

EKWO HALLELUJAH
(Chorus of Mixed Voices)

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Ekwo Hallelujah for chorus of mixed voices, SATB with African percussion instruments, text and music by Isong Isong Akpan.

Ekwo Hallelujah is a choral work by Nigerian composer Isong Isong Akpan, written for SATB choir with African percussion ensemble. The piece blends Western harmonic traditions with African indigenous rhythmic and linguistic elements, creating a vibrant expression of faith deeply rooted in both Christian theology and African cultural identity. It was first performed in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria, in 2024 by The Royal Fatherland Music Ensemble in a concert organised yearly by the composer to premiere his works.

TEXT AND TRANSLATION

Ekwo Hallelujah Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah! Yak nnyin ikwo Hallelujah,
Yak nnyin ikwo Hallelujah, Ke kpukpru
s'enye anamde ye nnyin, eme enyene nyo.
Yak nnyin ikwo Hallelujah, Yak nnyin
ikwo Hallelujah, Yak ikwo o! Hallelujah
koro_Enye 'modot ekom.
Utin y'ofiong k'ekwo ikwo Hallelujah!
Inuen k'ofum k'ekwo ikwo Hallelujah! Iyak
ke mmong k'ekwo ikwo Hallelujah! Yak
nnyin m'idian uyo ikwo Hallelujah!
Yak nnyin ikwo Hallelujah, Yak nnyin
ikwo Hallelujah, Yak ikwo o! Hallelujah
koro_Enye 'modot ekom.
Yak ikwo Hallelujah, Hallelujah! Yak
ikwo Hallelujah, Hallelujah! Yak imenere
esit, yak imenere_uyo, Yak ikwo o!
Hallelujah Yak ikwo o! Hallelujah Yak
ikwo o! Hallelujah koro_Enye 'modot
ekom.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

“Hallelujah” is an interjection from the Hebrew language, used as an expression of gratitude to God. It is used in this piece alongside the Efik language. This interplay of languages situates

Sing Hallelujah Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah! Let us sing Hallelujah, Let us
sing Hallelujah, For all He has done for us is
awesome Let us sing Hallelujah, Let us sing
Hallelujah, Let us sing Hallelujah, for He is
worthy of thanks.

Sun and moon are singing songs, Hallelujah!
Birds in the sky are singing songs,
Hallelujah! Fishes in the sea are singing
songs, Hallelujah! Let us in one voice sing
Hallelujah!

Let us sing Hallelujah, Let us sing
Hallelujah, Let us sing Hallelujah, For He is
worthy of thanks.

Let us sing Hallelujah, Hallelujah! Let us
sing Hallelujah, Hallelujah! Let us lift our
hearts, Lift our voices Let us sing O
Hallelujah, Let us sing O Hallelujah, Let us
sing O Hallelujah, For He is worthy of
thanks.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

the work at the intersection of local African identity and global Christian worship, affirming that the act of praise transcends cultural boundaries while remaining grounded in indigenous expressions.

In general, the vowels in the songs are pronounced as indicated below: [a], somewhat as in English pat; [e], somewhat as in English take; [i], somewhat as in English heat; while [o], somewhat as in English boat; [ɔ], somewhat as in English pot, and [u], somewhat as in English too.

Consonant kw - [q], somewhat as in English quart [kwɔ:t] /nw/ - labialised velar nasa,l /ny/ - palatal nasal, /kp /- labio-velar (voiceless), /t /- alveolar, /b/- bilabial; /b/, /t/, and /k/ are unreleased in final positions. As in the following examples: Esit - Heart - [esit¹] Modot - Worthy - [modot¹]. Also in the middle positions, /t/ is not released, as in Utin (Sun) [Ut¹in], but not in all cases; /t/ in the word below is released; Éti - (good)

Instrumentation Voices: SATB chorus (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). Instruments: *Ekomo* (drums), *Nsak* (rattles), Abang (pot drum), *Ntakorok* (wood block). The percussion grounds the piece in an African rhythmic framework, distinguishing it from purely Western choral music.

Musical Style and Structure Tonality: Written in G major (as indicated in the score), then modulates to B minor (the relative minor of D major, Bars 23-26), then sequentially moves one tone higher to C Major at bar 27, with a return to G Major at bar 30. Tempo: Moderato: allowing a steady, dance-like feel. Texture: Begins with unison rhythmic declamation (“Hallelujah”), develops into polyphonic layering of SATB voices. Form: Cyclical/antiphonal, characteristic of African choral music; call-and-response between voice parts; repetition of key phrases like “Ekwo Hallelujah.”

Rhythm and African Identity Percussion uses polyrhythms and ostinatos, driving the celebratory tone. Vocal rhythm mimics the speech rhythm of Efik, giving the text a natural flow. Frequent syncopations and repeated short phrases create a danceable communal character.

Theological and Cultural Meaning: It is both devotional (praise to God) and communal (inviting everyone to join). The African instruments and language localise the Christian Hallelujah tradition, affirming that praise belongs to every culture. “God is worthy of praise” serves as the theological climax: praise is not just emotional but justified and rooted in God’s worthiness.

Overall Significance: The piece is a fusion of Western choral tradition (SATB, tonal harmony, staff notation) and African indigenous music (drums, rattles, call-response, Efik language). It reflects African Christian identity, celebrating faith with indigenous rhythms, language, and expression. Musically, it is both accessible (repetition, dance-like rhythm) and profound (textual theology of God’s worthiness).

Performance Analysis of Ekwo Hallelujah:

1. Vocal Approach (SATB Choir) Sopranos: Carry the brightness of the “Hallelujah” motive; must project energy and maintain clarity in higher tessitura. 4 Altos: Provide harmonic grounding, often reinforcing rhythmic ostinatos. Warm, steady tone is key. Tenors: Act as a bridge; their lines frequently add rhythmic drive and countermelodies. Basses: Anchor the harmony and rhythm, sometimes doubling the drum rhythms vocally. Choral blend is essential, but the music thrives on rhythmic vitality rather than strict classical smoothness.

2. Rhythmic Performance Percussionists are central: *Ekomo* (drums) → establish pulse and excitement. *Nsak* (rattles) → add texture and keep the communal dance-feel. Abang (pot drum) → provides deep resonance, balancing the choir. *Ntakorok* (wood block) → sharp accents to mark phrases. Singers must internalise the percussion rhythms. Syncopation and call-response phrases should feel like conversation, not mechanical counting.

3. Language and Diction Efik words (“*Yak nnyin ikwo Hallelujah*,” “*Koro enye omodot Ekom*”) require careful articulation. The natural speech rhythm of Efik should guide phrasing; performers should avoid forcing it into purely Western accentuation. English “Hallelujah” must remain bright, jubilant, and resonant.

4. Dynamics and Expression Markings indicate *mf* → *f* → *ff* progressions, showing growth of intensity. Climax occurs at “*Koro enye omodot Ekom*” (God is worthy of praise); this should be sung with full conviction, possibly supported by a crescendo in percussion. Use of *ritardando* (as notated at the end) gives closure, allowing the choir to finish with grandeur.

5. Staging / Presentation Piece lends itself to movement: gentle swaying, clapping, or stepping can reinforce its communal African character. Choir could be arranged antiphonally (e.g., men vs. women, or soprano/alto vs. tenor/bass) to highlight call-response. Percussion should be positioned centrally or even among the singers to emphasize integration of rhythm and voice.

6. Overall Performance Goal: The performance should embody: Joyful proclamation (through bright tone and strong rhythm), communal unity (through call-response and group dynamics), cultural authenticity (through respect for Efik diction and African rhythmic style). A successful performance of Ekwo Hallelujah should feel less like a Western concert piece and more like a communal act of worship and celebration, where choir and percussion merge into one living, dancing sound of praise.

Challenges in Performance

1. Language and Diction Non-Efik choirs may struggle with pronunciation, potentially distorting the natural speech rhythm. Requires guidance from native speakers or phonetic training.

2. Rhythmic Precision Syncopation and polyrhythms demand careful coordination between choir and percussion. Western-trained choirs might find it difficult to loosen phrasing without losing accuracy.

3. Balance of Forces Percussion can easily overpower voices if not managed well. It requires sensitive dynamic control to keep text intelligible.

4. Stylistic Interpretation Western choirs may default to classical choral tone, missing the earthiness, brightness, and rhythmic flexibility characteristic of African singing. Over-formalisation risks stripping the piece of its intended joy and spontaneity.

5. Conclusion, *Ekwo* Hallelujah is both a celebration of faith and a cultural statement. It exemplifies the fusion of Western choral tradition and African indigenous expression. Its strengths lie in its infectious rhythm, communal participation, and rich fusion of traditions. However, successful performance requires sensitivity to language, rhythm, balance, and style. When approached authentically, the piece becomes not only a song but a living act of collective praise, embodying the theological message that “God is worthy of praise.”

Composer's Profile

Isong Isong Akpan is a composer, music teacher, author, and inventor of several musical games and puzzles. He is currently the CEO of The Royal Fatherland Music Ensemble, Calabar, and a former artistic/choral director of Hope Waddell Society of Music, HOWASOM, Calabar. He is not firing his first shot in composition. His previous works in his Choral book *Àsè* Vol. 1, attracted seasoned musical bodies including Lagos city Chorale, Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON), Ibom Musical Society, Akwa Ibom State, The *Akojopo* Music Foundation, New York, etc. Notable of the songs performed by these bodies included: *Sese Mmong K'oto K'obot K'eweredi*, *Sia Ndide Eyen*, *Ekop Do*, etc. Notable events where his works were performed include: the coronation concert in honour of their majesties King Charles III & Queen Camilla in Lagos, and the celebration of Nigeria's Independence Day at Megaron Concert Hall, Athens, Greece by The Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON). Akpan hosts a yearly musical concert in the city of Calabar, where he premieres his musical works and promotes the singing of Efik and Ibibio choral and contemporary classical pieces. He is currently teaching music at Federal Government Girls' College, Calabar as a part-time teacher, and he runs his private music venture. Other songs composed and arranged by Isong Isong Akpan include: Sacred Chorals: *Ima Ama Wai Nwed Abasi Elijah Bo Ekom Imaobong* Rejoice He's Coming, Season of Sweetness, Our Gratitude Be Not Afraid, Secular Chorals: *Etinkene Anwan Ndo Uyai Eyen Eku Ikot Mbom Eyen Nigeria Demere Akanam Ndonke Etekun Idim Inim Enem Uyo Ekon Nke Africa*, My Africa ORCHESTRATIONS *O Ediye Obio Edim Kuddep Efiori Nsasak Sighi Sighi Bem Bem Bet O Bet K'ime Mbre Ikoso*

Ekwo Hallelujah

For Chorus of Mixed Voices, S.A.T.B
with African percussion instruments

Text & Music by
Isong Isong Akpan

Doh is G Moderato

Musical score for the first system. It includes vocal staves for Soprano and Alto, Tenor and Bass, and percussion staves for Ekwo 1 (Drum), Ekwo 2 (Drum), Nsak 1 (ontainer Rattle), Nsak 2 (meshed Rattle), Abang (Pot Drum), and Ntakorok (Wood Block). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is Moderato.

Musical score for the second system. It includes vocal staves with lyrics and percussion staves. The lyrics are: "E - kwwo Hal - le - lu - jah! E - kwwo Hal - le - lu - jah!". The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is Moderato.

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Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!

le - lu - jah! E - kwə Hal - le - lu -

The first system of the score consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written in a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. It features a melody with various dynamics and articulations, including slurs and accents. The piano accompaniment is written in a bass clef and consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex rhythmic pattern in the left hand. The lyrics are in Indonesian and are placed below the vocal line.



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Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Yak nnyin

jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! E - jah!

The second system of the score continues the vocal and piano parts. It includes a first ending (1.) and a second ending (2.) marked with a double bar line and repeat signs. The second ending is marked with a dynamic of *mf*. The lyrics continue below the vocal line, including the phrase "Yak nnyin". The piano accompaniment maintains its rhythmic pattern throughout the system.

8

15

| d .m :t .r | d .d :l .l | r .f :d .m | r .r :m .m | f .s :f .m | r .r :d .d
 | s .d :s .s | s .s :l .l | l .d :l .ta | l .l :d .d | d .d :d .d | l .l :l .l
 i - kwɔ Hal - le - lu - jah, yak nnyin i - kwɔ Hal - le - lu - jah, ke kpu - kpru s'e - nye a - nam - de ye nnyin,
 | m .s :r .f | m .m :l .l | f .l :m .s | f .f :s .s | l .l :l .s | f .f :f .f
 | d .d :r .s | d .d :l .l | r .r :m .m | f .f :d .d | f .f :f .s | l .l :f .m



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| r .r :d .d | l .l :s .s | d .m :t .r | d .d :l .l | r .f :d .m | r .r :f .f
 | l .l :l .l | s .s :s .s | s .d :s .s | s .s :l .l | l .d :l .ta | l .l :l .l
 e - m'e - nye - ne nnyɔ. Yak nnyin i - kwɔ Hal - le - lu - jah, yak nnyin i - kwɔ Hal - le - lu - jah, yak i -
 | f .f :r .r | r .r :s .s | m .s :r .f | m .m :l .l | f .l :m .s | f .f :f .f
 | r .r :fe .fe | s .s :s .s | d .d :r .s | d .d :l .l | r .r :m .m | f .f :r .r

A **B.1.m**

f U-tin y'q - fi'ong k'e - kwq i - kwq

27 | s .d :l .l |s .s :d .d |d .d :t .t |d | | :m |l |l .l :- |d' .r' :d' .l

|d .s :f .f |m .m :l .l |s .s :s .s |s | | :m,m :m .m |m .f :m .m

kwq o! Hal - le - lu - jah ko - roE - nye 'mo - dot e - kom. U-tin y'q - fi'ong k'e - kwq i - kwq

|d .d :d .d |d .d :m .m |f .f :f .f |m | | :d',d' :d' .d' |l .l :l .l

|m .m :f .f |s .s :l .l |r .r :s .s |d | | :m |l |l .l :- |l .l :l .l

U-tin y'q - fi'ong k'e - kwq i - kwq

A



C.ta

Hal - le - lu - jah! I-nuen k'o - fum k'e - kwq i - kwq Hal - le - lu - jah! I-yak

24 | :d' .r' |d' .t :l .l |l .l :- |d' .r' :d' .l | :d' .r' |d' :l :l',d',d'

|m .f |m :d |m .m :m .m |m .f :m .m | :m .f |m :m .

Hal - le - lu - jah! I-nuen k'o - fum k'e - kwq i - kwq Hal - le - lu - jah!

:d' .t |l .s :l |d' .d' :d' .d' |l .l :l .l | :d' .t |l :l .

|l .m |d .r :m |l .l :l .l |l .l :l .l | :l .m |l :l .

Hal - le - lu - jah! I-nuen k'o - fum k'e - kwq i - kwq Hal - le - lu - jah!

10

ke m-mong k'e-kwo i-kwo Hal-le-lu - jah! Gs

27

f s s :s s |s :l :s s | :d' t |l :l | .^{de}r r :r r |r r r r | :l l |t :s s
 I yak ke m-mong k'e-kwo i-kwo Hal-le-lu - jah! Yak nnyin m'i-dian u-yo i-kwo Hal-le-lu - jah! yak

ta d',d' :d' d' |d' d' :d' d' | :d' r' |d' r' :m' | .^ml |l :l |l :l :l | :fe .fe |s :s s
 I yak ke m-mong k'e-kwo i-kwo Hal-le-lu - jah! Yak nnyin m'i-dian, i-dian u-yo i-kwo Hal-le-lu - jah! yak

ta d',d' :d' d' |d' d' :d' d' | :l s |l :l |^df |m |r r |r r |r r r r | :r r |s :l |t :s
 I yak ke m-mong k'e-kwo i-kwo Hal-le-lu - jah! Yak nnyin m'i-dian, i-dian u-yo i-kwo Hal-le-lu - jah! yak



33

d m t r |d d :l l |r f :d m |r r :f f |s d :l l |s s :d d |d d :t t |d :s s
 i-kwo Hal-le-lu-jah, yak nnyin i-kwo Hal-le-lu-jah, yak i-kwo o! Hal-le-lu-jah ko-roE-nye 'mo-dot e-kom. Yak nnyin

p

f l :m s |f f :r r |d d :d d |d d :m m |f f :f f |m :s s
 i-kwo Hal-le-lu-jah, yak nnyin

35 | d .m :t .r | d .d :l .l | r .f :d .m | r .r :f .f | **B** s .d :l .l | s .s :d .d

| s .d :s .s | s .s :l .l | l .d :l .ta | l .l :l .l | d .s :f .f | m .m :l .l

| i - kwø Hal - le - lu - jah, yak nnyin | i - kwø Hal - le - lu - jah, yak i - kwø o! Hal - le - lu - jah ko - ro - E -

| m .s :r .f | m .m :l .l | f .l :m .s | f .f :r .r | d .d :d .d | d .d :m .m

| d .d :r .s | d .d :l .l | r .r :m .m | f .f :f .f | m .m :f .f | s .s :l .l

B



38 | d .d :t .t | d .m .f :m .m | r .m :r .r

| s .s :s .s | s .d :d :d .d | .t .t :t .t

| nye 'mo - dot e - kom. Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!

| f .f :f .f | m .d .r | m .f .f | m .m .f .f

| r .r :s .s | d .l .l :l .l | .se .se :se .se

| Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!

B

1240

Hal-le-lu - jah!
 Hal-le-lu - jah!
 Hal-le-lu - jah!
 Hal-le-lu - jah!
 Hal-le-lu - jah!
 Yak i - kwø
 Hal-le-lu - jah,
 Hal-le-lu - jah!
 Hal-le-lu - jah!
 Hal-le-lu - jah!
 Yak i -



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me - ne - r'e - sit,
 me - ne - r'e - sit,
 yak i - me - ne - re u - yo,
 yak i - kwø o!
 Hal - le - lu - jah yak i -

mp *ff*

46 | s .d :l .l | s .s :f .f | s .d' :l .l | s .s :d' .d' | d' .d' :t .t | d' : :
| d .s :f .f | m .m :l .l | d .m :d .d | d .t :d .r | m .m :r .r | d : :
kwø ø! Hal - le - lu - jah yak i - kwø ø! Hal - le - lu - jah ko - roE - nye 'mo - dot e - kom.
| d .d :d .d | d .d :r .r | d .s :f .d | m .m :f .f | s .s :f .f | m *mf* : :
| m .m :f .f | s .s :r .r | m .m :f .f | s .s :l .l | r .r :s .s | d :s :s
kwø ø! Hal - le - lu - jah yak i - kwø ø! Hal - le - lu - jah ko - roE - nye 'mo - dot e - kom. E -



mf

49 | .m .m :m .m | .f .f :f .f | .s :f .f | m : :
| .d .d :d .d | .d .d :d .d | .t :d .r | d : :
Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!
| .s .s :s .s | .l .l :l .l | .r :l .s | s : :
| d : : | f : : | s : : | l : : | d : : | s : :
kwø Hal - le - lu - jah! E -

14

51

.m .m :m .m | .f .f :f .f | .fe :fe .r | s :
 .d .d :d .d | .d .d :d .d | .l .l :l .l | le :
 Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!
 .s .s :s .s | .l .l :l .l | .r .r :r .r | r :
 d :- | f Hal - - :- | r le - - r lu - - s jah! :s E - -



53

.m .m :m .m | .f .f :f .f | .s .s :s .s | .l .l :l .l |
 .d .d :d .d | .d .d :d .d | .d .d :d .d | .d .d :d .d |
 Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!
 .s .s :s .s | .l .l :l .l | .s .s :s .s | .f .f :f .f |
 d :- | f Hal - - :- | m le - - :- | f lu - - :-

55

Hal-le-lu-jah! Hal-le-lu-jah! Hal-le-lu-jah! Hal-le-lu-jah!

s
jah! Hal-le-lu-jah!



rit.

Hal-le-lu-jah! Hal-le-lu-jah!

rit.