

**THE INDEFATIGABLE, ITINERANT SCHOOL
MUSIC TEACHER: GODWIN ADEDAYÒ DÉDEKÉ
(1921-1994)**

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Abstract

*The rise and development of Yorùbá art music was influenced by the activities of European missionaries in Lagos and its environs, which began in the mid-nineteenth century. It manifested in the form of sacred music in the church, and secular music in the schools and society. This gave rise to composers and practitioners of art music, whose objective was to create a modern tradition of Nigerian art music. They were trained in local and overseas institutions and composed music patterned, not only along European music, but also in combination with African musical elements. Amongst these composers were T.K.E Phillips, Fela Sowande and Dayo Dédeké. Using the theory of cultural nationalism, this article studies the life and musical contributions of Godwin Adedayo Dédeké (1921-1994), a Yoruba art musician and frontline school music teacher, whose works and activities spanned various schools across South Western Nigeria. His work culminated in the publication of his popular song book **Ma gbagbe ile** in 1963. Oral interviews and focus group discussions were used to gather data, which was presented utilising content analysis. **Ma gbagbe ile** contains 36 sacred songs, as well as 14 secular songs. As a school music teacher, Dayo Dedeke taught the songs to various secondary schools across South-Western Nigeria. He also popularised Yorùbá choral music through radio and television choral music programmes for schools and colleges, titled 'The Young Voices.'*

Introduction

According to Nketia (2004), art music refers to music designed for concentrated listening or presentation as ‘concert’ music; that is, music in which expression of feeling is combined with a high level of craftsmanship and a sense of beauty. Euba (1977) points out that Nigerian art music has the same patterns as similar music in the Western world. He defines it as music composed for performance in a concert hall by a body of trained musicians before an audience who, by mutual understanding, is specifically excluded from joining the performance. Omójolà (1995) refers to Nigeria art musicians as those trained in formal local and overseas institutions, who compose music patterned not only along European music, but also in combination with African musical elements. He also emphasises that the objective of these musicians is to “create a modern tradition of Nigerian art music through a fusion of European and African musical elements” (Omójolà, 1995:5). He further explains that during the colonial era, the efforts of these musicians focused on promoting nationalism. Subsequently, in the immediate post-colonial period, it became a means of reinforcing and imposing a national identity on their musical works.

Africans appreciate music more when it is functional and contextual. “Meaning is the basis for appreciation” (Mokwunyei, 2001). Any music that, therefore, has no meaning is not appreciated by the African audience and is thus unacceptable. Hence, a Nigerian art music composer needs to make his music relevant to his “...native audience without necessarily compromising artistic qualities expected in a work conceived within the idiom of art music” (Omójolà, 1995).

Ekwueme (1999) highlights factors to be considered by composers of African choral music. According to him, the factors include those of language, form, style, idiom, content, structure, theory, purpose, audience and aesthetics. Through an analysis of selected works, he then attempts an outline of the techniques adopted by some of the most successful composers of African choral music, in tackling the requirements of composing for modern audiences. The stylistic features of antiphony, tonality, ostinato, harmony, vocal imitation, augmentation and diminution among others, are enumerated as compositional ingredients for choral music that may be truly called African, and yet meet the musical taste of an international audience.

The rise and development of Yorùbá art music was influenced by the activities of European missionaries in Lagos and its environs, which began in the mid-nineteenth century. In Christian religious practice, music constitutes an integral part of worship. All the worship, prayer, and preaching activities of the church are carried out in the modes of

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speech and music (Owoaje, 2014). Since the use of music was very necessary, the major musical practice in the early Yorùbá Church was singing of Christian hymns because it involved congregational participation. However, the translated European texts brought about a clash between the tone of the Yorùbá texts and the European hymn melodies. This, then, brought about a reaction in church music which was championed by the likes of Rev. J. J. Ransome-Kuti, T.K.E Phillip, Fela Sowande, Rev. I.O. Ransome-Kúti, Dayo Dédeké, G. P Dopemu, A.K Ajisafe, T. A. Bankole, among others. These early church music activists championed the composition of indigenous Yorùbá Christian songs, also known as *Yorùbá Native Airs (YNAs)* in order to produce viable alternatives to the confusing European translated hymns. They are, therefore, regarded as heroes of church music worthy to be celebrated.

The contribution of Godwin Adedayo Dédeké to Yorùbá art music and, of course, Church music, is a remarkable one. His legacies include his song compilation which he titled “*Má Gbàgbé Ilé*” (*Do not forget your heritage*) as well as popularising Yorùbá choral music through radio and television choral music programmes for schools and colleges, titled ‘The Young Voices’. Apart from these, Dédeké was known to have trained various school choirs and worked as music consultant to several states in South Western Nigeria, staging concerts, and imparting musical knowledge to the younger ones. This paper is, therefore, focused on the life and musical contributions of Dayo Dédeké to indigenous Yorùbá School and choral music tradition. It covers his family background and formal education, his career as a devoted itinerant school music teacher, his musical activities, and the compositional principles he utilised in *Má Gbàgbé Ilé*. Oral interviews and focus group discussions were employed in collecting data which was presented on the basis of content analysis.

This article is premised on the theory of cultural nationalism traced to Johann Gottfried Von Herder. He used the theory to study national identity, character and cultural traits among the federating states in Europe. The theory explains that members of groups sharing the same history and culture have a fundamental, morally significant interest, in adhering to their culture and sustaining it through generations. Several scholars (such as Euba, 1986; Adetiran, 1987; Omojola, 1987; Loko, 2011) have applied the theory to studies of ethnomusicology of Yorùbá music.

The idea of Cultural nationalism became prevalent among indigenous elite that worked within the colonial establishments in the last two decades of the 19th century, comprising the church, the school and colonial civil service. The indigenous elite sought better recognition and

promotion within these establishments; they strove to correct some unsuitable European cultural practices to which they were subjected. The unsatisfactory musical practices within the church were substituted with indigenous musical idioms which best represent the genius of Yorùbá music. The publication of *Má Gbàgbé Ilé* by Dayò Dédeké was also his contribution to the agitation for cultural nationalism, as the songs contained in the book were composed to provide viable alternatives to the European hymns used in Yorùbá school chapels, as well as European songs hitherto used in Yorùbá schools.



Family Background and Formal Education

Godwin Adedayò Dédeké was born on 2nd of December 1921 to Mr Deji G. Dédeké and Mrs. Janet Olamiotan Dédeké at Iporo-Ake, Abéòkúta. Dayò was the last born of his father's four children. Pa Deji was also an accomplished church musician. He was choirmaster of many congregations at various times, and his talent and love for music caused him to expose his son, Dayò, early to musical and cultural activities. Pa Deji Dédeké also encouraged Dayò at a tender age to develop interest in the visual arts and drama.

Dayò Dédeké attended St. Stephen's Anglican Primary School, Ondo, and St. Augustine's Catholic School Abéòkúta, for his primary education, while his post-primary education was at Abéòkúta Grammar School. Dayò joined the church choir at the age of ten and he continued this activity throughout his secondary school days. In Abéòkúta Grammar School, the young Dayò was fortunate to have the

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distinguished educationist and keen musician, Rev. I.O. Ransome-Kútì, as principal and music master. Rev. I.O. Ransome-Kútì quickly spotted his musical talent and, therefore, built on the musical foundation that had been laid by Pa Deji Dédeké. This helped Dayò to further develop his interest in music, and made him a popular school boy who led the school choir, giving solo renditions on different occasions. Apart from these solo renditions that made him popular, Dayò sang treble in the school choir. He was also encouraged by Rev. Ransome-Kútì to play the drums to accompany the school choir.

After his secondary education, Dayo Dédeké worked at different places in different capacities between 1940 and 1959. He started as a teacher at St. Jude's Primary School, Ebute-meta, Lagos, where he taught for five years from 1940 to 1945. He then moved into the private sector, and worked in John Holt Limited, Lagos, as a counter clerk, from 1946 to 1948. In 1948, he joined the Kingsway Stores Limited, Lagos, and worked there for about two years and then moved on to Leventis Stores, Lagos, in 1950. He was Chief Designer and Display expert at Leventis Stores. In 1953, Dayò Dédeké moved back into the civil service and worked in Lagos as a Supervision Officer.

Under the auspices of the British Council, he proceeded to Trinity College, University of London, in 1960, where he studied music. He took courses in singing under Mr. James Gadarn, compositional techniques under Dr. Douglas Mews, and choral conducting under Prof. Charles Proctor. In 1966, he proceeded to University of Melbourne, Australia, for further studies in music.



*Dayò Dédeké conducting a mass choir of schools performing the
Nativity of Christ*

The itinerant music teacher

Upon the completion of his studies at Trinity College, University of London, Dédeké returned to Nigeria in 1963 and taught music in various schools in the country. During this period, he published a song book *Má Gbàgbé Ilé* (*Forget not your heritage*), for use in school assembly halls and chapels. In 1966, Dédeké went to Melbourne, Australia, for further studies in music. His musical talent and the novelty of the African influences in his music brought him to the notice of the formal music circles in Australia. During his sojourn there, his song book, *Má Gbàgbé Ilé*, was introduced as a text in all schools in Adelaide, Australia. Dédeké was acclaimed to be the first African to venture into regions of the Aboriginal Australians to record their music. In acknowledgement of his musical talents, the Australian government appealed to Dédeké to remain in Australia after the completion of his studies, in order to help the country in a project of recording Australian folk music. He did not accept this offer as he preferred to return home to further develop school and church music in Nigeria.



Dayo Dédeké accompanying a girls' choir in 1963

In 1965, Dédeké led a contingent of the Western State of Nigeria to the Commonwealth Festival which took place in London. He later secured a job in 1967, as an Education Officer in Music in the Ministry of Education in the Western State of Nigeria. As Education Officer in Music, he produced radio and television choral music programmes for schools and colleges, titled 'the Young Voices'. Between 1968 and 1970 he was seconded to the Kwara State Ministry of Education to help develop music in their schools. He further expanded his sphere of

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influence to the whole country between 1967 and 1977 when, during these ten years, he consistently taught music as he toured around schools and colleges in different states of the Federation. In 1978, he trained and conducted a mass choir of 300 voices at a special carol service for the Head of State at Dodan Barracks. In 1983, he was invited to direct the first annual inter-church Choir Competition for Ekiti diocese of the Anglican Church and he later organised the National Choral Concert for post-primary schools in Nigeria.

Musical Life

During his years of service in both public and private sectors after his secondary education, Dédeké's love for music and the arts was widely recognised. This led to his appointment as an Executive Member of the Nigerian Arts Council, Lagos, between 1948 and 1955. He was also Organising Secretary for the Western Region in the Nigerian Arts Festival (1956 – 1962). He trained and conducted a mass choir of 600 voices at Obisesan Hall in 1957. He later became the Music Director of the Nigerian Arts Council (Western State) between 1970 and 1975. His interest in the theory and practice of religious, traditional, and folk music flourished during these periods. Hence, it was not surprising that Dédeké's deep interest in choral music and his desire to become a trained composer led him to Trinity College of the University of London in 1960.

While growing up, the drive for cultural nationalism was also gaining momentum in Nigeria. Hence, Dédeké's experience of music was naturally indigenous and intercultural. As pointed out earlier, under Rev. I.O Ransome-Kútì who was then the principal of Abéokúta Grammar School, he was encouraged to play drums to accompany the school choir. This must have had a strong influence on him. Hence, in his recital classes in Trinity College, Dédeké went to the Nigerian House to borrow drums and other Nigerian musical instruments with which he accompanied his presentations. This way, he made a strong impression on his lecturers in Trinity College, as a student that was able to creatively showcase African music within the context of western music studies. Throughout his musical career, his quest to fully understand and document traditional music took him on frequent trips to rural areas, collecting traditional music with his tape recorder. He recorded many traditional festivals in Yorùbá land; such as Igogo Festival in Owo, in 1964 and Iloko Festival in Iloko, Ilesa, in 1966.

In 1976, he composed the popular Ogun State anthem “*Ise ya*”. Towards the end of his civil service career in the Ministry of Education, Dédeké was appointed the first Ogun State Liaison Officer in Lagos. He later retired from the civil service in 1979 as the Ogun State Chief Protocol Officer in the Governor’s Office, Abéòkúta. After his retirement, he continued his meritorious service by willingly accepting invitation from the Ogun State government to help in organising special events such as Christmas Carol Services, National Choral Concerts and National Armed Forces Remembrance Day Celebrations. He was, until his death, the Diocesan Organist and Master of Music in the Ègbá/Egbado Anglican Diocese, Ogun State, where he encouraged the various churches within the diocese to utilise his sacred *Native Air* compositions for liturgical purposes.

The musical score is written on five staves in 12/8 time, with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes.

I-se ya, I-se ya, O-mo O-gun I-se ya, E-le-du-ma-re, I-se ma ya
o e, I - se ya. E-yin o-mo O-gun e se gi-ri, I-se po fun
wa la - ti se. O-mo re - re ki i sa'- se, O-mo O-gun ki i
s'o - le, E be - re gb'e-ru o o - lu - wa n be fun wa e
te'-ra mo'-se o. I - se ya, O-mo O-gun I - se ya.

Ogun State Anthem, “Ise ya”

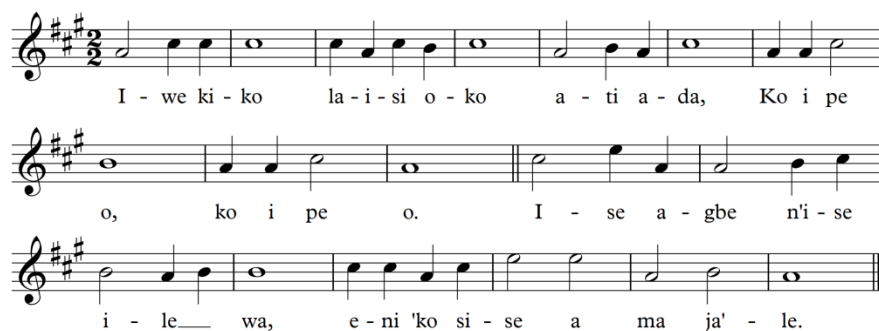
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Dédèké on the piano, with Government College Choir, Ìbàdàn, 1958

Má Gbàgbé Ilé

Dédèké, having been aware of the discrepancy that existed in the singing of Yorùbá texts to European tunes, joined forces with other crusaders of indigenous Yorùbá hymns to correct this anomaly. He employed the principle of writing Yorùbá melodies with the use of mainly pentatonic scale. Therefore, the melodies in *Má Gbàgbé Ilé* have been found to be pentatonic, wherefore he predominantly employed the first, second, third, fifth and sixth degrees of the major diatonic scale (Phillips, 1953; Omojola, 2001; Euba, 1986; Vidal 1986; Samuel, 2009). The song book contains a total of fifty songs made up of thirty-six (36) sacred and fourteen (14) secular songs. Amongst the most popular songs from *Má Gbàgbé Ilé* are “Iwe kiko” and “Olusegun, Ajasegun”.



Formal education without agriculture is incomplete;
He who farms needs his plough and hoe,
For, without work, all is in vain.

Farming is our traditional occupation;
He who does not work will engage in stealing.



Almighty God, conqueror of all
Steeped in sin is our world,
Hasten to our aid, Lord.
Steeped in sin is our world.
Hasten to our aid, Lord,
Almighty God, conqueror of all.

Dédeké's harmonic principles

Má Gbàgbé Ilé was done in staff notation with soprano, alto and tenor parts as well as rudimentary piano accompaniments. Hence, *Má Gbàgbé Ilé* provides data for the analysis of Dédeké's harmonic style. In the Preface to *Má Gbàgbé Ilé*, Dédeké expounds upon his views about appropriate harmony for YNAs, as highlighted below:

1. Harmonic singing is not foreign to Yorùbá music.
2. European principles of harmonic writing should not be fully applied to Yorùbá choral music.
3. Composers should aim at the intelligibility of the melody of individual parts, which must be based on Yorùbá tonal inflection before the parts are brought together.
4. Harmonic parallelism should be adhered to, in order to maintain tonal inflection that is in agreement with Yorùbá speech tone pattern in accordance with the prescriptions of scholars of Yorùbá indigenous music.

(Phillips, 1953).

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The bass part is largely excluded but, when required, it could be hummed because the intervals of the bass melody may be wide and ungainly, which will naturally be against Yorùbá tonal inflection.

In view of the above, Dédeké's harmonic characteristic features can therefore be summarised as a combination of mixed unison singing with parallel harmony in the three upper voice parts (soprano, alto and tenor). Where the lower part (bass) is supplied, he indicated that it should be hummed so that the bass notes do not clash with the tonal inflection of Yorùbá language of the upper parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor).

In recognition of his services to the country, Dayò Dédeké was honoured with Member of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (M.F.R) in 1982. He was married to Mrs. W.A. Dédeké and they were blessed with six children. His last public function was as Music Director at the Ogun State House Christmas Carol Service in Abẹ̀òkúta in December 1993. He died on May 18, 1994, at the age of 73.

Conclusion

Early exposure to traditional music through home, elementary and secondary education under I. O. Ransome-Kuti gave Dédeké solid background in indigenous musical idioms. His study of music in the United Kingdom and Australia also helped in shaping his music perspective, leading to his publication of *Má Gbàgbé Ilé*, which contains sacred and secular songs meant for teaching religious and moral instructions, aimed at grooming good citizenship. They were also used for entertainment for both young and old. Many of the songs in *Má Gbàgbé Ilé* are short songs which made it easy for Dédeké's students to remember and sing any of them, anywhere and at any time. His entire life reflected an untiring devotion to teaching pupils and students of various schools across the Nigerian geographical landscape.

Endnote: Photographs are courtesy of Mrs Yemi Olanrewaju, daughter of Pa Dayò Dédeké.

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