

NZA

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The Tale of Nza and Obu: A Folklore for Children and Lessons for All

Abstract

This paper examines *The Tale of Nza and Obu*, a creative composition inspired by Igbo folklore and arranged as a children's choral piece. The work draws upon indigenous storytelling traditions and integrates African musical idioms to communicate enduring lessons on humility, pride, wisdom, and survival. The accompanying score functions as both a pedagogical and cultural bridge, linking oral tradition with contemporary art music. In doing so, it highlights the role of creative composition in preserving cultural identity and fostering moral education. The study encourages composers and educators to explore folklore-based creativity as a means of ensuring cultural continuity and moral formation.

Introduction

Folklore has long served as a powerful medium of education, entertainment, and moral instruction within African societies. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, folktales act as moral compasses and mirrors of communal values (Echeruo, 1998; Okafor, 2005). *The Tale of Nza and Obu* originates from one such folktale, passed down orally to the composer by his mother, and reimagined here as a musical narrative for children's choir.

The work explores tensions between pride and humility, intelligence and brute strength, and smallness and greatness. Rather than a simple retelling, it is a reinterpretation that preserves Igbo oral tradition through choral composition. The music and narrative together affirm the moral insight that greatness is not determined by size or power but by wisdom and resourcefulness (Nzewi, 2007).

The Story: The Tale of Nza and Obu

Within Igbo folklore, the story of Nza, a small but clever bird, and Obu, a large and powerful one, conveys profound lessons about pride, humility, and survival.

The Contest

Nza challenged Obu to a contest: three weeks without food or drink (*izu n'ator*). Obu, proud and overconfident, accepted. The animal kingdom eagerly followed the contest, announced daily by a town crier through rhythmic chants that echoed across the forest.

Pi! Pi! Pi! – Nza

Pi! Pi! Pi! – Nza

Nza n'obu mār' iwu – Nza

Onye erīna ihie – Nza

Onye anūna ihie – Nza

Mbochi izu n'ātọ – Nza

This melodic chant echoed across the forest, keeping the contest alive in the minds of all creatures.

The Decline of Obu

While Nza discreetly ate small insects, Obu, the mighty Senegal Coucal (*Centropus senegalensis*), refused to admit weakness. By the second week, Obu's song weakened, fading from *forte* to *piano* and slowing from *allegro* to *adagio*. Eventually, pride led to its downfall, and Obu perished before the contest ended. The forest rejoiced, celebrating Nza, the Blue Waxbill (*Uraeginthus angolensis*), as victor, whose wisdom and adaptability triumphed over brute strength.

Moral Lessons

1. Humility conquers pride: greatness lies in wisdom, not size.
2. Wisdom ensures survival: resourcefulness secures resilience.
3. Know when to stop: pride blinds, but wisdom discerns limits.
4. Never despise small beginnings: greatness often emerges from unlikely sources.

Analysis of the Creative Work

1. Cultural Context

The story reflects Igbo oral traditions, where symbolic animal narratives encode moral lessons. Birds embody human virtues and flaws: Nza represents humility and cleverness, while Obu symbolizes arrogance and misplaced confidence. By adapting this folklore into a choral composition, the work bridges oral storytelling and modern performance, fostering cultural continuity (Okafor, 2005; Omojola, 2012).

2. Musical Form and Structure

The composition unfolds in sections aligned with the narrative:

- **Introduction (Prologue Chant):** establishes the folktale tone through rhythmic chanting.
- **Contest Theme:** lively call-and-response patterns symbolize dialogue between Nza and Obu.
- **Decline of Obu:** slower tempo and darker harmonies depict Obu's fading strength.
- **Victory and Moral Chorus:** triumphant rhythms and major tonality emphasize resolution.

The tonal language blends African pentatonic modes with Western diatonic harmonies, demonstrating how indigenous idioms coexist with art-music techniques (Nketia, 1974). Rhythmic vitality and percussive accompaniment reflect African performance practice, encouraging communal participation (Nzewi, 2007).

3. Text and Language

The libretto preserves Igbo linguistic flavor and tonal inflection, aligning musical phrasing with spoken prosody. While some refrains are adapted for accessibility, idiomatic expressions remain intact, sustaining cultural authenticity (Echeruo, 1998).

4. Instrumentation and Accompaniment

Traditional instruments such as *udu* (clay pot), *ekwe* (woodblock), and *ogene* (metal gong) are integrated with Western instruments, symbolizing inculturation in contemporary composition. This fusion reflects the Vatican Council II's emphasis on cultural adaptation in liturgy (Vatican Council II, 1963).

5. Educational and Social Values

Designed for children's choral education, the composition transmits moral lessons through participatory singing. It cultivates musical skills, listening, rhythm, coordination—while fostering ethical and cultural awareness. Schools, churches, and cultural centers can employ the work to teach both music and values (Okafor, 2005).

Conclusion

The Tale of Nza and Obu exemplifies African musical storytelling that intertwines morality, culture, and art. It preserves Igbo oral heritage while reinterpreting it for contemporary audiences. Through folklore, choral expression, and African instrumentation, the composition demonstrates how traditional narratives can be revitalized to inspire future generations. The small bird Nza thus symbolizes wisdom and resilience, embodying the enduring voice of African heritage (Nzewi, 2007; Omojola, 2012).

Program Notes: The Tale of Nza and Obu

The Tale of *Nza* and *Obu* is a children's choral work inspired by Igbo folklore, reimagined to teach timeless lessons on humility, pride, wisdom, and survival. The story contrasts *Nza*, a small but clever bird, with *Obu*, a large and powerful one. In a contest of endurance, *Obu*'s pride leads to downfall, while *Nza*'s resourcefulness secures victory, reminding audiences that wisdom often triumphs over strength.

Musically, the piece blends African pentatonic modes with Western diatonic harmonies, employing rhythmic chants, call-and-response textures, and percussive accompaniment to mirror traditional storytelling. The libretto preserves Igbo linguistic flavor, while instruments such as *udu*, *ekwe*, and *ogene* enrich the soundscape.

Designed for children's choir, the work functions as both art and pedagogy, developing musical skills while transmitting cultural identity and moral values. By bridging oral tradition with contemporary composition, The Tale of *Nza* and *Obu* celebrates African heritage and demonstrates how folklore can inspire new generations.

References

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NZA (The Tale of Nza and Obu)

Igbo Folklore

Arr Paul Ezeibenne

Moderato **Adante**

Congas

Shaker

Wood Block

Piano

Tenor Solo

Soprano

Bass

ff
Pi pi pil Pi pi pil...

f
N - za N -

Moderato **Adante**

Congas

Shk.

W.B.

Pno.

T. Solo

S.

B.

N-za n'O-bu ma ri - wu; o-ny'e - ri-la i-hie o- ny'e an-a i-hie m-bQ-ch'i - izu n'a -tQ N-

za N - za N - za N - za N -

17 **Andante**

Congas **2**

Shk.

W.B.

Pno. **Andante**
Var II

T. Solo *mf*
za za! - - Pi pi pi!

S. *mp*
za za! N-

B.



25 **Andante**

Congas **2**

Shk.

W.B. 8 12

Pno. **Andante**
Var II

T. Solo
Pi pi pil N-za n'O-bu ma-r'i -wu; o-ny'e - ri-la i-hie o-ny'e an-a i-hie

S.
za N - za N - za N - za N-

B.

33 **Vivace**

Congas **2** **2** **2** **2**

Shk.

W.B. 16 20

Pno. **Vivace**

T. Solo **To S. Solo** **Soprano Solo**

m-bQ-ch'i -izu n'a -tQ N - za

S. *mp*
za N - za N - za N - za N -

B.



41 **Vivace**

Congas **2** **2** **2** **2**

Shk.

W.B. 24 28

Pno.

S. Solo **f** (The big bird has fallen)
O-bu a laaaaa!!!

S. *mp* *p*
za N - za N - za N - za N - za N -

B.

49

Congas $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$

Shk.

W.B. 32 36

Pno.

S. Solo (Silence has fallen)
O-wu a daaa!!! N-ga-la bu-ru - zo m - mu t'e-kpe-re a zu

S. za N - za N - za N - za N - za N - za N -

B.



57

Congas $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$

Shk.

W.B. 40 44

Pno.

S. Solo Nwa nnem ge... nu mu nti nu r'a -kɔ-kɔ m n'a - kɔ i-ma i-hie ka m mma ka -ri-a i-ke a ka

S. *pp* za N - za N - za N - za N - za N - za N -

B.

65 **Adante = 60**

Congas

Shk.

W.B.

Pno.

S. Solo

S.

B.

N-za n'o-bu ma-ra i-wu a - ma-mi-hie na i - ke N-za e-me - rie o-bu O-bu ada

za N - za N - za N - za N - za N - za N -

73 **rit.**

Congas

Shk.

W.B.

Pno.

S. Solo

S.

B.

N-za n'O-bu ma r'i - wu; o-ny'e - ri-la i-hie o- ny'e an-a i-hie m-bq ch'i - izu n'a - tq N-

za N - za N - za N - za N - za N - za N -

81

Congas

Shk.

W.B.

Pno.

To S. Solo

S. Solo

S.

B.



85

Congas

Shk.

W.B.

Pno.

S. Solo

S.

B.