

THE PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION OF TRADITIONAL DANCE AND MUSIC IN AKWA IBOM STATE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF AKATA THEATRE TROUPE

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Abstract

Traditional dance and music performances are unique artistic expressions that are deeply rooted in the cultural foundation of a society. In a state as rich in cultural heritage as Akwa Ibom, traditional dance and music play an essential role in preserving the unique identity of the people. The preservation and promotion of traditional dances and music is an important aspect of cultural heritage conservation, as this art form provides a window into the history, customs, and values of a particular community. However, despite their importance, these dances and music often face challenges in terms of preservation and promotion. The Akata Cultural Troupe offers a powerful reminder that one's cultural traditions are not just remnants of the past, but living, breathing entities that must be nurtured, protected, and celebrated. The aim of this study is to expose the potentials and challenges of traditional dances/music in Akwa Ibom for socio-economic growth, cultural preservation and promotion through the activities and administration of the Akata Theatre Troupe. The research is ethnographic in nature which entails visiting the troupe and recording her activities and administrative modalities to draw our conclusion that the Akata Cultural Troupe's rich history and cultural significance extend beyond mere entertainment, influencing the social, economic, and cultural landscape of their community thus aiding the preservation and promotion of traditional values. This research recommends that State Governments should recognize traditional dances/music as an important component of education and cultural identity, preservation and promotion.

Keywords: Preservation, Promotion, Traditional Dance and Music, Challenges, Opportunities

Introduction

Traditional dance and music performances are unique artistic expressions that are deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of a society. These performances not only showcase the rich history and cultural heritage of a people, but can also have a significant impact on economic growth by generating revenue for the performers, the community and the region as a whole. However, to fully appreciate and preserve the essence of traditional dance performances, it is essential to recognize and value the materials and elements that give these performances their unique character. Therefore, it is crucial to protect and promote the use of traditional costumes, music, and other cultural artifacts that contribute to the authenticity and vibrancy of these performances.

As the world continues to globalize, it becomes increasingly important to protect and nurture traditional music and dance performances, not just for their economic value, but also for their cultural significance. These performances are living testaments to the history, beliefs and values of a society and serve as a means of passing down this rich heritage to future generations. In a state as rich in cultural heritage as Akwa Ibom, traditional music and dance play an essential role in preserving the unique identity of the people. However, despite their importance, these music and dances often face challenges in terms of preservation and promotion. The Akata Theatre Troupe, renowned for their vibrant performances, is emblematic of the challenges that many traditional troupes in Akwa Ibom face. Moreover, limited

investment in the promotion and preservation of these dances has resulted in a lack of resources and support for their continued development. This has also led to a decline in the number of skilled traditional artisans who can perpetuate these traditions, further undermining their potential economic impact. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing traditional dances in Akwa Ibom, with a particular focus on the Akata Theatre Troupe. The study will explore the historical context, current status, and future prospects of traditional dance and music in Akwa Ibom State.

Concepts on Dance and Music

Dance is truly a mirror that reflects the myriad aspects of a culture. Each geographical location, religious belief, political and historical experience, biological, social, and economic factor adds a distinct layer to the depth and richness of a particular dance form. For instance, African dances often incorporate elements of storytelling, symbolism, and rhythm that are deeply rooted in the history and beliefs of their respective regions. Bakare Ojo opines that "dance also expresses the geographical location, religious belief, political and historical experience, biological, social practice and economic peculiarities of the people that own it" (35).

As a performance art form, it consists of purposefully selected sequences of human movement and this movement has aesthetic symbolic values, thus, it is acknowledged as a dance by performers and observers within a particular culture. Bakare Ojo further postulates that "the use of dance as a method just as it is in healing rituals as observed today in many societies and it is regarded to have been another early factor in the social development of dance" (2). Historically, dance derived its major importance in the early societies from its function as an integral part of the social and religious life of man. Hawkins Alma submits that "through his body, man perceives the tensions and rhythms of the universe around him and using the body as his instrument he expresses his feelings, responses to the universe" (3).

Dance, as a form of creative expression, has its roots in the inherent desire of humans to express themselves through movement. In the earliest days of civilization, primitive man engaged in dance under the influence of powerful emotions, using physical gestures to tell stories and convey meaning. These mimetic gestures, which served as a precursor to modern dance, allowed for the narration of tales and the sharing of experiences through the art of movement. According to Yeside Dosumu-Lawal; "in all societies, man has always danced and will always dance because dance is innate in man" (305). The history of dance is difficult to access because dance does not often leave behind clearly identifiable physical artifacts that last over millennia, such as stone tools, or cave paintings. As mentioned by Ekaette Edem during an interaction session, "the communal nature of these dances further cemented the bonds within the group, reinforcing their shared identity and values". Through the rhythm and movement of dance, people were able to reaffirm their beliefs, celebrate their triumphs, and create lasting memories that would be passed down through generations.

Ahmed Yerima confirms that; "Dance is the bond, the link, the power beyond entertainment or identity" (8). And Chris Ugolo is of the opinion that "dance art in Nigeria is woven around the fabrics of the traditional societies with focus on the socio-political and economic relevance of the people that owns it" (39). In Africa, traditional dances become a powerful symbol of a people's identity, a living history that evolves and adapts with each new generation. They are a cultural legacy, handed down from parent to child, teacher to student, community to community. As such, these dances become a means of preservation, ensuring that the stories and experiences of past generations are not lost to time. They act as a living archive, a repository of knowledge that is passed on not through books or lectures but through the physical embodiment of movements and rhythms.

According to Ime Ekpo “the earliest memories of humans were with music such as soft lullabies, patty-cake rhythms, parade music, seasonal songs, folk songs, chants and music produced on homemade instruments” (1). For Okafor R., “next to local language, traditional music is the most widely used medium of expression for all manners of occasions and at all times and periods of life” (87). Nigeria is a nation of rich cultural diversity, shaped by the diverse ethnicities that call it home. With over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own distinct traditions, languages, and customs, Nigeria's cultural landscape is a tapestry of vibrant, unique, and often interwoven cultures that make it one of the most diverse and vibrant countries in Africa. This is corroborated by Emmanuel Iroh who agrees that “Nigeria is a plural state, made up of people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds” (8). This cultural plurality is a testament to Nigeria's long history of ethnic and cultural interaction, from the ancient civilizations of the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa people to the more recent influences of colonialism and modern globalization. The diverse cultural landscape of Nigeria has shaped the way in which the people of the country perceive arts and culture, influencing their values, traditions, and artistic expressions.

Ekpo further stated that music is dispensed usually according to cultural standards of rhythm, melody and harmony... although it involves sounds of all kinds and, although there are no sounds that can be described as inherently un-musical, musicians in each culture have tended to restrict the range of sounds that they will admit. To confirm this, Okwilagwe A. asserts that; “music is a symbolic expression of social and cultural organization and within this expressions vividly expressed as they make music and the excesses of the citizens curbed through songs. Nigerian music often reflects the values, traditions, and social norms of the communities in which it is produced, serving as a means of communication, celebration, and social commentary. For instance, traditional music and dances are often used to celebrate important events such as weddings, festivals, and other occasions, serving as a means of fostering community spirit and identity. Ekpo further claims that “Although music is part of every culture in Nigeria, its performance differs among cultures in style and structure. One can easily identify music as belonging to the Hausas, Yorubas, Igbos, Ibibios and Efiks” (27).

Traditional Dance/Music Preservation and Promotion

The preservation and promotion of traditional dances and music is an important aspect of cultural heritage conservation, as this art form provides a window into the history, customs, and values of a particular community. There are some key factors that should be considered in the context of traditional dance preservation and promotion:

1. Documentation: Documenting traditional dances/music through videography, and written records is crucial for future generations to understand the art form's cultural significance.
2. Training and Education: Teaching traditional dances/music to younger generations and providing education about their history and significance is important for passing on this knowledge and fostering cultural pride.
3. Creation of Cultural Centers: Establishing cultural centers or institutions dedicated to preserving traditional dances/music can help to create a centralized location for teaching, performing, and preserving these art forms.
4. Integration into Modern Entertainment: Incorporating traditional dances/music into modern entertainment forms such as music, film, and dance competitions can help to increase their visibility and appeal to a wider audience.
5. Collaboration with Government: Working with local, state, and national governments to provide funding and support for traditional dance/music preservation can help to ensure that these art forms are adequately supported and sustained.
6. Creating Festivals and events: Organizing festivals and events centered on traditional dances/music can not only provide a platform for performances, but also help to generate interest and support from local communities.

7. Engaging with Tourist: Marketing traditional dances/music as cultural attractions to tourists can help to generate revenue and raise awareness about their importance.
8. Empowering Performers: Providing economic opportunities and support for traditional dance/music performers, such as through grants or job opportunities, can help to ensure that these art forms remain sustainable and valued by society
9. Social Media Promotion: Using social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook to share videos, photos, and information about traditional dances/music can help to increase their visibility and reach a wider audience.
10. Collaborations with Artists: Collaborating with other artists, such as musicians and dancers, can help to create cross-cultural fusion pieces that blend traditional dances with modern forms, making them more accessible to younger audiences.
11. Incorporation into School Curriculums: Including traditional dances/music as part of school curriculums can help to raise awareness about their importance and increase interest among younger generations
12. Use in Tourism Marketing: Highlighting traditional dances/music in tourism marketing materials can help to attract visitors to local festivals and performances, creating economic opportunities for dancers and increasing their visibility.

According to Ekaette Edem “Cultural life in Nigeria is extremely marked by tradition and traditional forms of events like festivals, ceremonies, exhibitions, performance, music and dance, arts and crafts, carnivals and so on” (4). Taking into consideration the parameter of traditional dances to tourism, it could be observed that in Nigeria and especially Akwa Ibom State people are blessed with invaluable traditional dances that can be repackaged, developed and promoted through films as well as organized festivals and carnivals and major traditional events that can be able to economically exploited from potential tourists and audience. Edem also mentioned that “Festivals tell the past of the people, assist in easy understanding of the present and a projection into their future as an oral literature. Festivals represent the sociological yearnings of the people, social moral, historical and religious deeds” (64). Indeed, festivals are a source of knowledge and a vehicle for the transmission of values, customs, and beliefs from one generation to the next. As oral literature, festivals serve as a powerful means of storytelling, a window into the sociology of a community, reflecting its moral, historical, and religious values. Through the observation and participation in festivals, one can gain a deeper understanding of a society's worldview, beliefs, and traditions.

Bio-Data of Obong Prophet Ubokudom

Obong Prophet Ubokudom was born in 1958 to Ubokudom family in Ikot Ayan Ediene in Ikono Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. He finished his elementary education in 1974. Before completion of his elementary 6, Ubokudom was already a member of a live band, his youthful spirit set alight by the melodies of traditional Nigerian tunes; his creativity blossoming in the heart of the ensemble. It was in this crucible of music, in this symphony of tradition, that the seeds of the Akata Cultural Troupe were truly planted, his artistic instincts honed by the rhythms of life and the beating heart of the band. Ubokudom's artistic sensibility grew in breadth and depth, his voice a vessel for the stories of his people. With each performance, each melody, each harmony, the troupe's genesis was being forged, the flames of their cultural legacy fanned by the breath of his inspiration, the heat of his passion, and the energy of his artistry.

According to Ubokudom, “he took a decisive step into the unknown, transforming his vision for the Akata Cultural Troupe from a youthful dream into a fully-fledged business venture”. As the Akata Cultural Troupe begun, Ubokudom made a choice that few could fathom, leaving behind the comfort and familiarity of his time in the live band to embrace entrepreneurship, his heart fueled by a singular

vision. Singing and dancing to him is an inward gift from birth. It was in the confines of the Apostolic Church where this gift first found its way that his voice became a vessel of divine inspiration. From Ikot Ayan Ediene, his name is etched into the annals of cultural history as the founder of Akata Cultural Troupe. To Ubokudom, Akata which migrated from Ikono, found itself back to its ancestral root.

In 1982, Ubokudom and his newly formed Akata Cultural Troupe found themselves standing on the precipice of their first professional performance, at Minya Mfia, at the site of a newly opened hotel. He mentioned that “his first performance attracted the sum of ₦50 only”, a humble, yet significant beginning for a troupe destined for greatness. For the Akata, this humble payment was not just remuneration for their artistry, but a sign that their vision resonated with the people, a spark of belief in the power of culture and tradition. The troupe has weathered the storms of change, its timeless spirit a testament to the power of cultural preservation, its enduring presence a potent reminder that traditions, like memories, never truly fade.

About Akata Cultural Troupe

From an interaction with Ubokudom, “the Akata Cultural Troupe, from history is said to have originated from Cross River State, in Nigeria. With roots in the Efik and Ibibio ethnic groups, the Akata Cultural Troupe draws on the region's rich history and traditions, by incorporating elements of storytelling, music, and dance in their performances”. Drawing from the wells of cultural wisdom, Obong Ubokudom, in his words, sought to honor the inseparable bond between culture and humanity, the cosmic forces that had guided our ancestors and would continue to guide us through the mystical realm of ancestral wisdom. He proclaimed that the soulful melodies and energetic movements of dance were a universal language, a unifying force that transcended the boundaries of time and space, a bridge between the physical world and the spiritual realm.

In the era of the South Eastern State, the Akata started its performances, singing and dancing across the lands. It all started in the heart of a thick forest, where a group of people chose to forge their destiny, and thus, migrated to a new place and named the land Ekoi. Surrounded by a green forest teeming with wildlife, they found solace, sustenance, and inspiration within the dense foliage. This bold act of settling in the midst of an enigmatic forest not only symbolized their resilience and resourcefulness, but also reflected their deep reverence for nature, as they became one with its rhythms and secrets. Living harmoniously within the mystical embrace of Ekoi, the community evolved, finding sustenance in the bountiful land, and flourishing amidst the numerous of trees and wildlife that dwelt within. They intricately intertwined with the surrounding nature, relying on traditional practices to guide their livelihood, and preserving their cultural heritage through the mystical artistry of the Akata.

To Ubokudom, “the Ekoi farmers used Akata to secure their crops from wild animals in the night, as the Akata members will tarry in the night to perform and also scare away thief's and wild animals from the farms”. As the nightfall descended upon the Ekoi farmland, the enigmatic Akata emerged, lurked in the shadows, using the original rhythms of their music, to scare thief's and wildlife alike, safeguarding the farmlands and ensuring a bountiful harvest. Their presence was with a mixture of artistry and vigilance, forged an inseparable bond between tradition, protection, and sustenance in the Ekoi community, reinforcing the symbiotic relationship between humanity and the natural world. In the Ekoi community, the moonlit nights were not only about surviving the onslaught of predators and the dangers of encroachment, but also an opportunity to express their gratitude and reverence for the land, by safeguarding the very heart of their community, the crops, through the enchanting artistry of the Akata. They were seen as mysterious beings and their identity veiled in the shadows of the unknown. The Akata was tagged a sacred performance that transcended the boundaries of human understanding, like an ancient spirits, their voices echoing the primitive heartbeat of nature. Theirs was like a ritual of protection, of sacrifice, and of reverence, for they danced for the preservation of their people, the guarding of their crops, and the defense of their land.

Anyone who steals or commits other crimes in Ekoi, Akata as an unknown deity to humans will sing and announce the crime committed to every member of the community through music and drumming. This also happens in the dark abyss of night, when the moon hangs low and the earth sleeps, the veil between the physical and the spiritual realms grows thin, it is at this luminal space that the Akata manifests. The crackling echoes of the drumbeat sing tales of misdeeds, its songs a haunting siren that rouses the community from slumber, a clarion call that demands attention, which demands justice. In this chilling incantation, the Akata becomes an all-seeing eye, a guardian spirit that pierces through the veil. In the shrouded realm of night, they were the guardians of Ekoi, the protectors of tradition, the champions of their people. In the wake of their performance, the Akata troupe leaves behind not just the fading echoes of their music, but a communal understanding, a new reverence for justice and tradition, and a palpable drop in the prevalence of misdeeds.

The Akata's diabolic reputation was but a mere veil, a smokescreen that obscured the truth of their power: for within the darkness of night, they were the protectors, the guardians against the unseen forces. No matter the crime, no matter the hour, no matter the circumstances, the Akata's expertise stood as the unassailable lighthouse, the beacon of justice in a sea of uncertainty. Ime Ekpo asserts that “Akata musicians delight in camouflaging their musical communication, thus making their voices to sound nasal in order to give a ghost effect. They sing with unusual tones and the lead singer sings into a musical instrument called Ekpamkpuud which looks like the kazoo of the Western world. The instrument is covered with *mba mkpekpem* (wing of a bat) or *mfefero ofoñ* (nylon material) at one end and kept open at the other to distort the tone produced. The most prevailing form of songs performed by the members are those composed, arranged or improvised out of reaction towards non-conformity to the norms of the society by some individuals or groups of individuals (31)”.

In the vigilant watch of the Akata, Ubokudom mentioned that “Ekoi stood strong, its integrity and dignity unbroken, shielded by the divine grace of tradition and the unwavering devotion of its protectors. In their hands, justice was like a balm that soothed the wounds of the land, their truth a healing remedy that restored the balance to the community”. Ubokudom further said that “Akata was assumed to have migrated from the sacred soil of Ikono Local Government Area in Akwa Ibom State, who were the inhabitants of Ekoi”. At the heart of Ikono Local Government Area, at Ikot Ayan Ediene, lies the spiritual pulse of the Akata Cultural Troupe, a sacred space where the soulful melodies of ancient tradition harmonize with the beating heart of modern life. In the hands of Ubokudom, the Akata Troupe followed the contours of history, retracing the footsteps of his people back to the ancestral lands of Ikono after the creation of Kwa Ibom State. In this homecoming, the Akata found a renewed sense of purpose, a reaffirmation of its identity, and a deeper connection to the rhythm of its ancestors. For the Akata, this return to their ancestral lands was a rebirth, a moment of reconnection to the land and the spirits that nurtured their culture.

As Ubokudom surveyed the changing tides of time, it was under his guidance that the Akata underwent a transformation, their dance now a vibrant spectacle that bathed in the warmth of day, their role no longer shrouded in darkness but embraced by the light of the sun. For the troupe, this shift was not a betrayal of its past, but a harmonious symphony of tradition and progress, a reminder that heritage is not a relic, but a living, breathing force that guides us towards a brighter tomorrow. Under the visionary stewardship of Ubokudom, the Akata Troupe underwent a shift in its fundamental essence, as the age-old tradition of male-only performers gave way to a more inclusive embrace of women. It was a bold step, a courageous embrace of change that shattered the boundaries of tradition, forging a new path that respected the past while embracing the needs of the present. For the troupe, this inclusion was not a mere token, but recognition of the vital role that women played in the community, their voices and their energy a vital spark in performances. Even as their performances flourished in the daylight, the shadow of suspicion remained a lingering specter that lingered in the minds of the community.

Obong Ubokudom, a visionary and a pioneer, breathed life into the nascent Akata Cultural Troupe with about forty members, an ensemble of both men and women ready to tread the path of tradition, paving the way for the troupe's ascent into prominence. The members of the Akata Cultural Troupe range from the age of eight to about forty years. Ubokudom believes that there is time for everything, and retires his performers at the age of forty. From the tender age of eight, the troupe's members are initiated into the secrets of their ancient tradition, learning the intricate steps and melodies that bind them to their heritage.

Ubokudom records most of his inspired songs in a spare phone. This phone as he said is devoid of a Sim Card with a vault of untapped potential, a wellspring of artistic inspiration that awaits its moment to shine, a testament to the enduring power of tradition and the human spirit, a testament to the promise of the future. For him, the act of singing is a skill that can be honed and refined through practice, but the art of composition is a more elusive beast, a skill that is borne of a deeper, more spiritual wellspring, of divine inspiration that cannot be taught; accessible only to those who have been blessed with the gift of creative vision. And so, as he pens each note, as he crafts each melody, Ubokudom becomes a scribe of the divine, a scribe of the ancestors, a scribe of his people; his compositions a powerful expression of tradition, of heritage, of the spiritual realm.

Cultural Participation by Akata Theatre Troupe

Akata theatre troupe performs series of dances from waist dance to *Mbaya*, *Ekombi*, *Asian*, *Usaharak* and many more. Like a symbiotic duet of rhythm and grace, each movement of the Akata Cultural Troupe is a subtle expression of the intricate music that guides their steps, the melodies and rhythms of their instruments weaving a spellbinding web of cultural resonance. The drums thrum, their beats a hypnotic pulse that guides the troupe's feet; the percussion thunders, its rhythms driving the very essence of the dance.

In every corner of the Efik/Ibibio community, in every crevice of daily life, the Akata Cultural Troupe's presence was felt, their performances a vital part of the communal fabric. Whether it's the joyous celebration of a Marriage, or the reverent homage of Festivals, the troupe's movements are a living tribute to the rich culture of Efik/Ibibio tradition. To Akata Cultural Troupe, the currency of culture is not measured in mere monetary terms, but in the intangible wealth of tradition, of history, of community. Yet, as the troupe performs, the members are paid differently according to their roles within the troupe, from the musicians, to the dancers, each participant are paid in accordance with their unique contribution. There is also no fixed prize for engagement for patrons. From engagements in nearby towns, where patrons offer up their gratitude ranging from not less than Two Hundred Thousand to One Million Naira, to more distant events, where the troupe's presence is valued at a premium.

In the world of the Akata Cultural Troupe, their music is a symphony of artistic excellence, a confluence of rhythm, melody, and movement that combine into a beautiful expression of people's culture. The instrumentation, a vibrant blend of traditional drums, with some iconic dances like *Mbaya*, *Waist Dance*, *Ekombi*, *Asian*, *Uaharak* etc. weaves a tapestry of sound that elevates the troupe's message, while the dancers, their bodies an elegance of grace and beauty, bringing the music to life, each step a moving tribute to their heritage, their artistry and a reflection of their people's vibrant spirit. In recognition of the troupe's achievements, and the profound influence of Ubokudom's leadership, the Governor, Chief Godswill Akpabio donated a bus to the troupes, as a symbol of respect and recognition for their contributions to the cultural heritage of Akwa Ibom State. For Ubokudom, this gift was not just a material reward, but a validation of the troupe's unwavering dedication to their craft, a testament to their tireless efforts to preserve and celebrate their cultural heritage.

The Akata Cultural Troupe, has also nourished the lives of its members, a testament to the troupe's commitment to community through the donation of Motorcycles to the awarding of employment opportunities. The troupe has demonstrated a unique form of generosity, a generosity that reflects the troupe's dedication to elevating the lives of its members, a dedication that transcends mere financial gain. In the midst of these tangible expressions of generosity, the troupe's free performances become a form of entertainment for the community, a form of cultural sustenance of tradition, a form of giving that speaks to the heart of their mission, a mission that is rooted in the belief that culture is a gift to be shared and cherished, a gift that can transcend the boundaries of wealth and status.

Artist Training by Akata Theatre Troupe

Within the walls of their practice space for the troupe, the selection of dancers becomes a meticulous process, a weaving of individual skill and collective cohesion, each decision guided by a deep understanding of their art and a profound appreciation of the nuances of tradition. Every Tuesday and Friday, the Akata Cultural Troupe gathers by 3 pm heralding a new chapter in their journey, a new opportunity to hone their craft and deepen their connection to their heritage. In these rehearsals, each dancer becomes a practitioner of their art, a disciple of tradition, their passion a potent force that propels them toward excellence. For the troupe, the selection process is a thoughtful and deliberate one, a careful consideration of each dancer's capabilities, their individual skills becoming a vital component of the troupe's artistry.

Challenges Faced by Akata Cultural Troupe

1. Religious Barrier

With the rise of modernity and the changing tides of social mores, Ubokudom has witnessed a painful shift in the cultural landscape, a shift that threatens to erode the traditions that have defined the communities for generations. In this age of globalization, where the allure of Western influences has taken root, the Akata Cultural Troupe stands as a stalwart guardian of the past, their performances a defiant proclamation of the enduring beauty of the peoples heritage, their artistry a resistance to the erasure of tradition by modernity and the church.

As the Akata Cultural Troupe fights to defend the sanctity of tradition, their performances become a vital act of resistance, a reminder of the inextricable bond between community and culture, their artistry a lifeboat in the turbulent seas of progress, a beacon that shines through the darkness of oblivion. He complained that the church today is on the verge to kill the legacy of traditional performances as the cultures are dying off gradually. He mentioned that some churches feel that it is devilish to indulge in cultural performances of music and dance.

As He navigates the tumultuous tides of societal change, his passion for tradition remains undiminished, his commitment to the Akata Cultural Troupe a powerful rebuke to those who would dismiss the value of culture. For him, his troupe's performances are a testament to the power of cultural preservation, an act of defiance against those who would erase the past, a beacon of hope for those who would see tradition endure. He views his role as a guardian of the past, a defender of cultural heritage, his voice a rallying cry for those who would see tradition flourish.

Ubokudom journeyed deeper into his cultural identity, his artistic soul found itself at odds with the expectations of his birth church, his passion for tradition at odds with their strict interpretation of spirituality. And so, in a bold act of self-determination, he made the decision to leave his birth church as a famous chorister and joined the Catholic faith, a community that offered him the freedom to express his artistry, a place where his love for tradition could thrive. For Him, this departure from his birth church was not just a change of affiliation, but a realization of his true calling, a realization that the

passion for tradition that burned within him was a divine inspiration, a divine mission. His transition to the Catholic Church was a moment of self-discovery, a moment where he embraced his identity as an artist, a visionary, a guardian of tradition, and his continuation of the work that he had already begun with the Akata Cultural Troupe.

In his heart, he knows that his talent for singing is a gift from God, a blessing that he must nourish and share, a blessing that transcends the boundaries of religion, a blessing that no man or institution can quell. He believes in *Mkpo Nsop* to be a special talent. For Ubokudom, *Mkpo Nsop* is not just a mystical concept, but a powerful truth, a truth that shapes the contours of his identity, a truth that defines his purpose and his path. And so, He sees himself as a channel for this sacred talent, a channel for the wisdom and the power of the ancestors, a channel for the spirit of Efik/Ibibio culture that runs through his veins. He recognizes that this role is not just a responsibility, but a privilege, a privilege to carry on the traditions of his people, a privilege to share the magic of *Mkpo Nsop* with the world, a privilege to uphold the legacy of his community. And so, as he sings, as he dances, as he performs, he becomes a vessel for the past, a messenger of tradition, a prophet of the past, a herald of Efik/Ibibio culture, his voice a portal into the soul of his people. Each note that he sings, each step that he takes, becomes a transmission of history, of wisdom, and the deep-rooted traditions that have defined his community for generation.

From the depths of his soul, the rejection from his birth church sparked a stirring ballad, a powerful expression of his resilience, a powerful declaration of his commitment to tradition. As he sings, his voice raises a clarion call for cultural preservation, respect, protection of tradition, and a beacon of hope for cultural revival. For Ubokudom, his music is not just a series of sounds and rhythms, but a testament to the rich tapestry of life itself, a testament to the beauty and the struggles, the triumphs and the tragedies, that shape our existence. Below was his first song when he left his church alongside other songs addressing social ills, communal living, morals etc.:

1. Jesus Anye Edi Ama Mi

Jesus anye edi ama mi oo!
Ino afa udianke idem!

English Translation

You claim that Jesus is my Love
But you steal always

Adana ima ami ette amade owo!
Mme nsinam owo osong esit akenie abasi ubok owo!
Amen enyin nto eyenuka akanim ke anwa ifot!
Amen akpan udua eyenuka akanim ke anwa ifot!
the coven
Amen idib anwan eyenuka akanim ke anwa ifot!
Uwod owo afo udianke idem!

With all the Love of God,
Why do men own idols?
Men take names of their siblings to witchcraft coven
Men take their siblings investment to witchcraft
Men take their in-laws womb to witchcraft the coven
Men refuse to stop killing

Mkpetre akata ino ayatre!
Mkpetre akata ifot ayatre!
Mkpetre akata ayatre una anwan owo!
Mkpetre akata ayatre udia ubok edem!

If I stop singing Akata, will stealing end?
If I stop singing Akata, will witchcraft end?
If I stop singing Akata, will adultery end?
If I stop singing Akata, will corruption/bribery end

2. Oto Nte Udaha, Da Do

Oto nte udaha da do!
Oto nte abasi udaha da do!
Kuyana uboho udu udiana!
Kufehe uboho udu ukpong usung.

English Translation

Stay where destiny has placed you
Stay where God has placed you
Don't struggle too much so you won't fall
Don't run too much so you won't miss the road

<i>Imaikeme ini uniehe nkpo!</i>	You will make it when it is your time
<i>Nkom anam se anam ukute usung!</i>	You will not succeed no matter what you do
<i>Mkom akpewot owo ukide usung!</i>	Even if you kill, you will not make it
<i>Imo owo nko akedo ubwene!</i>	The rich was one time poor
<i>Akekem ini anye anie nkpo!</i>	With time he/she became rich
<i>Akwa owo akedo enyen owong!</i>	An old man was one time a baby
<i>Akekem ini anye okpon owo!</i>	With time he/she became adult
<i>Umauniehe udia bene owo!</i>	If you don't have what to eat today borrow
<i>Imaunoho kpong idem!</i>	If they don't give you be contained

3. Christian Asua Satan

<i>Christian asuusua Satan, ama ubokutom Satan</i>	Christians hate Satan but love his doing
<i>Christian ekere idem</i>	Christians think

<i>Uyip ino ado ubokutom Satan</i>	Stealing is a sin from Satan
<i>Christian eda iso</i>	Christians are the first in line
<i>Uwod owo ado ubokutom Satan</i>	Killing is a sin from Satan
<i>Christian eda iso</i>	<i>Christians are the first in line</i>

<i>Usanga use ado ubokutom Satan</i>	Adultery is a sin from Satan
<i>Christian eda iso</i>	Christians are the first in line
<i>Udia ubok edem ado ubokutom Satan</i>	Bribery and Corruption is a sin from Satan
<i>Christian eda iso</i>	Christians are the first in line

<i>Christian ekama edeme inua ekama ewod owo ammo</i>	Christians use their tongues to kill others
<i>Pastor abre poditics imaha itan akpaniko</i>	Pastor's play politics and tell lies
<i>Elder abre poditics imaha itan akpaniko</i>	Elders in play politics and tell lies
<i>Eka Iban abre poditics imaha itan akpaniko</i>	Woman leader play politics and tell lies
<i>Poditics ado so Akwa Ibom ekere idem</i>	What is politics, Akwa Ibomites should think
<i>Poditics ado so Nigeria ekere idem</i>	What is politics, Nigerian's should think

As he composes, he sings and performs; he becomes a chronicler of the people's experience, their past, present and the future. In the fading twilight of cultural preservation, Ubokudom finds himself among a rare breed, a group of stewards whose hearts beat with the rhythms of tradition, their hands skillfully nurturing the lifeblood of their heritage. He said that “as the custodians of Efik/Ibibio culture diminish in number with the likes of Late Uko Akpan, their role becomes even more vital, their preservation efforts a valiant struggle against the forces of change and modernization, their dedication a powerful antidote to the apathy and indifference of the modern world”.

Payments

As the Akata Cultural Troupe takes the stage, with their artistry a vibrant celebration of the people's heritage, the government stands at a distance, their recognition of the troupe's efforts a dim shadow in the face of the troupe's hard-won accomplishments. For Ubokudom, this lack of recognition is a bitter pill to swallow, a bitter reminder of the obstacles that performers must navigate; their success a testament to their own resolve and determination; their artistry a triumph that rises above the political fray. He believes that the government must take up the mantle of investment, a duty to nourish and support those who bring beauty and tradition to the people, a duty to ensure that performers like those of the Akata Cultural Troupe are given the resources and support they need to continue their vital work. His vision is that the government becomes a vital partner in the preservation of culture, their investment a symbol of their commitment to the soul of the community, their support a reflection of their dedication to preserving the vibrancy of tradition, the Akata Cultural Troupe a shining example of what can be.

In the complex web of bureaucracy that often shrouds government involvement, Ubokudom has witnessed a troubling pattern, where artistic fees are often siphoned by those who claim to be the facilitators of cultural exchange. For the troupe, this diversion of resources is a thorn in their side, a hurdle that they must navigate with grace and skill, their artistry a bargaining chip in a game of political chess, their success a testament to their perseverance and resilience. In the spirit of harmony and progress, Ubokudom envisions a symbiosis between the government and the community, a bridge of understanding and cooperation that could help the cultural treasures of Akwa Ibom State flourish.

With his mind's eye turned towards the future, Ubokudom envisions a world where government and cultural practitioners work in tandem, where traditional performers are given a platform to thrive and their art is elevated to its rightful place at the forefront of society. For him, this partnership is not just a pipe dream, but a vital strategy for revitalizing the cultural landscape of Akwa Ibom State, a strategy that begins with the promotion of cultural carnivals and festivals. In his vision, the government should establish cultural departments in each Local Government Area of the State, councils to act as a regulatory body for traditional performers, offer support and resources, councils and serve as a beacon for the protection and promotion of culture. Through this initiative, Ubokudom envisions a society where culture will thrive greatly.

Away from the government support of cultural groups/troupes, Ubokudom has implemented a system of fiscal responsibility, a system that not only empowers his performers, but also ensures the longevity and stability of the troupe. Each member is encouraged to contribute a portion of their earnings, a contribution that is collected and saved throughout the year, a contribution that becomes a rainy-day fund, a safety net for the troupe, a security blanket for its members. This system, rooted in traditional cooperative principles, not only fosters a sense of community within the troupe, but also instills a spirit of financial discipline, a spirit that will serve the performers well as they navigate the challenges of the future.

Conclusion

The Akata Cultural Troupe's rich history and cultural significance extend beyond mere entertainment, influencing the social, economic, and cultural landscape of their community. The spirit of Akata Cultural Troupes lives on, not just in its performances, but in the hearts and minds of those who have been touched by their artistry, who have been moved by their dedication, who have been inspired by their example. Their journey reminds one of the powers of tradition, the power of creativity, the power of community, a power that transcends the limitations of time and space, a power that speaks to the enduring human need for connection, for meaning, for expression.

The Akata Cultural Troupe offers a powerful reminder that one's cultural traditions are not just remnants of the past, but living, breathing entities that must be nurtured, protected, and celebrated. In a world that is increasingly homogenized, this troupe reminds one of the power of diversity, of the beauty of our differences, of the importance of embracing the unique expressions of humanity. Beyond their artistic and cultural values, the Troupe also holds significant place in the history and development of its community. By preserving, promoting and perpetuating their cultural heritage, the troupe ensures that future generations will continue to have access to the wisdom and experience of their ancestors, helping to build a sense of continuity and connection within the community. In this way, the Troupe is not just a cultural institution, but also a living archive of the history and traditions of Ikono, Akwa Ibom State, preserving their unique place in the larger tapestry of human experience.

Looking forward, it is clear that there are significant opportunities to harness the potentials of traditional dances/music in Akwa Ibom for economic growth and cultural preservation and promotion. For instance, initiatives such as dance/music workshops, training programs, and international exchange

programs could help to foster a new generation of dancers who can carry these arts forward. Moreover, the integration of traditional dances/music into modern entertainment and media, such as film, television, can help to increase their visibility and broaden their appeal. This research recommends the need for State Governments to support Traditional Troupes by giving traditional Troupes the enabling platforms to perform and as such promoting and marketing of traditional dance heritage in anticipation that they will attract tourists. It is therefore the position of this work that the Federal Government of Nigeria should consider it wise to financially support traditional Troupes so that they may be encouraged to strive for higher standards. By incorporating these arts into school curriculums and community activities, we can ensure that the younger generation develops an appreciation for their cultural heritage and an understanding of its significance. In conclusion, with the right approach, however, we can not only safeguard these arts for future generations but also use them as a catalyst for economic growth and cultural celebration.

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