

# THE RUDIMENTS OF HIGHLIFE MUSIC: STRUCTURAL ANAYSIS OF CHRISOGONUS EZEWUIRO OBINNA (DR. SIR WARRIOR) 'IMA ONYE WU ONYE'

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## ABSTRACT

*Primarily, this study beyond all reasonable doubt brings to limelight and logical conclusion, the rudimentary scope of Warrior's communication skills through highlife music. The skillful device he employed in his music are disposed in this work as appendages to prove further, his communication and creative ability, especially in the techniques and styles of highlife composition. An investigation into the musical resources unique with Warrior's composition is of added advantage and also steps in the right direction in the study of music hybridization. Also it gears towards thwarting any wrong notion or unfounded allegations leveled against musical conducts, which peradventure may have materialized into publications capable of tarnishing the artistes' image. Furthermore, the anatomy inherent in this study will be a stimulus for practising artistes and their managers in their bid to improve upon their artistic and economic wellbeing, and contribute to the economy of the country through highlife music. Fieldwork investigation and the print media constitute the major sources of the fact findings in accomplishing the Herculean task.*

**Keywords:** *Highlife, Warrior's ethnography, Texture, Harmony, Rhythm, Melody.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Nigeria traditional society paradoxically revered Nigerian musicians making music in its own culture but castigated those of them practising western/neo-western popular music. They reason that the traditional musicians strictly adhere to the tenets of their culture while practising their art, whereas the popular music artistes were influenced by acculturation, and by the reason of that exhibited traits unacceptable to the indigenous culture, for the fact that drinks, women, diabolical acts and certain conducts that leave much to be desired were associated with the guitarists. According to Radel (1986)

*"Highlife is a type of popular song and dance music prominent, especially in west Africa beginning in the 1930s. Associated with and taking its name from urban social life, it incorporates both Africa and western instrument and musical idioms. It is most often in duple meter, featuring Ostinato rhythmic and melodic figures".*

Today, increased awareness beyond one's immediate environment has caused a change in the rigid attitude. Popular music artistes are now esteemed with honourable 'stage names' and traditional titles reflective of societal appreciation of their inevitability. For instance, Ex-Governor of Imo State, Chief Sam Onunaka Mbakwe of late memory was the first to address Warri as Dr. Sir. This was as a result of Warri's wonderful performance in 1984 during Mrs. Mbakwe's demise. Even today, the honorary title remains as effective as though it were formally conferred on him based on academic merit.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Highlife as at then was severely under-promoted in the Western Europe markets, the Caribbean and even the Americans where a populous resident population originally came from Africa. Highlife and its other derivatives were at a time, music for the middle

and advanced age groups. However, nowadays the teenagers are the dominant beneficiaries. Some scholarly reasons are adduced for the non-promotion of highlife abroad.

Lo-Bamijoko in Newswatch (1989) affirms "Overseas if you want to work with a band, you give them your score. They will have no time listening to you telling about it". And Ekwueme (1994) appends, "Many of those who go about pretending to be accomplished musicians are not". In defense he asserts, one way to look at the charge is the growing number of singers with albums to their names but who cannot play musical instruments.

In the contrary, popular music of the Western world, including those with African roots, are heavily promoted. The electronic media project these western pops to all corners of the globe to capture the minds and the hearts of the cosmopolitan, particularly the young. The effect of the media is captured by Okafor (1989). He calls any act of African music artistes that yearns for foreign styles in the said artiste's music "Hero-worshipping". In that respect he says: "the over all effect of this clash with convention is that while popular music has a fervent following among the young and radicals, the more conservative and older elements in the population are alienated". Hero - worshipping" is thus, a common factor that has affected the trend of highlife as a popular music in its rendition. The cumulative effect of all this is that highlife is not widely appreciated as it should be because; it is not given adequate exposure either in the foreign markets or on the Nigerian Radio/ T.V. air waves. Promotion and competitions organized by PMAN tend to have real effect only on the local market in Africa. It is against these odds that Chrisogonus Ezewuiro Obinna, Popularly known as Dr. Sir Warrior has to rise to stardom through his musical merit. The features of his music logically demands a close study, and this paper attempts to do that to a reasonable extent.

### **Warrior's Social Environment**

A pedigree handed down to the present generation claims that Enyioyugu from where Warrior hails is a mother of nine

industrious villages; with same dialect, specific and distinctive social customs, traditions and institutions. Within the clan is lineage with common a fore-father. On the outskirts of the heart of the main and popular market, cited on a table ground, is the town's catholic pro-cathedral, Saint Charles among other prominent structures. The town is near the state capital (Owerri) towards the east, with linear settlement pattern along Umuahia road. The circum-adjacent of the town are: Azaraegbelu brook, Imo airport, and the defunct paint industry respectively. The above noted physical structures are at proximity to the town, which is also envired by good vegetation.

Culture-wise, Enyiogugu has not been backward. The inevitable Oruru Enyiogugu day soars high during its celebration within the first two weeks of every November. This activity draws the natives and friends from every nook and cranny of Nigeria and far beyond. The dance and the musical culture of the area include: Ese, Odimma, Dandiko and masquerading. The inhabitants are not only nationalistic but have a broad view of life. Their polity centers on the village level under the auspices of the council of elders and the village men's assembly, who see to the welfare of the populace in their communal affairs. Equity and fair play is maintained in all their deliberations, while the majority's consensus over rules and carries the day in all their decisions.

**Melodic Contour and Intervallic Structure of His Album, 'Ima Onye Wu Onye':** In his song text, Warrior uses open resonant voice production. Some words are shouted; others spoken or whispered (Okoro, 2005). Pitch is an essential element of his text. Each section of his song differs slightly in melody as a result of the words involved. In consequence, separate melodic treatments are used to ensure the tune agrees with the syllabic rise and fall of the text. Where vocal sounds precede another consecutively, the first is omitted. However, where it is not omitted, it is usually slurred or tied to the one being preceded, and this occurs primarily in the spoken lines. Exclamatory vowels inform of rhetoric questions at phrasal ends are common.

Figure 1: Melody as "a succession of pitches conceived as a meaningful whole"

The image shows three hand-drawn musical staves. The top staff is in 4/4 time and contains a sequence of notes: a quarter note on G4, a quarter note on A4, a quarter note on B4, a quarter note on C5, a quarter note on B4, a quarter note on A4, a quarter note on G4, and a quarter note on F4. The notes are grouped into two sets of four, separated by a bar line. The first set is labeled 'INTER-LOCKED THIRDS' and the second set is labeled 'PENDULAR THIRDS'. The middle staff shows a sequence of notes: a quarter note on G4, a quarter note on A4, a quarter note on B4, and a quarter note on C5, followed by a wavy line indicating continuation. This is labeled 'TRIADIC SPLIT FIFTH'. Below this staff is the text 'This is employed but not consecutively.'

Adopted from Ferris (1995). The Enjoyment of Music. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc.

There is tonal sequence of major third below the repetition of certain bars of the melodic vocal verse. Most vocal repetitions are improvised with replacement of lyrics that form the initial text. Elision is commonly applied - such that two adjacent vowels are scanned to one note, covering what may be two different syllables into one, usually by omitting the last vowel of the first syllable. Example "na uwa" becomes "n' uwa". Descending line is the norm of the melodic progression while conjunct, static and disjunct motions are mixed up in the melody. However, the following melodic shapes just occurred in few occasions:

Figure 1 helps us understand melody as "a succession of pitches conceived as a meaningful whole" (Ferris, 1995)

The intervallic structure of the melody is derived by sequentially arranging the successive sounds of the individuals various pitches of the vocal melody. Then with the use of 'density referent calculations, which could be any particular beat of measurement, the distance or difference between consecutives series of notes are transformed into contour. The notes of indefinite pitch are mainly vowel sounds and they occur at either phrasal ends or cadential points. At times, they are introduced along the recitative lines and occur either on high or low pitch. The interval of the notes is built on heptatonic scale. After the very few first spoken lines, the actual song begins at bar 23 and all the notes of the scale are utilized within the range of 35 bars. This is, from bar 23 to 58, all the notes that form the intervallic structure of the music are already exhausted. It is upon the said limited bars that the rest of the melodic continuity in progression is based. With the foregoing discourse on intervallic structure, we hereby present an interval as "the difference in pitch between two tones regularly measured from the lower tone to the higher" (Schirmer, 1978).

**The Melodic Parameters:** The melody moves within the range of "G" - a perfect fifth below middle "C" to "A" above it. Running notes are very common while notes of long duration are few and mainly

occur at cadential points; their value hardly exceeds dotted crotchets. The longest consecutive intervallic structure of the melody is a major sixth "C" - "A". The shortest is a minor second, "F" - "E". The widest intervallic range of the entire melody is a compound minor second.

The highest vocal pitch - "B", a minor 7th above middle "C" is not part of the melodic nucleus because it was shouted along the line of recitative lyrics. Two other notes of non-determinant pitch are believed to be on first line "B" (i.e.) first "B" above middle C of G clef). Both of them are exclamatory vowel syllables - OLEI! And EBEO! The lowest pitch is an 8ve below the tonic key of the music. The notes with low pitches are characterized by lack of full-fledge beats of long duration and a good number of these interactive pitches are slurred. More so, they are dominated by vowel alphabet and also fall inbetween vowel syllables much more than consonants.

**Figure 2:** The sequence of the intervallic structure



**Rhythm and Metric Organization:** Rhythm is a regulated musical movement. It is also any succession of sound in agreement to time. Rhythm is never in isolation of pitch, two of which act together as the heart beat of music (Okoro, 1993). Without the presence of rhythm, the melodic progressions may not worth much on their own. Thus, there is great aesthetic satisfaction on the complex and contrasting rhythmic patterns interwoven therein. As a cardinal rule, all musical instruments void of discrete boundaries practically exhibit

clash of rhythm to a large extent than the key instruments. The conga drum extemporize the greatest rhythmic variations. Besides, each of the rhythmic instruments, unlike the melodic ones is autonomous of one another. As the time liner, the bass drum is played regularly with very little variations; the only change in its pattern is the subdivision of a single beat in each measure into two, or the replacement of a beat with one rest in each bar. These variations do not change from measure to measure, though they may be applied to any beat. The rhythmic organization of these instruments: Conga drums, petit slit drum, rattles and, of course, the snare drum, display multirhythms in command; all put together emit poly-pitches sounded simultaneously. An outstanding characteristic of rhythm is that, it features in tempo as its framework. In this context, his music hinges absolutely on the tempo of the rhythmic instrument. That, of course, is why each occasion the cymbal is struck the voice always coincide with it. The use of notes of short durational values as the bases of movement has provided African songs with good metric organization (Agu, 1999).

According to Randel (1986) meter, also termed time is the pattern in which a steady succession of rhythmic pulses is organized. Meter is applied here not as the division into symmetrical lines in verse, but as symmetrically grouped musical rhythms. Peculiar to the songs is strict meter. The musical setting is characterized by a structure in simple periods. Each syllable is represented by a note which varies in value depending on the character of the alphabet (that is whether vowel or consonant), and its position within the composition - such as phrasal end, cadential point, etc. Meter therefore combines with "the whole feeling of movement in music with a strong implication of both regularity and differentiation" (Apel, 1973)) called RHYTHM to achieve its musical value. (Reference to Atinuke in Idolar 2005).

**The Rhythmic Quality of the Instruments:** Rather than regulating the movement of beats with stressed sounds at definite beat intervals, some of the instruments display regular articulation of rhythms at other points than the beginning of beats. This is very common with the snare drum. The lead guitar observes syncopation at a given moment in time within a regular interval; while the conga drums improvise intermittently and usually repeat the first beat of their introductory rhythms. The bass drum maintains a steady rhythm of crotchet beats all through.

Emphatic beats of snare drum usually fall on the vocal rest and also coincide at interval with the bass drum at every other weak beat. The lead guitar calls the vocal in (in a special way). After trilling, the lead guitar is frequently plucked with a fret in a staccato style. The spasmodic striking of the fret especially on the strong accent is very common. The basic accent on the drum set falls on the bass drum while the hihat, bass drum and half beat of the snare apparently coincide with one another at the first beat, save that the snare at times fluctuates in note values or with use of rests. The position and number of snare drum beats within the bar affect the three beats of the hihat and bass drum.



**Figure 4:** Crossing parts between rhythm and bass guitars

The image shows a handwritten musical score for two guitar parts in 4/4 time. The score is divided into two systems by a vertical bar line. The top system is labeled "RHYTHM GUITAR" and the bottom system is labeled "BASS GUITAR".

**Left System (before the bar line):**

- Rhythm Guitar (top staff):** Treble clef, 4/4 time signature. The notation consists of four measures: a quarter note on G4, a quarter note on A4, a quarter note on B4, and a quarter note on C5. A bracket spans the first two notes.
- Bass Guitar (bottom staff):** Bass clef, 4/4 time signature. The notation consists of four measures: a quarter note on G2, a quarter note on F2, a quarter note on E2, and a quarter note on D2. A bracket spans the first two notes.

**Right System (after the bar line):**

- Rhythm Guitar (top staff):** A single whole note on G4.
- Bass Guitar (bottom staff):** A single whole note on G2.

A large curly brace on the left side of the page groups both staves together. The handwriting is in black ink on a white background.

Figure 5: Vertical hemiola between drums

The image shows two staves of handwritten musical notation. The top staff is labeled "PETIT SUIT DRUM" and features a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The notation consists of a series of notes on a five-line staff, with some notes marked with an 'x' and others with a dot. The bottom staff is labeled "CONGA DRUM" and features a treble clef. The notation consists of a series of notes on a five-line staff, with some notes marked with a '+' and others with a dot. The two staves are connected by a vertical line, indicating a vertical hemiola relationship between the two drum parts.

**Figure 6:** Harmonic progression between lead and rhythm

Lead and Rhythm Guitars. NB, 'W' represents Continuation of musical progression/movement.

The musical score consists of two systems, each with a Lead Guitar and Rhythm Guitar part. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

**System 1:**

- Lead Guitar:**
  - Measure 1: Quarter note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5.
  - Measure 2: Quarter note D5, quarter note E5, quarter note F#5, quarter note G5.
  - Measure 3: Quarter note G5, quarter note F#5, quarter note E5, quarter note D5.
  - Measure 4: Quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4.
  - Measure 5: Quarter note G4, quarter note F#4, quarter note E4, quarter note D4.
  - Measure 6: Quarter note C4, quarter note B3, quarter note A3, quarter note G3.
  - Measure 7: Quarter note G3, quarter note F#3, quarter note E3, quarter note D3.
  - Measure 8: Quarter note C3, quarter note B2, quarter note A2, quarter note G2.
  - Measure 9: Quarter note G2, quarter note F#2, quarter note E2, quarter note D2.
  - Measure 10: Quarter note C2, quarter note B1, quarter note A1, quarter note G1.
  - Measure 11: Quarter note G1, quarter note F#1, quarter note E1, quarter note D1.
  - Measure 12: Quarter note C1, quarter note B0, quarter note A0, quarter note G0.
- Rhythm Guitar:**
  - Measure 1: Quarter note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5.
  - Measure 2: Quarter note D5, quarter note E5, quarter note F#5, quarter note G5.
  - Measure 3: Quarter note G5, quarter note F#5, quarter note E5, quarter note D5.
  - Measure 4: Quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4.
  - Measure 5: Quarter note G4, quarter note F#4, quarter note E4, quarter note D4.
  - Measure 6: Quarter note C4, quarter note B3, quarter note A3, quarter note G3.
  - Measure 7: Quarter note G3, quarter note F#3, quarter note E3, quarter note D3.
  - Measure 8: Quarter note C3, quarter note B2, quarter note A2, quarter note G2.
  - Measure 9: Quarter note G2, quarter note F#2, quarter note E2, quarter note D2.
  - Measure 10: Quarter note C2, quarter note B1, quarter note A1, quarter note G1.
  - Measure 11: Quarter note G1, quarter note F#1, quarter note E1, quarter note D1.
  - Measure 12: Quarter note C1, quarter note B0, quarter note A0, quarter note G0.

**System 2:**

- Lead Guitar:**
  - Measure 13: Quarter note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5.
  - Measure 14: Quarter note D5, quarter note E5, quarter note F#5, quarter note G5.
  - Measure 15: Quarter note G5, quarter note F#5, quarter note E5, quarter note D5.
  - Measure 16: Quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4.
  - Measure 17: Quarter note G4, quarter note F#4, quarter note E4, quarter note D4.
  - Measure 18: Quarter note C4, quarter note B3, quarter note A3, quarter note G3.
  - Measure 19: Quarter note G3, quarter note F#3, quarter note E3, quarter note D3.
  - Measure 20: Quarter note C3, quarter note B2, quarter note A2, quarter note G2.
  - Measure 21: Quarter note G2, quarter note F#2, quarter note E2, quarter note D2.
  - Measure 22: Quarter note C2, quarter note B1, quarter note A1, quarter note G1.
  - Measure 23: Quarter note G1, quarter note F#1, quarter note E1, quarter note D1.
  - Measure 24: Quarter note C1, quarter note B0, quarter note A0, quarter note G0.
- Rhythm Guitar:**
  - Measure 13: Quarter note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5.
  - Measure 14: Quarter note D5, quarter note E5, quarter note F#5, quarter note G5.
  - Measure 15: Quarter note G5, quarter note F#5, quarter note E5, quarter note D5.
  - Measure 16: Quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4.
  - Measure 17: Quarter note G4, quarter note F#4, quarter note E4, quarter note D4.
  - Measure 18: Quarter note C4, quarter note B3, quarter note A3, quarter note G3.
  - Measure 19: Quarter note G3, quarter note F#3, quarter note E3, quarter note D3.
  - Measure 20: Quarter note C3, quarter note B2, quarter note A2, quarter note G2.
  - Measure 21: Quarter note G2, quarter note F#2, quarter note E2, quarter note D2.
  - Measure 22: Quarter note C2, quarter note B1, quarter note A1, quarter note G1.
  - Measure 23: Quarter note G1, quarter note F#1, quarter note E1, quarter note D1.
  - Measure 24: Quarter note C1, quarter note B0, quarter note A0, quarter note G0.

Chord progressions for Rhythm Guitar:

- System 1: IVC - I - IC VII - IIIc - V - V7c I - IVc
- System 2: IIIc - vb I -

Additional notes: 'TRANSITION IN STYLE' is written at the end of the first system.

The Vertical hemiola occurs between rattle and petit slit drum and also between conga drum and petit slit drum respectively. The division of rhythmic beats into three is being played simultaneously with the division of another instrumental beats into two.

**Harmony:** It is the interplay among the various instruments and between the instrumental and the vocal sounds results in the harmonic structure peculiar with Sir Warrior's music. In his view of harmony, Apel (1964) avers, "harmony is any simultaneous combination of sounds, hence, synonymous with chord- thus, harmony denotes the chordal or vertical structure of musical composition, in contrast to counterpoint".

The staggered vertical movement of the local membrane drum and the melodic strings of the guitar display these characteristic. Harmony is so commonized in Sir Warrior's music that it enhances the rhythm with composite sound. The basic harmony is established by the presence of the definite pitch instruments such as the voice and the electronophone strings. The reason for the claim is that, they are capable of producing several chords, which in succession produce harmony of both identical and varied structure, applied on various degrees of the musical progression. Frequent extemporization typical of the drumming affects the rendition in such a way that the resultant harmony is never the same in its logical repetitions. Also the use made of instruments of indefinite pitch, the application of exclamations and the declamatory vocals are conventionally, quite different from the Euro-American concept of their musical values.

Finally, the following are the fundamental succession of chords that form the harmonic structure of the transcribed work: the conga drum - it was chord one all through the music. The lead guitar primary or major chords and their inversions are mostly used, with strong and weak progressions.

Bass Guitar - Chord V - 1; and 1 - V randomly occurs, while VI-V exists mainly within specified bars. Rhythm guitar - it involves chords

II-V, II-I, IV-V, VI-1, 1-IV-V, 1-II, VI-I in different systematic bars. A Sample of Harmonic Progression between Lead and Rhythm Guitars NB, 'WV' represents continuation of musical progression/movement. In a bid to harmonize with the instruments, the voice meanders through different chords through the secondary chords and weak progression which in few occasions are coloured with added sixth and neighbouring notes. But generally, these chord progressions follow the melody - VI-V, III-II and I, IV-II, I-VI and IV-Ib.

**Texture:** In this paper however, texture refers to the arrangement of either vocal or instrumental parts that make up the musical fabric. Vocally, there is no call and response, such that could lead to alternate singing by soloist and chorus. According to Machils and Forney (1999),

*A composition need not use one texture or another exclusively. A large-scale work may begin by presenting a melody against a homophonic texture, after which the interaction of the parts becomes increasingly polyphonic as more independent melodies enter. So too in a large homophonic piece, the composer may enhance the effect of the principal melody through an interesting play of countermelodies and counter rhythms in the accompanying parts.*

The entire musical frame work is not void of dense texture. This is identified by the simultaneous sounding of two or more pitches of instruments versus instruments or vocal lines. In view of this factor, the instruments and voice/s, and the number of both involved in the performance of this music are inherently interwoven to constitute the musical texture. The absence of vocal accompaniment or response to the vocalist in this piece of music shows that the melody on its own has monophonic texture. The accompanying instruments append volume to the melodic verse thereby making it sonorous. Here the texture is derived from the accompaniment of a soloist's voice by instruments of both definite and indefinite pitches. The contribution of the instruments to the music texture goes beyond embellishment and facilitating strong rhythmic effect on the vocal

section. Besides, the lead guitar and the local membrane drums define or interpret what the voice has sung while the rattle supplements the phonic effect of cymbals. Simultaneous use of conflicting rhythms and accents primarily by the monophonic instruments abound. In other words, more than a specific rhythm is played at a given moment with some variations of pitches by the instruments involved. In summation, the instruments are characterized by polyrhythmic texture. Consequently, individually designed autonomous rhythms of several instrumental parts are sounded together in combination with the vocal melody. This resultantly yields texture.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study proves that some of the problems besetting highlife music in those days, especially its practitioners (which include late Sir Warrior), could have easily been ameliorated forthwith, or resolved in the long run if necessary steps were taken. This research therefore makes the following recommendations in the interest of the contemporary crop of highlife careerists: the provision in the National Cultural Policy for Nigeria (1988), which stipulates that Radio and T.V. organizations in Nigeria should devote about 80% of their air waves to work by Nigerian artistes should be strictly implemented. If this is done, it will enable bands akin to Sir Warrior's Oriental Brothers International forge ahead with more avenues for performance expressions.

It will expose the Nigerian youth to more Nigerian rooted' popular music and thereafter, leave a more nationalistic impression on their minds. More so, they will show more regard to Nigerian pop heroes than to Europe and American pop artistes. The Nigerian government Cultural Agency should use the network of our recording studios and Diplomatic mission on cultural issues to promote Nigerian art and artistes. This approach will create more avenues for appreciating Nigerian pop music such as highlife.

The Performing Musicians Association of Nigeria (PMAN) should intensify promotional efforts on Nigerian creative arts and performances. This will boost artistic career and pave way for the musicians to provide audience with more opportunities to be in contact with their works. Nigerian performing musicians should try to improve on the "musical literacy" and competence of their personnel. In this regard, PMAN should assist them by organizing short term workshop for band-leaders and musicians in specific musical calling or skills. Educational institutions should both encourage and strive to engage performing musicians in enhancing performance dexterity of their students. This type of musical interaction will benefit both the students and the musicians.

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