogate and is used to “talk” during performances. The *òpì* is a very gendered instrument and is played solely by men. Because of this unique role, the *òpì* is often mistakenly thought to be the most important instrument in this ensemble; however, the *òkpòkòlò* is the requisite instrument in any *Égwú Àmàlà* ensemble and performance.

THE *OKPOKOLO*

The *okpokolo* is a small slit drum (also woodblock) characteristically made of wood or in some cases, bamboo (see Figure 3). It is struck with a wooden mallet and emits a high, non-vibrating, rather flat, non-piercing yet distinctive sound that blends with the other instruments of the ensemble. Although it has two lips, the sound on both lips is the same; by contrast, the *ékwé* (larger slit drum) has lips that produce different sounds when struck and are usually used for communication as well as to “talk” during musical performance. Thus, the *okpokolo* could be considered as an instrument with no pitch referent.

In any *Égwú Àmàlà* presentation, the unique sound of the *okpokolo* is heard recurrently throughout the performance. Its rhythmic structural pattern (see Figure 4)

Figure 3. The *okpokolo*, shown in a picture from the dance group “Otu Aboh Nadi” in Ashaka, among whom I conducted research on *Égwú Àmàlà* between 2005 and 2006.



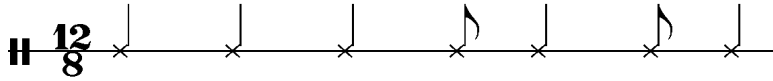
serves as a phrasing referent providing a cyclical time line over which the other instruments in the ensemble improvise and by which the rhythmic motion of the ensemble is sustained.¹⁶ This fundamental ostinato pattern is emblematic of and specific to *Égwú Àmàlà*. It is this episodically recurrent rhythmic pattern of the *òkpòkòlò* that Uzoigwe significantly quoted and so creatively used in his composition *Egwu Amala*.

The transcription of the *òkpòkòlò* rhythmic pattern in Figure 4a is from the dance-theme called *Aboh nwenu'gbo yana àmàlà* as performed by the “Otu Aboh Nadi” dance group, and the rhythmic pattern is consistent with my other transcriptions. In his composition, Uzoigwe wrote this ostinato rhythmic pattern in 19/8, which is attained by the rhythmic augmentation by an eighth note of each of the seven attacks that constitute the *òkpòkòlò* rhythmic pattern, shown in Figure 4b. Since *Égwú Àmàlà* is widely performed within and even outside Ogbaruland, one wonders if Uzoigwe possibly heard a piece with this rhythmic time configuration. Conversely, it is arguable that the 19/8 emanates from his creative process that draws on his knowledge of the European-derived compositional technique of rhythmic augmentation, prompting him to add a durational unit between each attack or onset. The *òkpòkòlò* rhythmic pattern thus occurs in two forms as illustrated in Figure 4.

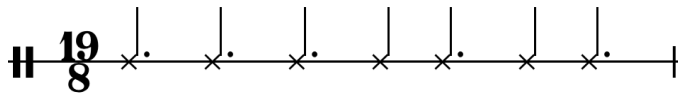
¹⁶ Various Africanist scholars have used different terms to refer to the “time line,” a term formulated by J.K. Nketia (1962). According to Nketia, a time line is “a constant point of reference by which the phrase structure of a song as well as the linear metrical organization of phrases are guided” (78). A popularly used term is the “bell pattern” by Jones (1959). Nzewi (1997) referred to it as a “phrasing referent” (35). Agawu (2003, 73) prefers “topos,” which he explains as “a short, distinct, and often memorable rhythmic figure of modest duration (about a metric length or a single cycle), usually played by a bell or high-pitched instrument in an ensemble, and serves as a point of temporal reference. It is held as an ostinato throughout the dance-composition.”

Figure 4. The *okpokolo* rhythmic pattern

(a) 12/8 pattern with seven attacks (in the traditional genre)

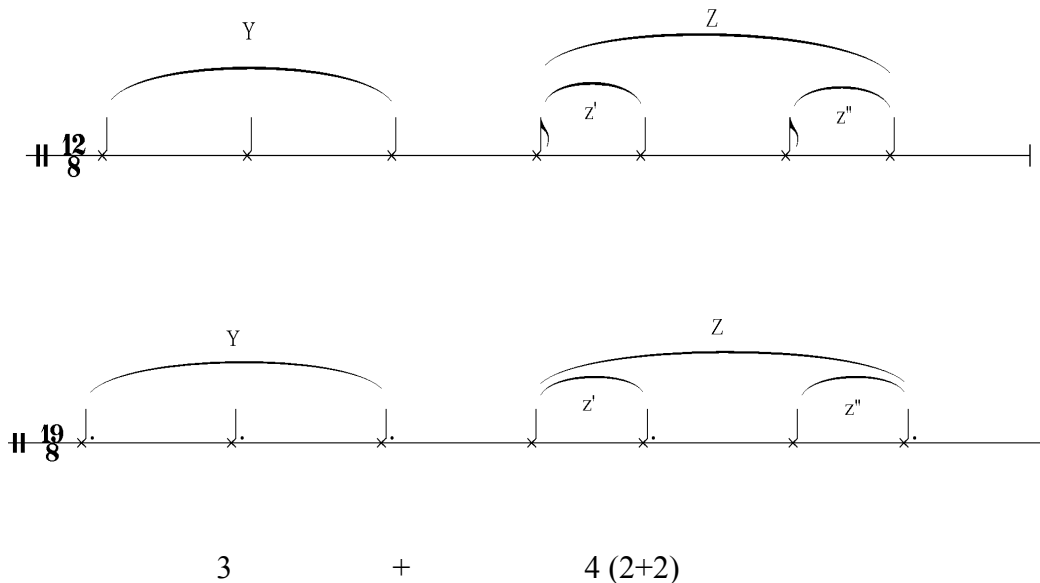


(b) 19/8 rhythmic variation that Uzoigwe used in his piece. The variation is achieved through a rhythmic augmentation of each attack by an eighth note.



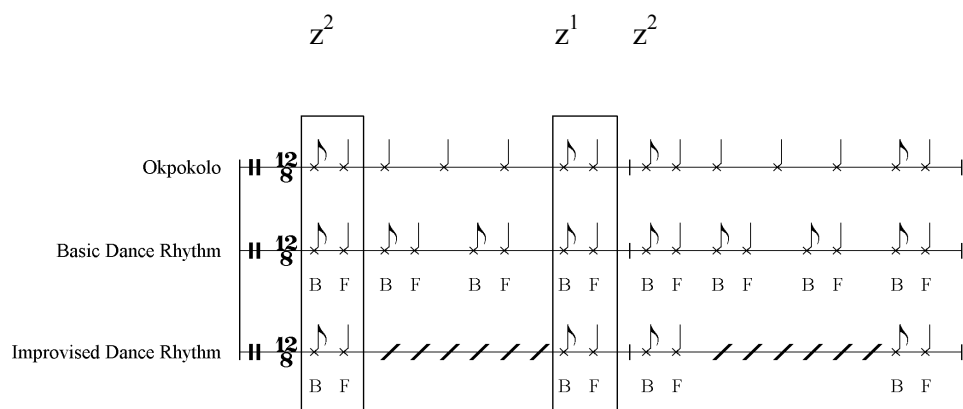
The rhythmic pattern of the *okpokolo* has two segments: *Y* and *Z*, as indicated in Figure 5. This segmentation is important in that it clarifies certain aspects of the pattern, especially when the dance is taken into consideration.

Figure 5. The two parts of the *okpokolo* rhythmic pattern



During *Égwú Àmàlà* performance, the *òkpòkòlò* pattern serves as a point of temporal reference for the dancers, who articulate section Z as part of their basic dance step pattern. As Figure 6 illustrates, the steps of the dancers are based on the first two attacks, for example z^1 , of the Z pattern. Typically, this dance pattern is repeated four times, corresponding with the cycle of the *òkpòkòlò* rhythmic pattern. Nonetheless, throughout the course of the performance, the dancers improvise such that they maintain the occurrence of the Z pattern on the first (z^2 up) and last (z^1 down) beats of the 12/8 measure, thus articulating the attack pattern of the *òkpòkòlò* at those points as shown in the boxed sections on Figure 6. Consequently, the dance not only articulates the *òkpòkòlò* pattern, but also presents multiple rhythmic patterns that add to the entire dance music and performance (see also Agawu 2006).

Figure 6. The *òkpòkòlò* rhythmic pattern and basic dance steps



Key:

- B = the ball of the foot
- F = flat foot
- The dancers begin with the left foot followed by the right.
- The use of multiple / (/////) here indicates sections where the dancers often perform intricate dance steps before returning to the downward beat of the ostinato pattern.

EGWU AMALA FROM TALKING DRUMS FOR SOLO PIANO

Uzoigwe's *Egwu Amala* for solo piano is the fifth and last piece of his *Talking Drums*.¹⁷ This piece is based on two sets of pitch materials, a pentatonic set and a hexatonic set, with tonal centricities on C and F#. Uzoigwe superimposed these materials to achieve polytonality, as illustrated in mm. 3–4 of Figure 7. Within these two measures, the right and left hands combine anhemitonic F# – G# – A# – C# – D# and hexatonic C – D – E – F – G – A scales, and the left hand transposes the pitch classes A, D and E down a perfect fifth to D, G, and A. Additionally, some parts of the C – D – E – F – G – A scale are occasionally mixed registrally and textually with F# – G# – A# – C# – D#. Interestingly, this two-measure passage, as well as the use of the interval of a descending fifth, appears recurrently in the piece.

The tempo marking indicated by the composer is ♩ = 152, which is easily translatable as *allegro* (fast), a tempo consistent with that used in some *Égwú Àmàlà* performances. That said, it is common to find dance compositions in slower tempi; for instance, the dance group “Otu Ife Chukwu Deni, Aboh” performed *Égwú olu ogo* (Farming dance) at ♩ = 100 during the course of my research in 2006. No matter what the tempo, it is imperative that the dance portrays the elegance and beauty of the Ogbaru female body and the culture of the Ogbaru people.

¹⁷ Uzoigwe did not live to publish most of his works, including *Egwu Amala*, in internationally known presses. It is now published thanks to William Chapman Nyaho, who through his recent complete edition of *Music of Africa and the African Diaspora*, has drawn international attention to the works not only of Joshua Uzoigwe but also of other African and African Diaspora composers. *Egwu Amala* is the sixth piece in Volume 5 of Nyaho's Anthology. For a recording of Uzoigwe's *Egwu Amala*, see William Chapman Nyaho's CD, *Senku: Piano Music by Composers of African Decent* (MSR Classics).

Figure 7. Uzoigwe's *Egwu Amala* from *Talking Drums*, mm. 1–6

Although Uzoigwe's piece is in 19/8 meter, transcriptions from my field recordings demonstrated the use of 12/8 in most *Égwú Àmàlà* music performances.¹⁸ Whereas in *Égwú Àmàlà* performance the ostinato rhythmic pattern of the *òkpòkòlò* (woodblock) has an indefinite pitch variant, Uzoigwe deviated from this tradition by often assigning pitch values to this pattern. For example, he lowered the second pattern (Z) a minor second from the first segment Y to give this ostinato a more melodic character (see again Figure 7). But, as I will explain later, there are some exceptions, which Uzoigwe inventively used to advance the piece.

The longest piece in Uzoigwe's *Talking Drums* is the first piece, *Ukom*, which has an overall length of 181 measures. The second longest piece in this set is *Egwu Amala* with 106 measures, in which the composer uses the *òkpòkòlò* rhythmic pattern 33 times.

¹⁸ As in *Égwú Àmàlà*, the use of 12/8 is found in most Sub-Saharan music settings (Dargie 1991; Nketia 1974)

In a concert performance, *Ukom* is seven minutes long whereas *Egwu Amala* is five minutes. The length of Uzoigwe's *Egwu Amala* is not surprising given that an actual *Égwú Àmàlà* performance could last for one or more hours, as was the case during my fieldwork.

The form of *Egwu Amala* is defined by an extended binary structure with a short Coda: A¹ – B – A² – C – coda. Broadly speaking, the piece can be divided into two parts, with the first consisting of sections A¹ and B and the second consisting of sections A² and C, followed by a concluding coda section. As can be seen in Table 1, there are symmetrical relationships between the various parts and sections of this piece. For example, parts 1 and 2 are precisely the same length (51 measures each), as do sections A¹ and A² (30 measures each) and sections B and C (21 measures each). However, in an actual traditional *Égwú Àmàlà* performance, we do not see this accurate division. In fact, the lyrics/songs drive the length of the performance because the music and dance is functional, not a concert piece. Additionally, within the above-mentioned form (in Uzoigwe's piece) one might perceive a call-and-response structure in which the *òkpòkòlò* rhythmic pattern often serves as a response. Another possible example of call-and-response is the imitation of melodic contour in the two voices of mm. 82–83. Uzoigwe used this style to call to mind the call-and-response singing technique utilized in a typical *Égwú Àmàlà*.

Table 1. Part 1, Part 2 and Coda

PARTS	SECTIONS	MEASURE NUMBERS
1	AI	1–30
	B	31–51
2	AII	52–81
	C	82–102
Coda	Coda	103–106

Uzoigwe was aware that he was writing for a Western instrument that is unable to capture all the sonic idiosyncraies of the indigenous *Égwú Àmàlà* instrumental ensemble. Thus, the continuous sound of the *òkpòkòlò* rhythm pattern (as would be the case in an *Égwú Àmàlà* performance) may sound monotonous to some ears. In order to avoid this tedium, he creatively used the retrograde form of the *òkpòkòlò* rhythm pattern in mm. 17, 18, and 19 and later in mm. 68, 69, and 70. Typically in *Égwú Àmàlà*, the *òkpòkòlò* does not play this retrograde pattern; Uzoigwe could possibly have drawn this idea from his study of Western art music. The retrograde version briefly substitutes the 3+4 segmentation, represented above in Figure 5, with a 4+3 segmentation. However, Uzoigwe prepared the introduction of the retrograde *òkpòkòlò* patterns in advance by replacing the descending half-tone (half-step) segmentation of the *òkpòkòlò* rhythmic pattern (m. 2) with a dramatic descending four-half-tone segmentation in m. 16 (and later in m. 67).

The above compositional materials signal a drive toward the climax in section A¹. Furthermore, Uzoigwe relinquishes the *òkpòkòlò* ostinato pattern and employs a series of contrary motions to reach a peak in section A¹ (m. 23, which is not the climax of the piece). From this sectional apex, the piece gradually makes a descent through the use of similar motion (mm. 23–26) and the introduction of a succession of continual quarter notes (mm. 23–24 and later 73–74) that are, in fact, an augmentation of the 2+2+2+3+2+3+2+3 segmentation pattern in m. 1. This descent is followed by an ascent (m. 27) and then a descent (m. 28), particularly in the melodic line. The bass line, on the other hand, maintains a more stable repetitive movement that, in conjunction with the melodic line, forms an oblique motion. In the ensuing two measures (mm. 29–30), the

reverse is the case: the melodic line is repetitive and more or less static (with A then F as prominent notes), while the bass line makes a descent privileging C that progresses to the tonic F to establish the F tonality (m. 30).

Likewise, in the other sections, Uzoigwe used various motions (similar, contrary, and oblique), melodic high points (e.g., mm. 23, 74, 95), and peaks (e.g., m. 47) throughout the piece to create an overall undulating feel typical of the waves of the river *Òshimìli*, from where this dance is believed to originate. In a traditional performance, peaks are realized by increase in the volume and density of the instruments as well as the intensity of the dance. With regard to the singing, the lead singer sings shorter verses (calls) as the chorus sings the response. This pattern continues until the lead singer gives the cue and all the musicians end on a downbeat with a release of the density and intensity of the music as the lead singer introduces a new song and new dance-theme. Hence, *Égwí Àmàlà* performance has the same undulating feel that Uzoigwe tried to create in his piece.

Unlike the more chordal and homophonic texture of section A¹, section B insinuates a more contrapuntal texture. This section can be subdivided into two groups, B¹ and B². Section B¹ (mm. 31–41) is more coalesced by imitative treatments of materials in augmentation (m. 31). In counterpoint with it is the original segmentation pattern of 2+2+2+3+2+3+2+3 found in m. 1 and throughout the piece, but in the retrograde form of 3+2+3+2+3+2+2+2. This is linked to the *òkpòkòlò* rhythmic pattern (mm. 33–34), thus suggesting a third voice. Specifically, the first nine measures of this subsection (mm. 31–39) show this suggestive contrapuntal texture, which flows into a more chordal part (mm. 40–41) as it introduces the next subsection.

Section B² (mm. 42–51), comprising ten measures, is a more chordal section that does not offset the counterpoint. The composer employed the dynamic and expression signs “*Fortissimo PESANTE, e un poco rubato*” at the beginning of this subsection to mark its importance as the music builds up to the peak of the entire piece. Notably, the *okpokolo* rhythmic pattern is conspicuously absent in this important subsection, which features a sequence of contrary motions that drives the piece to a climax marked by both the highest and lowest notes in the composition (m. 47). The use of *mezzo forte sub* in m. 48 followed by a *piano* in m. 49, and the descending contour of the bass line that cadences on C signals the conclusion of section B. To further evoke *Égwú Àmàlà* performance, Uzoigwe linked the climax of section B (part 1) to a new section A² (part 2) by letting the lower bass line continue to the beginning of the next measure, so that the textual change is continuous and not metrically abrupt (see bracketed section in Figure 9, mm. 51–52).

Part 2 begins with section A² (mm. 52–81). By the second measure of the section (m. 53), the long-anticipated characteristic *okpokolo* rhythmic pattern is reintroduced. This section is an exact repeat of A¹.

In a typical binary form, one would expect a return of section B, or possibly B¹, after section A². This is not the case here. Rather, Uzoigwe breaks the monotony of repetition that this return of section B could have created by introducing a new and

Figure 9. *Egwu Amala* from *Talking Drums*, mm. 51–52

The image shows a musical score for piano, measures 51 and 52. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. Measure 51 shows a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Measure 52 shows a continuation of the melodic line in the right hand and a bass line that descends to a C note. A dynamic marking of 'p' (piano) is present in measure 52. A bracketed section covers measures 51 and 52.

dramatic section C that is symmetrical to section B but presents different materials. Section C is composed of twenty-one measures (mm. 82–102) and has two salient features. First, the composer structured the lines in both right-hand and left-hand parts in a cantabile style that captures the vocal aspect of *Égwú Àmàlà* performance. For example, in mm. 84 and 90 the voices sing harmonically (in parallel thirds)¹⁹ as a duet from the lower to the upper voice registers respectively, with a three-voice variant in m. 88. In addition, in mm. 82, 83, and 86–88, the right- and left-hand parts present strict hocket styles. These features—singing in thirds and hocket—are attributes of *Égwú Àmàlà* dance performance. In particular, hocket is heard within the instrumental part of the traditional dance performance between the *òkpòkòlò* rhythmic pattern, hand clapping, *ùdùdù* (clay pot drum), and the *ogéné* (metal clapperless bell). To this point, twelve measures into section C (mm. 82–93), we do not hear the *òkpòkòlò* ostinato rhythmic pattern, an aspect that never occurs in the traditional dance performance where the ostinato pattern is unremitting.

Second, when Uzoigwe restated the *òkpòkòlò* rhythmic pattern in this last part of his *Egwu Amala* (beginning from mm. 94), he used the expression marking “*misterioso*,” possibly to evoke the cosmological and mythical origin of *Égwú Àmàlà*, which as tradition holds, was given to humans by *onye mili* or *mami-wata* (the water goddess) of *Òshimìlì*, the River Niger. This is the first time in the entire piece that the *òkpòkòlò* rhythmic pattern is heard at the same pitch level. He developed two motivic structures, which I designate *a* and *b* in Figure 10. These two motifs together with the *òkpòkòlò* pattern are repeated three

¹⁹ Singing in parallel thirds is not characteristic of *Égwú Àmàlà* alone; it also features in most West African music traditions.

Figure 10. *Egwu Amala* (“*misterioso*”) from *Talking Drums*.

times, alternating between C and A pitch collections with the centrality on C, as the piece descends an octave each time (mm. 94–99). Also, the monotonal *okpokolo* pattern, which is consistent at this point of the piece, moves in fifths from G# to C# and then to F# (mm. 100–102), all pitches of the pentatonic scale with a centrality on F# that appears at the beginning of and throughout the piece.

The coda, which follows, consists of only of four measures (see Figure 11).

Instead of writing out the characteristic ostinato pattern in these measures, the composer allowed the listener to hear the unsounded *okpokolo* pattern as he gradually brought the piece to a cadence on the lowest note, C, m. 106, as if to *Ala*, the earth deity of the Ogbaru/Igbo people.

Figure 11. The coda of *Egwu Amala* from *Talking Drums*.

CONCLUSION

Égwú Àmàlà is a dance genre that portrays the socio-cultural life of the Ogbaru people. The signature rhythm with which the genre is identified is the cyclical ostinato pattern usually played by the *òkpòkòlò* (small slit drum). It is this motif that Joshua Uzoigwe creatively utilizes in his piano piece *Egwu Amala*. Although writing for a Western instrument, Uzoigwe structured his composition in a way that captures the dance mode and essence of an actual traditional *Égwú Àmàlà* performance. The inventive use of repetition that often breaks monotony and the drive to a density that culminates at an apex and then gradually descends evoke parallel features in *Égwú Àmàlà* performance as well as in the Igbo cosmological worldview. The exploration of registration in Uzoigwe's piece also mirrors the undulating movements of the waves of the river, the habitat of the water divinity and where *Égwú Àmàlà* was previously performed. The gracious and energetic dance character in *Égwú Àmàlà* is reflected in Uzoigwe's *Egwu Amala*.

Uzoigwe is meticulously calculative in structuring his piece. For example, his composition is divided into two symmetrical parts, each with a length of 51 measures. Each part is further divided into two asymmetrical sections of 30 and 21 measures respectively and an additional coda of 4 measures. The result is a numerical sequence $30+21+30+21+4 = 106$.

While depending on the Igbo culture for pre-compositional resources, Uzoigwe effectively draws on his knowledge of Western art music, thus blending African tradition and Western art musical idioms. Uzoigwe's *Egwu Amala*, like his other works, underscores African art music composers' application of innovative rhythmic concepts

that draw from traditional roots. It also demonstrates African composers' fascination with popular folk genres.

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