

# EZIGBO NNE (Good Mother)

[A Composition for Trumpet and Piano/African Instrumental Accompaniments]

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## Structural Analysis of “Ezigbo Nne” (Good Mother)

### Abstract

This paper explores Ezigbo Nne “Good Mother” by Nwaeke Udochukwu, a contemporary African art music piece that bridges indigenous Igbo musical traditions and Western classical compositional techniques. The study investigates six critical aspects of the work, identification and form, scale and mode, melodic structure, rhythmic organization, text, and expressive dynamics. The analysis reveals how the composer effectively utilises African rhythmic complexity, pentatonic modal flavors, and a layered percussive texture while retaining Western formality and harmonic organization. By doing so, the piece becomes a musical symbol of cultural hybridity, honouring motherhood while emphasising the relevance of African musical identity in contemporary composition. This critical engagement contributes to the documentation and scholarly appreciation of African art music as a distinct, evolving genre. The analysis will be based on identification and forms, scale and mode, melodic structure of the music, rhythmic structure of the music, text of the music and dynamics or expression marks.

**Keywords:** Analysis, Composition, Tonal harmony, Cultural hybridity.

### Introduction

African art music is a genre that has matured significantly through the creative efforts of composers seeking to blend Western classical traditions with African idioms. The genre emerged in the early 20th century and continues to evolve with composers like Joshua Uzoigwe, Akin Euba, and Sam Akpabot making notable contributions. These composers, and their successors, have often drawn on indigenous African elements such as rhythm, scale, instrumentation, and storytelling to create works that are both structurally refined and culturally expressive (Agawu, 2003; Omojola, 1995).

*Ezigbo Nne*, composed by Nwaeke Udochukwu in 2025, represents a continuation of this compositional tradition. The title, translated as *Good Mother*, immediately situates the work in a cultural context that values familial honour and maternal reverence. The composer employs a range of instruments including trumpet, piano, and a variety of African percussion to convey themes of celebration, introspection, and honour. Through this analysis, we aim to reveal the intricate ways in which African musical characteristics are employed in the piece and how these elements coexist with Western stylistic features.

## Composition

There are many perspectives concerning the term *composition*. *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Music* (1992) defines it as “the act or process of creating a work of music,” while *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (2001) states that it is “the activity of creating a musical work, the work thus created.” The term is most often used in contrast to improvisation, implying an activity carried out prior to performance or a work whose features are specified in sufficient detail to retain its essential identity from one performance to another. It is also an act that requires skillful acumen to carry out.

Thus, Uzoigwe (1994) explains:

To compose is to put things together. Composition, therefore, is an art that is highly structured, highly planned, very intellectual, mathematical, and even cold-blooded. What the composer does is to create a blueprint for a tonal house, as an architect creates one for a house of brick, mortar, steel, glass, and cement (p. 157).

## Defining a Composer

A composer is traditionally understood as one who creates, structures, and notates music for performance. However, contemporary definitions extend beyond the Western classical paradigm, acknowledging multiple modes of music creation, including oral transmission, improvisation, and digital composition. According to Cook (2018), a composer is not merely a producer of musical scores but also a cultural agent whose works engage with history, identity, and creativity.

In African contexts, composers frequently serve as custodians of tradition while also being innovators. Nzewi (2013) describes African composers as culture bearers who reimagine oral traditions in modern formats, thereby ensuring continuity and renewal of cultural heritage. With the rise of technology, composers are increasingly viewed as interdisciplinary creators, working across music, film, gaming, virtual reality, and digital soundscapes (Williams, 2021).

Moreover, contemporary scholarship emphasizes the blurred line between composer, performer, and improviser. In jazz, hip-hop, and electronic music, the composer may also be the performer, producer, or sound designer (Solis & Nettle, 2020). This suggests that the role of the composer is fluid, context-dependent, and shaped by cultural practices.

## Categories of Composers

Composers can be classified in several ways: by historical era, cultural context, function, medium, and stylistic orientation. These categories, while overlapping, provide useful frameworks for understanding diversity in music creation.

- **Historical Categories**

- Medieval and Renaissance composers (e.g., Hildegard von Bingen, Josquin des Prez) focused on modal structures and sacred polyphony.
- Baroque composers (e.g., J. S. Bach, Handel) explored counterpoint and functional tonality.
- Classical and Romantic composers (e.g., Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin) emphasized formal clarity and later, emotional expression.
- 20th- and 21st-century composers (e.g., Schoenberg, Stravinsky, John Adams, Thomas Adès) expanded the concept of tonality, embracing serialism, minimalism, and multimedia composition (Taruskin, 2019).

- **Functional Categories**
  - Sacred composers: Dedicated to religious music (e.g., Palestrina; in Africa, Lazarus Ekwueme).
  - Secular composers: Write for opera, theatre, or popular contexts.
  - Film, theatre, and media composers: Create soundtracks and incidental music (e.g., Hans Zimmer, Rachel Portman).
  - Experimental composers: Redefine musical boundaries through sound art and new media (e.g., John Cage, contemporary digital composers).
- **Cultural and Geographical Categories**
  - Western art music composers: Centered on tonal and notated traditions.
  - African composers such as Fela Sowande, Akin Euba, and Joshua Uzoigwe integrate indigenous African idioms with Western harmonic systems (Omojola, 2020).
  - Asian composers: The likes of Toru Takemitsu, who combine traditional aesthetics with modernist practices.
  - Global popular music composers/songwriters such as Bob Dylan or Burna Boy blend performance, composition, and social commentary.
- **Medium-Based Categories**
  - Orchestral composers: Specialize in symphonic works (e.g., Brahms, Sibelius).
  - Choral composers: Focus on sacred or secular choir works (e.g., Handel, Eric Whitacre, Sam Ojukwu).
  - Electronic and digital composers: Innovators in sound manipulation, algorithmic composition, and interactive media (e.g., Brian Eno, Pamela Z).
  - Cross-disciplinary composers: Work across film, gaming, and immersive environments, reflecting new 21st-century practices (Wright, 2019).
- **Contemporary Re-categorizations**

Recent scholarship highlights fluid categories, where composers function as hybrid creators (Cook, 2018; Wright, 2019). For instance:

  - A contemporary African composer may simultaneously be a performer, teacher, and ethnomusicologist.
  - In global pop music, songwriters also act as producers, cultural critics, and entrepreneurs.
  - In digital media, composers become sound designers, working at the intersection of music, technology, and performance.

## Identification and Form

The composition *Ezigbo Nne* is scored for a small ensemble that combines Western and African instruments: a trumpet in Bb, a piano, and traditional African percussion instruments, including the Okpokolo, Mgbiligba, Ichaka, Igba, and Udu. The piece is marked *Allegro e espressione* at the outset, suggesting a fast and expressive tempo and character.

Structurally, *Ezigbo Nne* does not adhere to classical Western forms such as binary, ternary, or sonata form. Instead, it is through-composed, a form wherein new musical material unfolds continuously without returning to previous sections. While some motives recur with variation, there is no strict repetition of entire sections. This format supports

the work's expressive intent, allowing the music to evolve organically, mirroring oral storytelling traditions in African culture where narratives are fluid and shaped by context (Euba, 1989).

The episodic structure of the piece, including changes in tempo (from *Allegro* to *Allegretto*) and meter (6/8 to 3/4), signals a narrative progression possibly symbolising different emotional or ceremonial phases of celebrating motherhood.

**EZIGBO NNE**  
(Good Mother)

NWAEME UDOCHUKWU  
01/05/2025

*Allegro e espressione*

Trumpet in Bb

Okpokolo (Wood Block)

Mgblligba (School-bell)

Ichaka (Maracas)

Igba (Membrane-drum)

Udu (Bass pot-drum)

Piano

*Allegro e espressione*

*mf*

2

Tpt.

### *Scale and Mode*

A striking feature of *Ezigbo Nne* is its modal ambiguity and flexibility. The primary tonal center is G major, established early in the piece through the trumpet and piano lines. However, the frequent use of modal mixture, including flattened scale degrees like F natural, suggests a transition into G mixolydian. This interplay between major and modal inflections is a common feature in African music, where scales are not rigidly fixed but shift according to expressive needs (Agawu, 2003).



Additionally, the melodic material hints at pentatonic structure, a five-note scale foundational to many African music traditions. These scales offer flexibility and are often associated with vocal and instrumental music in Igbo and other West African cultures. The blending of pentatonic contours with Western harmonic progressions in the piano part creates a rich harmonic texture that reflects the cross-cultural compositional intent of the work.

### *Melodic Structure of the Music*

The melodic content of *Ezigbo Nne* is predominantly conjunct, meaning it moves in small steps rather than wide leaps. This kind of melodic motion is typical of vocal music and mimics natural speech intonation, a feature prominent in Igbo traditional music (Nzewi, 2007). The trumpet often carries the main melodic line, presenting short motifs that are repeated, sequenced, and rhythmically varied.

These motifs are occasionally interrupted by leaps, such as perfect fourths and fifths, introducing moments of tension or emphasis. The melodic contour is generally descending, especially at phrase endings, a feature that aligns with the “call-and-response” tradition where the leader’s phrase ends with a descent, inviting a response. Moreover, ornamentation through grace notes and triplets adds to the expressive quality, linking the piece to African vocal improvisation traditions. The piano provides harmonic support and at times doubles the melody, while also engaging in counterpoint, thereby enriching the overall texture.

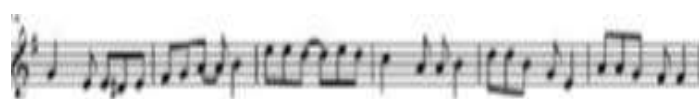


### *Rhythmic Structure of the Melody*

Rhythm is perhaps the most complex and culturally distinct element of *Ezigbo Nne*. The prevailing meter is 6/8, which lends itself to a dance-like, flowing rhythm that mimics the patterns of African drumming and song. In the latter part of the composition, the meter shifts to 3/4, creating a sense of calm and closure. This shift may symbolise a transition from celebration to reflection, consistent with the thematic honoring of motherhood.

The percussion section is particularly vibrant, showcasing African polyrhythms, a simultaneous layering of multiple rhythmic patterns that interact dynamically. Instruments like the udu and ichaka are used not merely for time-keeping but as expressive tools that dialogue with the melodic instruments.

Syncopation, dotted rhythms, rests, and rhythmic ostinati are used throughout the composition, contributing to a texturally dense and rhythmically propulsive soundscape. These rhythmic choices reinforce the connection to African dance music and ritual ceremonies where rhythm plays a central role in structuring experience (Omojola, 1995).



### *The Text of the Music*

While Ezigbo Nne is instrumental, the title provides insight into its textual meaning. “Good Mother,” is a direct translation from the Igbo language and reflects a cultural norm of revering the maternal figure. In many African societies, the mother is not only a caregiver but also a spiritual and moral anchor. It is therefore likely that the music narrates or dramatises the role of a mother, perhaps her strength, nurturing nature, and enduring presence.

The structure of the piece, from vigorous to subdued, mirrors a life-cycle metaphor, beginning with youthful vigor and ending in quiet reflection. Although the absence of text might make interpretation subjective, the expressive markings and instrumental dialogue create an emotional arc that resonates with the African praise-song tradition (Agawu, 2003).

### *Dynamics and Expression Marks*

Dynamic markings in Ezigbo Nne are used with precision to articulate emotional shifts. The piece begins mezzo forte (mf), signaling strength and balance. Crescendos and forte (f) markings occur at high points of rhythmic or melodic intensity, while ritardandos slow the pace toward reflective moments.

Tempo indications like *Allegro e espressione* and *Allegretto* emphasise both speed and expressive quality. The expressive directives are crucial in guiding performers to balance the energetic African rhythms with the lyrical, reverent tone suggested by the piece’s theme.

Articulations such as staccato, accent marks, tenuto, and slurs further refine the phrasing and expression. The piano and trumpet frequently engage in contrasting articulations, highlighting tension and release, while the percussion maintains a consistent dynamic level, reflective of traditional ensemble practices where drums are played continuously and assertively.

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Ezigbo Nne'. At the top, there is a single staff for the Trumpet (Trp.) in G major, marked 'mf' and 'ritardando'. Below this is a grand staff for Piano (Pian.) and Trumpet (Trp.), with the Piano part in the lower register and the Trumpet part in the upper register. The Piano part is marked 'mf' and 'ritardando'. The Trumpet part is marked 'f' and 'ritardando'. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines. At the bottom, there is a staff for Percussion (Perc.) with a consistent rhythmic pattern. The score concludes with a double bar line and the tempo marking 'Allegretto'.

### *Recommendations*

Based on the critical analysis of Ezigbo Nne, the following recommendations are proposed for performers, composers, and scholars engaged with African art music:

1. Performers should immerse themselves in Igbo musical traditions to accurately interpret the rhythmic and expressive nuances embedded in the score. Workshops or collaborations with traditional musicians can enhance authenticity.
2. Music educators should include works like *Ezigbo Nne* in African art music curricula to expose students to indigenous compositional idioms within formal music education settings.
3. The composer may consider adding brief program notes or contextual information in the score to guide performers in interpreting cultural and expressive intentions more effectively.
4. Scholars are encouraged to conduct comparative studies of African art music compositions, highlighting similarities and regional differences in instrumentation, form, and melodic language.
5. It is recommended that *Ezigbo Nne* be submitted for publication in academic music journals or included in anthologies of African art music to increase its visibility and impact.
6. Future compositions could explore the integration of other African cultural elements and languages, promoting Pan-African musical dialogues and innovation.

### **Conclusion**

*Ezigbo Nne* by Nwaeke Udochukwu exemplifies the dynamic possibilities of contemporary African art music. Through its integration of Igbo cultural elements, modal fluidity, rhythmic complexity, and symbolic meaning, the work pays homage to motherhood while affirming the legitimacy of African aesthetic values within modern concert music. This analysis demonstrates that African composers are not only preserving their musical heritage but also advancing it within global art music discourses. *Ezigbo Nne* should be recognised not only as a celebration of a cultural theme but also as a model for innovative African composition that bridges the traditional and the contemporary.

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# EZIGBO NNE

(Good Mother)

NWAEKE UDOCHUKWU  
01/06/2025

*Allegro e espressione*

Trumpet in B $\flat$

Okpokolo  
{Wood Block}

Mgbiligba  
{School-bell}

Ichaka  
{Maracas}

Igba  
{Membrane-drum}

Udu  
{Bass pot-drum}

Piano  
*mf*

The musical score is written for a trumpet and five traditional Nigerian instruments: Okpokolo (Wood Block), Mgbiligba (School-bell), Ichaka (Maracas), Igba (Membrane-drum), and Udu (Bass pot-drum). The tempo is *Allegro e espressione*. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8. The trumpet part is mostly rests. The percussion instruments have rhythmic patterns. The piano part has a melody in the right hand and accompaniment in the left hand.

7

Tpt.

Okp.

Mgb.

Ich.

Igb.

Ud.

*mf*

Pno.

The musical score for page 47, measures 7-9, features the following details:

- Measures 7-9:** The score is divided into three measures. Measures 7 and 8 contain rests for all instruments. Measure 9 begins with a repeat sign and contains the first notes for all instruments.
- Tpt. (Trumpet):** Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#). Measure 9 contains a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4.
- Okp. (Snare Drum):** Marked with a '2' and a double slash. Measure 9 contains eighth notes G4, A4, and B4.
- Mgb. (Tom-tom):** Marked with a '2' and a double slash. Measure 9 contains a quarter rest.
- Ich. (Cymbal):** Marked with a '2' and a double slash. Measure 9 contains eighth notes G4, A4, and B4.
- Igb. (Bass Drum):** Marked with a '2' and a double slash. Measure 9 contains eighth notes G4, A4, and B4.
- Ud. (Upright Drum):** Marked with a '2' and a double slash. Measure 9 contains a quarter note G4.
- Pno. (Piano):** Treble and bass clefs. Measure 7 contains a series of chords. Measure 8 contains a quarter rest in the treble and a quarter note G3 in the bass. Measure 9 contains a quarter note G3 in the bass and a quarter note G4 in the treble.

12

Tpt.

Okp.

Mgb.

Ich.

Igb.

Ud.

Pno.

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for a trumpet and piano. The trumpet part (Tpt.) is in G major and begins at measure 12. It features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes. The piano part (Pno.) has a right-hand part with chords and a left-hand part with eighth notes. The percussion parts (Okp., Mgb., Ich., Igb., Ud.) are marked with a double bar line and a '2' with a slash, indicating a specific rhythmic pattern or measure.

18

Tpt.

Okp.

Mgb.

Ich.

Igb.

Ud.

Pno.

24

Tpt.

Okp.

Mgb.

Ich.

Igb.

Ud.

Pno.

30

Tpt.

Okp.

Mgb.

Ich.

Igb.

Ud.

Pno.

36

Tpt.

Okp.

Mgb.

Ich.

Igb.

Ud.

Pno.

42

Tpt.

Okp.

Mgb.

Ich.

Igb.

Ud.

Pno.

50

Tpt.

Okp.

Mgb.

Ich.

Igb.

Ud.

Pno.

57

Tpt. *mf*

Okp.  $\frac{2}{\parallel}$

Mgb.  $\frac{2}{\parallel}$

Ich.  $\frac{2}{\parallel}$

Igb.  $\frac{2}{\parallel}$

Ud.  $\frac{2}{\parallel}$

Pno. *mf*

63

Tpt. *rit.* **Allegretto**

Okp.  $\frac{2}{\parallel}$   $\frac{2}{\parallel}$   $\frac{3}{4}$

Mgb.  $\frac{2}{\parallel}$   $\frac{2}{\parallel}$   $\frac{3}{4}$

Ich.  $\frac{2}{\parallel}$   $\frac{2}{\parallel}$   $\frac{3}{4}$

Igb.  $\frac{2}{\parallel}$   $\frac{2}{\parallel}$   $\frac{3}{4}$

Ud.  $\frac{2}{\parallel}$   $\frac{2}{\parallel}$   $\frac{3}{4}$

Pno. *rit.* **Allegretto**

70

Tpt.

Okp.

Mgb.

Ich.

Igb.

Ud.

Pno.

79

Tpt.

Okp.

Mgb.

Ich.

Igb.

Ud.

Pno.

87 **Allegro**

Tpt.

Okp.

Mgb.

Ich.

Igb.

Ud.

Pno.

**Allegro**

94

Tpt.

Okp.

Mgb.

Ich.

Igb.

Ud.

Pno.

*f*

102

Tpt.

Okp.

Mgb.

Ich.

Igb.

Ud.

Pno.

108

Tpt.

Okp.

Mgb.

Ich.

Igb.

Ud.

Pno.