

# When Music Speaks to Gods: A Musical Study of Ogun Ritual Rites and Its Relevance to Contemporary Ijanikin Community

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## Abstract

*This study examined singing and chanting in the ritual rites of Ogun deity with the aim of investigating their functions to the rites, anticipated returns for the young musicians and significance to the people of Ijanikin community. Some scholars have written on Ogun deity in relation to its history, festivals, 'attributes in vocation' and many others. Findings showed that, 'Isese' (traditional rites) is well accepted among some youths in the community and they are proud devotees. Not only that, musical practices which includes; chanting, singing and dancing plays a significant role in the ritual rites and attracts the interest of non initiates in the community. So, the need to document the assertions of these devotees (chanters & priests) on 'singing and chanting' with some of their songs prompted this study for archival purpose and for further studies. This study concluded that, conversance with the worship of Yoruba deities should be encouraged among the young members of the community and the obvious reasons for the recommendation were noted. The adopted theory for the study is the Stimulus - Response Theory. This study took a qualitative approach by relying on bibliographies, interviews and observation for data collection.*

*Keywords: Ijanikin, chanting, singing, Ogun rites, Yoruba gods*

## Introduction

Sacred music is functional in African context and often functions in varieties of ways in the activities of spiritual events. Many scholars such as; Sowande (1970), Vidal (2010), Okunade (2010), Adeleke, (2010), Omojola, (2013), Osunniyi (2019), and Adeyemo (2022) have described the roles and uses of music in daily activities, spiritual and occasional events in African society from different perspectives. To the Yoruba people, sound and messages that constitute music are of great importance and opined that, some metaphysical needs would be met through the instrumentation, tunes and messages of the songs used in the rites performance. This is being observed in their language tonality and expressions which contained words with the same spelling but different meanings because of tonal difference. In the worship of deities among the Yoruba people, sacred music used in appeasement of the supreme beings is also motivating the par-

ticipants. Some of these musical forms are rhythmic in nature for dance movements while others are symbolic for premeditated responses or reactions.

Sowande, (1970: 60) noted that, “sound has metaphysical power that is potent in its own right and, in it, a creative force which operates effectively according to the laws of its own nature with or without the awareness, consent or approval of man”. Through the messages and tunes in the singing and chanting, an unseen force which stimulates devotees’ reactions could be observed especially, during invocation of the spirits. Such displays include peculiar way of; singing, dancing, and becoming irrationally wild. This study focused on the indigenous members of Ijanikin community—the Awori. They are the predominant devotees to the worship of Ogun deity in the community.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The adopted theory for this study is the stimulus–response theory. Daodu (2010:109) noted that, “The Stimulus – Response theory is also called associationism and behaviourism theory because, it is based on the idea that learning occurs when people associate their behaviour with a stimulus in the environment”. The S – R theorists emphasized the observable environmental stimulus and response. Stimulus in this context is being influenced by unseen forces so, S–R theory with reinforcement is appropriate for this study. Some of the theorists that uphold this view are: - Edward L. Thorndike (1874 – 1949), Clark L. Hull (1884 – 1952) and Burrhus Fredrick Skinner (1904 – 1990). The spiritual influence on the observed stimulus is not strange to scholars on the field of study as Adefuye (2005) noted that, “the term metaphysics has earned the etymological interpretation as the human thought that deals with everything existing in a way beyond human comprehension and natural appearances. It is the interpretation of the physical phenomena in terms of the non physical”.

Also, Aluede (2019:3) noted that, “Here and now we need to quickly wake up to the realization that music is already being described to have a link with many other fields like astronomy, arithmetic and that the knowledge of music leads to the understanding of the whole spiritual and physical universe”. As such, S – R theory is appropriate for this study because, with the aid of chanting and singing during the rites activities, a metaphysical stimulus evolved and transformed devotees into another being emotionally.

### **Significance of the Study**

Study on the societal benefits of Yoruba gods and its worship in Ijanikin community from a musical perspective has not enjoyed deserved attention from music scholars in the environs. The premeditated activities in the Ogun ritu-

al rites at Ijanikin community involves the children, the youths and the elders among the members of the community who believed in the worship and appeasement of the Gods as a means of solving their individual and collective or communal problems. These aforementioned activities also embraced singing and chanting for reasons known to the devotees. So, documentation of selected songs with chant used in the rituals with musical analysis and devotees' anticipated returns for their participation would be provided.

## Methodology

### Participants

The data were gathered from seven devotees of the Ogun deity. Two traditional priests, two chanter and singers with three drummers were interviewed. Ages of the participants ranges from: 20 to 60 years. The participants in this study are some of the devotees who agreed to be interviewed willingly after the event.

### The participants:

- Chief Abdul Waheed (Olokun) (2022) – A traditional priest to Ogun and other Yoruba gods,
- Chief Akeem Kosoko (Agbomola) (2022) – A traditional priest to Ogun and other Yoruba gods,
- Ajayi Ogidiolu (2022) – A traditional chanter,
- Olawale Ojenike (2022) – A traditional chanter,
- Damilare Ogunrinde (2022) – A traditional drummer,
- Ifeoluwa Adesunloye (2022) – A traditional drummer and,
- Taiwo Adebayo (2022) – A traditional drummer.

*N.B.: It was observed by the researcher that, the two traditional priests interviewed have more than four shrines for different Yoruba Gods in their compound which include: - Ogun, Sango, Osun, Esu, Obatala, and Oluweri / Olokun. And, members of the community perform ritual rites to any of these Gods as being directed by the oracle through the priests.*

### Instruments

Observation and interview method of data collection were employed.

## Procedure

The researcher was at the venue of the event observing and recording the activities of the ritual rite, asking relevant questions then, interviewed some devotees who were interested in the study.

## Literature Review

### Highlights of the Yoruba ethnic group

The Yoruba people are known with rich cultural values which has been indoctrinated from time immemorial and transferred from generation to generations. Ogunbiyi, (2002) noted that, “The term Yoruba identifies the language as well as the people who lived mainly in South Western states of Nigeria which are: Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Lagos, Kwara, some parts of Kogi and parts of Republic of Bénin.” This implies that the colonizers did not consider the ethnicity while establishing the geographical boundaries. Lange, (1994), Olaleye (2003), Akintoye, (2010), Omojola (2013: 2) and Akindipe (2022) wrote on the origin, history, norm and religious view of the Yoruba ethnic group from a general view which could give an insight to the practice of the devotees at Ijanikin community. Traditionally, four days in a week were been observed by the Yoruba people of old which influenced the fixing of their local market days to fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) day till date. Odunjo, (2013: 66 - 67) highlighted the days as; (i) Ojo Ose, (ii) Ojo Awo, (iii) Ojo Ogun, and (iv) Ojo Jakuta”.

- i. Ojo Ose (weekday) – This day was dedicated to Obatala (Alamorere).
- ii. Ojo Awo (occult day) - This day was dedicated to Orunmila (Eleri ipin).
- iii. Ojo Ogun (Ogun’s day) – This day was dedicated to Ogun (deity).
- iv. Ojo Jakuta (Sango’s day) – This was dedicated to Sango (deity).

The week days highlighted above are no longer reckoned with in the community but, it influenced the local market days (fifth day). The reckoned week days in the community are seven days as being observed globally.

### The Indigenous people of Ijanikin

The indigenous members of Ijanikin community are known as Awori, a Yoruba subgroup and descendants of Ogunfunninire a brave hunter and warrior who led his people from Ile Ife to Lagos. Asserting the origin of the name Awori, Ajetunmobi (2003), noted that, “This name according to oral sources, was derived from the legend of a floating ritual dish which Ogunfunminire (their progenitor) allegedly followed from Ile Ife down to Isheri. It was the disappearance

(sinking) of this dish that suggested settlement in the region as earlier prophesied by the Ifa oracle. Thus, the group took it's name from Awori - the dish sinks". They were known to be fishers and farmers but, Western civilization and other factors have afforded them to venture into other vocations. Ijanikin is a kingdom under the kingship of The Onijanikin of Ijanikin Kingdom.

### Ogun, the god of iron

It is noteworthy that Ogun is among the second category of the Yoruba gods. Omojola, (2013:17) opined that,

... the second category of deities consists of those regarded as spiritual reincarnation of departed heroes. Other examples in this category include: - Sango the orisha of thunder, lightning and retribution, and Ogun the orisha of war and iron implements".

The actual personality of Ogun is difficult to be ascertained because, there are contrasting notions describing him. In an oral interview, Olokun (2022 - see names of the Participants) said that 'Ogun was one of the earliest divinities and a chief of all divinities which made him - Oshin Imole'. In addition, 'ekimogun descendant' noted that, "He loved hunting; and cleared the thick impenetrable way with his iron implements for other divinities when he was coming from heaven to possess the earth".

Agbomola (2022 - see names of participants) believed that, "Ogun Lakaaye Osin-Imole was the first of the primordial Orisha to come to earth. In view of Ogun's social life, 'ekimogun descendants' noted that, "...tired of secluded life, he decided to go for a settled life, which he had rejected earlier on. He came down from the hilltop in a garment of fire and blood but could not find an abode in any community. So he borrowed fronds from the palm-tree and headed for Ire where he was made king. Hence, the name Ogun Onire (Ogun, the Lord of Ire) was given to him". But, Sunny Ade (a famous Nigerian Juju Musician in his song titled '*Ogun*') declared that, "Ogun's home is not Ire, he only went to Ire to drink palm wine". Meanwhile, Babalola (1976), noted that, "Ijala originated from Ogun the gods of iron who embarked on chanting in accordance with a divination that said, he would establish his reputation as an entertainer". So, many contrasting views about Ogun made it difficult to ascertain his actual personality.

### **Ogun ritual rites**

Olokun (*see* names of the participants), explained that, in the worship of Ogun, palm leaves are weaved symbolically to represent Ogun's attires and iron implements are arranged by the priest as Ogun's tools and symbol. Examples of the iron implements are; Dane guns, cutlasses, hoe, knife, hooks and sickles. The ritual offerings are; dogs (if; male dog / hen and, female dog / cockerel), palm oil, roasted yam, roasted maize, palm wine, groundnut, snail, beans, kola nuts, alligator pepper, dry gin, *eko elewe* (cold pap) and others. The actual need or purpose for the ritual rites determines the choice of things to offer. In many occasions, the oracle is being consulted to determine the appropriate rite for the patrons in need of the rituals. In another view, Ogun could be likened to ancestors connecting the living and the supreme beings.

Akindipe (2022) opined that, "Ancestors are also considered to be intermediaries between the supreme beings and the living. However, they are believed to be spirits of relatives who died long ago but still dwell among the living in order to help and protect their loved ones". As such, the supreme beings in this context could be Olodumare. Some of the needs that prompt patrons to perform Ogun ritual rites could be; protection against enemies or motor accident, divine breakthrough, appeasement for success and many others.

### **When music speaks to the gods: (Reactions of devotees become extraordinary)**

Sacred music is used in the invocation and appeasement of the Ogun deity with more focus on supreme beings than the living in the process of connecting both. So, it communicates to gods, which lead into invocation of the spirits and extraordinary reactions of the initiates during the rituals. The researcher observed some violent display in the process of participatory observation and, the researcher was asked to take away his recording camera or else, the invoked person would take it and destroy it. An instance to support Oikelome (2002:15)'s notion that, "When the spirits possess individuals in the course of singing and dancing, certain paraphernalia identified with the gods, which denotes their personalities (aggressive, erratic, boisterous) are manifested by the activities of the initiates". And, in view of outstanding performance during ritual rites, Idamoyibo (2005: 155) noted that,

Ijala chanting also comes in a sort of spiritual dramatic spectacle. An expert Ijala artist is one who is able to bring the realities of what happens in the forest into focus during performance. This is why it is required of a master artiste to employ some poetic devices; such as pun, onomatopoeia, digression, repetition, humour, hyperbole and oxymoron.

As such, the researcher observed that effective participation in the activities required mastery in the art. Also, Oriki (eulogy) of Ogun deity in musical tunes stimulated the devotees to display strange characters (*'Egun'*) which would not have happened if they were in their normal sense. Not only that, children and youth participation in the activities buttress Akindipe's (2022) notion which stated that,

Whether specially chosen by the ancestors from the community or belonging to some traditional priesthood lineage, children are very involved in the African Traditional Religion practices. They learn and imbibe the religion's values through interactions with parents, other members of the religious coming to some traditional priesthood lineage, children are very involved in the munity, and observations during religious activities.

Ojenike (*see names of the participants*) explained that, 'there are different songs for different goals during ritual rites which is being determined by the purpose of the event. And, the songs to be sung should be; in correlation and conformity with the sequential arrangement of the event and should be performed towards achieving the purpose of the event'. Ogidiolu (*see names of the participants*) explained further that, 'singing and chanting plays a significant role in invoking spirits to meet their needs and accept the ritual appeasement'. Also, the devotees, patrons and other participants would be motivated through expertise musical performance which attracts gifts as a display of appreciation to the singers and chanters.

Adesunloye (*see names of the participants*) added that, 'the gifts are often monetized nowadays so; clothing materials, food and others are rarely given'. In addition to the benefits of their involvement, Adesunloye concluded that, 'singers and chanters are being recognized and connected with dignitaries in the society which could bring opportunities to them'. Some elders among the chanters did not have other trades but youthful chanters venture into other trades to make a living and still committed to the art. Two songs were selected out of the songs heard in the event and a brief chant was recorded. They are: (i.) Ogun toju wa, and (ii.) Ogun bemire, with the chant: Ogun Onire—

- i. Ogun toju wa, ko ma wo wa o/2x ko si ma toju  
adugbo fomode o (Appendix I)

### Analysis:

- Language: Yoruba.
- Identification of Form: Traditional call-and-response to be repeated. The

lead singer improvises by substituting a few words and the backup singers continue to repeat same lyrical phrase.

- Tempo: Andante (Appendix 1)
- Key signature: The singer was not mindful of a key signature while singing but sang on key B flat major (G minor) concert.
- Rhythm / Time signature: Simple quadruple time
- Scale: Pentatonic minor

4 **SCALE**

G Bb C E F G F E C Bb G

Scale 1: Bb

<sup>10</sup> **SCALE**

G Bb G

Scale 2: Range

- Length: Ten bars (to be repeated) – Appendix. 1.
- Medium: Male and female vocals.
- Range and tessitura: The range was from E flat major to C major. The lead singer changes the pitch, lyrics and tunes of the song as an improvisation technique. It also makes the musical practices interesting to prevent boredom.

**PITCH RANGE**

Eb F G Bb C Bb G F Eb

Score 3: Pitch Range; As observed in the score.

<sup>8</sup> **PITCH RANGE**

E Bb C

Score 4: Range; the lowest and highest pitch.

- Tonal shift: Tonal shift was observed after about five cycles of repeat.
- Frequency of notes: Key G (Lah) was more frequent than any other notes with twenty eight (28) appearances (Appendix No. 1).



Table 1:

| Keys         | G  | Bb   | C    | Eb | F  | Total |
|--------------|----|------|------|----|----|-------|
| No. of times | 28 | 26   | 14   | 4  | 8  | 80    |
| %            | 35 | 32.5 | 17.5 | 5  | 10 | 100   |

**Musical form: AA**

- ii. Call: Ogun bami re o, mama bami ja o, Response; bami re, Ogun bami re o ma ma ba mi ja o et.c (Appendix I)

**Analysis:**

- Language: Yoruba
- Identification of Form: Traditional call and response with repetition. The lead singer improvises by substituting few words and the backup singers repeats same lyrical phrase. The call and response here is a short phrase sang in variations.
- Tempo: Andante
- Key signature: The singer was not mindful of a key signature while singing but eventually sang on key G major (E minor) concert.
- Rhythm / Time signature: Compound quadruple time
- Scale: Pentatonic minor

17 SCALE

E G A B D E D B A G E

**Score 5: Musical Scale**

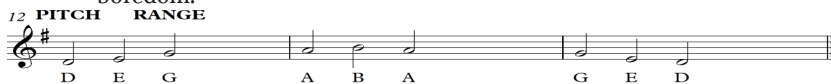
21 SCALE RANGE

E G E

**Score 6: Range**

- Length: Ten bars (to be repeated) – Appendix No. 2
- Medium: Male and female vocals.
- Range and Tessitura: The range was from D major to B major. The lead singer varied the pitch, lyrics and tunes of the song occasionally as an improvi-

sation technique. It also makes the musical practices interesting to prevent boredom.



Score 7: Pitch range: As observed in the score.



Score 8: Range; the lowest and the highest pitch.

- Tonal shift: Tonal shift was observed after five cycles of repeat.
- Frequency of notes: Key G (Doh) was more frequent than any other notes with thirty four (34) appearances. (Appendix No. 2)

Table 2:

| Keys         | E     | G     | A     | B    | D     | Total |
|--------------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| No. of times | 24    | 34    | 18    | 10   | 21    | 107   |
| %            | 22.43 | 31.78 | 16.82 | 9.35 | 19.62 | 100   |

### Musical form: AA

Finally, Ogidiolu (*see names of participants*) eulogized Ogun in a chant titled ‘*Ogun Onire*’ (Appendix I)

### Analysis:

Language: Yoruba

Identification of Form: Traditional Yoruba chant dependent on the creativity and discretion of the chanter. It has no steady tempo or rhythmic pattern but use of, proverbs, parables, philosophical expressions, figure of speech and historical events to buttress their points is very common.

Tempo: Andante

Key Signature: The singer was not mindful of a key signature while singing but found on key A major (F# minor) concert – Appendix No. 4.

Rhythm / Time signature: No beats or rhythm accompaniment.

Scale: Pentatonic minor

23 **SCALE**

F# A B D E F# E D B A F#

Score 13: Musical Scale

28 **RANGE**

*gliss.*

Score 14: Range

- Length: Ten bars (to be repeated) – Appendix No. 4
- Medium: Male voice
- Range and tessitura: The range was from D to C#. The lead singer changes the pitch, lyrics and tunes of the song as an improvisation technique. It also makes the musical practices interesting to prevent boredom.

Score 15: Pitch range : As observed in the score.

29 **PITCH** **RANGE**

F# D E F# A B D E D B A F# E D F#

8<sup>va</sup>-----J

Score 16: Range: the lowest and the highest pitch.

34

F A E

8<sup>va</sup>-----J

- Tonal shift: Tonal shift was not observed.
- Frequency of notes: Key E (Soh) was more frequent than any other notes with sixty eight sounds. (Appendix I, No. 4)

Table 4:

| Keys         | F#    | A     | B     | D   | E     | Total |
|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|
| No. of times | 56    | 56    | 46    | 17  | 68    | 243   |
| %            | 23.05 | 23.05 | 18.93 | 7.0 | 27.98 | 100   |

### **Musical form: A**

Taiwo Adebayo (*see names of the participants*) added that, drumming is not compulsory in the Ogun ritual appeasement for an individual because, its inclusion could expose their secret activities to the public. However, drumming is often used in elaborate communal event that involves a number of people in the society. Damilare (*see names of the participants*) said that there is no specific number of musical instruments to be used but, traditional drums which include; Iya - Ilu Dundun, Agogo, Sekere, Omele Ako and Omele Abo are very common. Some other drums like; Kerikeri, Sakara, Gangan or Gudugudu may be added at times dependence on the size of the event, accessibility of the drum and demand of the patrons. Ifeoluwa Adesunloye emphasized that, drumming in this context involves more symbolic playing of premeditated proverbial tunes (talking / mimicking) than mere rhythms. Basically, participants would want to understand and interpret messages of the drums as a proof of dialogue between the singers and the drummers.

### **Conclusion**

It is obvious that, there are observable variations in musical practices of Ogun ritual rites at Ijanikin compared to other Yoruba communities. Chant for Ogun ritual rites in Ijanikin community is referred to as 'Ewi' which is a chanter's and his participants' affair. Elsewhere in Oyo state, the same chant is being referred as Ijala which is a dialogical form. Two or more chanters will be chanting interchangeably. The chanters in Ijanikin are fewer in number compared to Oyo state chanters. It is noted that a good number of chanters in Oyo state are practicing hunters, sawyers, farmers and Blacksmith (Vidal, 2012). Nevertheless, chanting in Ijanikin has positive impact in the co - curricular activities of basic schools in the community through performance and teaching. Damilare said that, basic schools in the community used to patronize them for performance and to teach selected students the art of chanting which could be presented during their school events.

Also, the musical practice provides economic benefit to the chanter which is a big support to their wellbeing. In addition, the younger generation loved participating in the musical practices of the deity because; they believed that, recognition or fame could be attracted to them by participating actively in the events. Finally, parents encouraged the youths to be committed to musical practices in the events as a means to occupy and prevent them from criminal activities that often emanated from idleness in the community. This study has opened doors for further studies on this deity and perhaps other deities.

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**Others**

- Ekimogun descendants. Origin of Ogun.[www.ekimogundescendant.org](http://www.ekimogundescendant.org).
- Sunny Ade – Album titled Ogun.

## Appendix I: - Lyrics & English translation

- i. Ogun toju wa, ko ma wo wa o/2x ko si ma toju adugbo fomode o. [Ogun take care of us, secure us and the community for the children.]
- ii. Ogun bami re o, mama bami ja o, bami re, Ogun bami re o ma ma ba mi ja o. [Ogun, be my friend and never in conflict with me.]
- iii. Call: Ogun meje - meje Response: Ogun meje meje, Call: Alagbede Ire. Response: Alagbede Iremogun. Call: Alagbede Ire. Response: Alagbede Iremogun.
  - Call: Ogun is in seven forms,
  - Response: repeat
  - Call: Iremogun's Blacksmith
  - Response: Iremogun's Blacksmith.

### Chant:

*Ogun onire oko mi olu irin, onibode ti nwo tojo terun, Won ni meeje nire - meje lo-  
gun, Aye ajibowu lolori gbogbo won, Ogun onile nii gbaja, Ogun onire won a gbag-  
bo, Ogun mala-mala nii jekuru funfun, Ogun oni gbajamo irun ori nii je, Ogun kan  
mbe lodo tii muje eja, Ogun kan mbe nso alapata, ojumo o nii mo, komo alapata  
ko ma muje eran, Tire nimogun aji bagbede soro imule, bimo finna nile ilagbede  
won a pe mo seun, bi nsi finna, nile onilagbede won a pe mo seun, finna-finna-  
finna, iyen mbe lenu ilagbede, Maja majesin ara ilodo, e wa wo're ti mo ba mule ti  
ko da ni,*

[Ogun the lord of Ire, my boss, the security that watches in raining and dry season. They said - Ire is seven, Ogun is seven but, the one in the iron forge is the supreme.]

Ogun the home owners usually accept dogs, Ogun the lord of Ire usually accept rams, Ogun for the non Yoruba usually accept white bean porridge. Ogun of the barbers use to eat hair on the head, there is another Ogun in the stream that usually drink blood of fishes. There is one Ogun in the butcher's shop, there is no day, when the butcher will not drink blood of animals. For the devotees in Ogun rites who always communes in vow with the iron forge. If I help in the iron forge they will say thank you, I refuse to help in the iron forge, they will say thank you, work hard - don't be lazy, that is common to the blacksmith. Chose dogs don't eat small fishes residents of Ilodo. Come and see the lord of Ire whom I made a vow with and never betrayed me.

Appendix II: - Pictures.



*Ogun shrine of Chief Abdul Waheed (Olokun) at Ijanikin*



*The researcher (L) & Abdul Waheed*



*Ifeoluwa Adesunloye, Olokun and the The Researcher & Damilare. Researcher*



*Ogidiolu, (Olokun),*