

BABA MO W'OLE
(Chorus and Orchestra)

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Introduction

This study presents a musical analysis of *Baba Mo W'ole*, a choral–instrumental composition by Sunday Olufemi Akande that synthesises African sacred music traditions with Western harmonic and orchestral sonorities. Scored for SATB choir and a mixed ensemble comprising alto saxophone, trumpet in B \flat , trombone, electric piano, claves, and *sekere*, the work embodies a distinctly liturgical atmosphere. Its moderate and steady tempo ($\text{♩} = 80$), hymn-like melodic contours, and Yoruba devotional text collectively evoke the reverent character of congregational worship.

The formal design follows a modified rondo structure (A–B–A'–C–A"), enriched by prominent call-and-response exchanges that reflect the dialogic nature of African musical practice. Through responsorial writing and text-driven development, the composition employs musical and linguistic repetition to articulate themes of prayer, supplication, and divine mercy. The rhythmic interplay between claves and *sekere* introduces polyrhythmic layers characteristic of Yoruba worship traditions, while the use of elongated note values underscores the theological weight of the text. In its fusion of African rhythmic vitality with Western choral and instrumental textures, *Baba Mo W'ole* affirms both cultural identity and devotional expression.

Musical Form

The composition demonstrates a modified rondo form (A–B–A'–C–A"); though, its sectional design can also be interpreted through a call-and-response binary framework, owing to the alternating presence of choral and instrumental motifs. This reflects the broader African musical principle of dialogic interaction, where musical ideas are passed between performing forces to create communal meaning; a concept extensively discussed by Chernoff (1979) and Agawu (2003) in their analyses of African performance traditions.

The A section (bars 1–6), introduces the main theme with the choir singing “*Baba mowa w'ole f'adura*” (Father, I bow down in prayer), while the saxophone and trumpet provide instrumental interjections that mirror and respond to the vocal line. This interaction reinforces what Kwabena Nketia (1974) describes as the responsorial style, a hallmark of many sub-Saharan African traditions where solo-chorus or voice-instrument dialogues structure of both sacred and secular music.

In the B section (bars 7–12), a marked shift occurs with the text “*Je ki adura mi t'ewo gba*” (Let my prayer be accepted). Here, the melodic contour becomes more fluid, and the harmony thickens, illustrating contrast and development in line with the rondo principle of recurring and contrasting material. The return of the main theme in the A' section (bars 13–16) is enriched with harmonic support and more pronounced rhythmic contributions from claves and *sekere*,

percussive instruments that are central to Yoruba music-making and often signify ritual emphasis or communal affirmation (DjeDje, 2008).

A contrasting C section (bars 17–22), introduces the expansive text “*Fun mi l’ayo... Alaafia*” (Give me joy, peace), with more extended phrasing in the choral line and cadential punctuation from the brass section. This type of sectional growth, driven by text and reinforced by orchestration, aligns with Arom (1991) and Stone (2005), who argue that African compositional logic often stems from text-based structuring and dynamic repetition rather than European thematic development.

In the final return to A (bars 22–end), the theme is restated with heightened orchestration and rhythmic intensity, culminating in the plea “*Fi ife re gba adura mi*” (Receive my prayer with favour). This closing operates as a coda, reaffirming the spiritual intention of the piece. The layering of voices and instruments in this final section emphasises the cyclical and cumulative character of African musical forms, which Agawu (2003) identifies as essential to African expressive culture, where return and intensification replace linear climax as structural goals.

Rhythm

The tempo marking $\text{♩} = 80$ provides a steady, meditative pulse. The rhythm alternates between simple duple meter patterns (quarter and eighth notes) and syncopated African percussion figures from claves and *sekere*. As Agawu (2003) argues, African rhythm is not only a structural device but also a communicative tool, often serving as a means of articulating social and spiritual meaning through repetition and variation.

In this work, repeated rhythmic cells, particularly in bars 7–10, emphasised key Yoruba textual phrases. The use of elongated note values (e.g., bars 13–16 on the phrase “*Olugba la*”) enhances the sense of reverence and spiritual solemnity. This is consistent with findings by Alvan-Ikoku and Nwamara (2024), who assert that text-setting in Yoruba sacred music frequently involves rhythmic expansion to convey emotional weight and theological significance.

Furthermore, the layering of percussion, particularly the interplay of claves and *sekere*, introduces a polyrhythmic texture that evokes traditional African ensemble practices. Agawu (2006) notes that such polyrhythms are fundamental to African musical aesthetics, where rhythm operates on multiple planes to create a dynamic and participatory musical experience. In this context, the percussion does more than accompany; it converses with the vocal lines, reinforcing the call-and-response structure and the dialogic nature of Yoruba worship music.

Arrangement

The voices required in the composition are Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass (SATB). The choir carries the thematic material, moving mostly homophonically but occasionally breaking into call-and-response between male and female voices.

Instrumentation

In the composition, the alto saxophone and Trumpet provided melodic doubling and call phrases, echoing or extending vocal lines, while the trombone added harmonic depth, often supporting cadences. The electric piano provided a harmonic foundation and rhythmic drive. The claves and *sekere* gave an Afrocentric percussive colour and rhythmic grounding to the

composition. There occurred a balance between Western harmonic instruments and African percussion, reflecting a fusion of traditions.

Theme

The central theme of the piece revolves around prayer, supplication, and divine mercy, expressed through deeply reverent Yoruba lyrics such as “*Baba mo w’ole f’adura*” (Father, I bow down in prayer). This text sets the devotional tone, conveying humility, reverence, and the acknowledgment of divine authority. According to Nketia (1974), African sacred songs often serve as verbal extensions of prayer, functioning not just musically but spiritually, offering an avenue for personal and communal communication with the divine. The lyric reflects what Peel (2000) describes as a central Yoruba religious value: the acknowledgment of one's dependence on a higher spiritual power, often marked by physical gestures (such as bowing) and linguistic expressions of humility.

Throughout the composition, recurring phrases like “*Fun mi l’ayo*” (Give me joy), “*Alaafia*” (Peace), and “*Fi ife re gba adura*” (Receive my prayer with your love) articulate petitions and emotional appeals. These phrases follow a ritualised structure of prayer, moving from adoration and submission to request a form consistent with Olupona’s (2011) description of Yoruba liturgical frameworks, which prioritise respect, honour, and progression in prayer as essential for spiritual efficacy. The repetitive textual and musical elements underscore this process, reinforcing the transformational nature of prayer in Yoruba cosmology.

Musically, the main theme is simple, repetitive, and hymn-like, allowing both accessibility and spiritual immersion. The stepwise melodic motion promotes singability, fostering congregational participation, a key feature of African choral worship as observed by Ruth Stone (2005). She emphasizes that repetition and melodic simplicity are not signs of musical limitation but rather tools for communal unity and spiritual engagement. The gradual layering of voices and instruments builds intensity without disrupting the meditative tone, embodying what Agawu (2003) refers to as “cumulative intensification”, a structural principle in African music that replaces Western notions of linear climax with cyclical emotional depth.

Improvisation

To use a vocal improvisation for this work, Soloists could introduce ornamental lines or short calls before choral responses in line with Yoruba call-and-response traditions. The saxophone and trumpet have scope for embellishments and short interludes between choral phrases.

Also, *Sekere* and claves players can vary their rhythmic patterns to intensify or relax sections, especially during repetitions. Through dynamics, tempo rubato, and repeats, the choir director or conductor can shape the performance to suit liturgical or concert contexts.

Conclusion

“*Baba Mo W’ole*,” stands as a compelling example of intercultural synthesis, effectively blending African sacred traditions with Western harmonic and instrumental frameworks. Through its modified rondo form, text-driven development, and rich call-and-response structures, the composition captures the spiritual and musical essence of Yoruba worship. Sunday Olufemi Akande’s integration of SATB choral writing with African percussion and Western brass and woodwinds reflects a nuanced understanding of both liturgical function and musical aesthetics.

The rhythmic foundation, rooted in African polyrhythmic practices, offers more than accompaniment; it participates in theological expression, reinforcing the piece's central themes of prayer, humility, and divine supplication. The frequent use of repetition, both lyrical and musical, mirrors Yoruba prayer structures and underscores the meditative and communal dimensions of worship. This cumulative intensification, rather than a dramatic climax, embodies a distinctly African approach to musical form.

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BABA MO W'OLE

(Chorus and Orchestra)

♩ = 80

Composed by: Sunday Olufemi Akande

The musical score is arranged in a vertical stack of staves. From top to bottom, the instruments are: Alto Sax, Trumpet in B \flat , Trombone, Claves, Electric Piano (grand staff), Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Shekere. The Alto Sax, Trumpet in B \flat , and Trombone parts are in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The Claves, Electric Piano, and Shekere parts are in common time (4/4). The Electric Piano part consists of a right-hand melody with chords and a left-hand bass line with eighth-note patterns. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) are currently empty, indicated by horizontal lines with a dash. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 80.

BABA MO WOLE

5

13

A. Sx.

B \flat Tpt.

Tbn.

Clv.

E. Pno.

S

A

T

B

13

Je-ki le lo gba - la-ye O - lu - gba - la I-wo ni kan lo le ba-mi

Je-ki le lo gba - la-ye O - lu - gba - la I-wo ni kan lo le ba-mi

Je-ki le lo gba - la-ye O - lu - gba - la I-wo ni kan lo le ba-mi

gba O - lu - gba - la I-wo ni kan lo le ba mi

2 BABA MO W'OLE

A. Sax.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

Clv.

E. Pno.

S

A

T

B

The musical score is for the piece 'BABA MO W'OLE' and is page 28 of 90. It features a multi-staff arrangement. The top staff is for Alto Saxophone (A. Sax.) in treble clef, with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The second and third staves are for B♭ Trumpet (B♭ Tpt.) and Trombone (Tbn.) in bass clef, with the same key signature and time signature. The fourth staff is for Clarinet (Clv.) in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The fifth and sixth staves are for Electric Piano (E. Pno.) in treble and bass clefs, with a key signature of three sharps and a 4/4 time signature. The seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth staves are for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B) voices, all in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps. The eleventh staff is for a percussion part in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The score consists of three measures of music. The saxophone and trumpet parts have melodic lines with some grace notes. The trombone part has a similar melodic line. The clarinet part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The electric piano part has a complex texture with chords and eighth notes. The vocal parts are currently silent, indicated by whole rests. The percussion part has a steady eighth-note rhythm.

BABA MO W'OLE

3

A. Sax.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

Clv.

E. Pno.

S

A

T

B

Ba-ba mo wa wo - le f'a-du -

4 BABA MO W'OLE

10

A. Sax.

10

B \flat Tpt.

Tbn.

10

Clv.

10

E. Pno.

10

S

ra Je-ki a-du - ra mi te-wo gba

A

ra Je-ki a-du - ra mi te-wo gba

T

ra Je-ki a-du - ra mi te-wo gba

B

fa-du - ra mi o 'du - ra te wo

10

Clv.

6 BABA MO WOLE

A. Sax.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

Clv.

E. Pno.

S.
se Jo wo mo be o o mo be o o

A.
se mo be o o

T.
se mo be o o

B.
se mo be o o

BABA MO WOLE

7

19

A. Sax.

B \flat Tpt.

Tbn.

Clv.

E. Pno.

S
jo wo sa nu fun mi sa nu fun mi Fun mi la yo 'wo o-mo

A
sa nu fun mi Fun mi la yo 'wo o-mo

T
sa nu fun mi Fun mi la yo 'wo o-mo

B

19

8 BABA MO WOLE

22

A. Sx.

B \flat Tpt.

Tbn.

Clv.

E. Pno.

S

A

T

B

22

A - la - fi - a Fi fe re gba - du - ra mi

A - la - fi - a Fi fe re gba - du - ra mi

A - la - fi - a Fi fe re gba - du - ra mi

The musical score is for the piece 'BABA MO WOLE'. It features a variety of instruments and vocal parts. The instruments include Alto Saxophone (A. Sx.), B-flat Trumpet (B \flat Tpt.), Trombone (Tbn.), Clarinet (Clv.), and Electric Piano (E. Pno.). The vocal parts are for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The score is in 8/8 time and the key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The vocal parts have lyrics: 'A - la - fi - a Fi fe re gba - du - ra mi'. The score is marked with a rehearsal mark '22' at the beginning of the vocal and piano parts.