

The Use of Themes and Variations in Early and Contemporary Juju Music

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Abstract : This paper discusses the thematic structure of Yoruba popular music of Southwest Nigeria. It examines the use of themes and variations in early and contemporary Juju music. The work is an outcome of a research developed by the author in his doctoral studies at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, with the aim of analyzing the thematic and motivic developments in Yoruba popular genres. Observations, interviews, live recordings and CDs were used as methods for eliciting information. Field recordings and CDs of selected musical samples were also transcribed and notated. The research established the prevalent use of string of themes by Juju musicians as a compositional technique in moving from one musical section to another, as they communicate the verbal messages in their song. These themes consisting of the popular 'call and response' form found in most African music, analogous to the western 'subject and answer' style of the fugue or sonata form, although without the tonic-dominant relations. Due to the short and repetitive form of African melodies and rhythms, a theme is restated as a variation, where its rhythmic and melodic motifs are stylistically developed and repeated, but still retaining its recognizable core musical structure. The findings of this study showed that Juju musicians generally often employ a thematic plan where new themes are used to arrange the songs into sections, and each theme is developed into variations in order to further expand the music, eliminate monotony, and create musical aesthetics, serving as hallmark of its musical identity. The study established the musical and extra-musical attributes of the genre, while recommending further research towards analyzing the various compositional techniques employed in African popular genres.

Keywords : compositional techniques, popular music, theme and variation, thematic development

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