

Nne Mi

(My Mother)

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Abstract

Nne Mi (“My Mother”) is a programmatic piano composition that transforms an Efik domestic folktale into a vivid musical narrative. Centred on the curiosity of two children questioning mysterious sounds from an earthen pot, the work unfolds through contrasting textures that mirror the emotional and dramatic contours of the story. A contrapuntal opening evokes the overlapping voices of the inquisitive children, while a lyrical, homophonic section portrays the grandmother’s calm authority. Increasing harmonic density, rhythmic tension, and dynamic contrast reflect the rising excitement and the gathering of neighbours, capturing the communal character of African storytelling. Pentatonic inflections, modal colouring, and rhythmic motifs reminiscent of call-and-response reinforce the work’s cultural grounding. The composition concludes with a gentle return to tranquillity, symbolising restored harmony and the moral cadence of oral tradition. Through this expressive arc, *Nne Mi* emerges as a culturally rooted piano work that bridges narrative, memory, and musical imagination.

Keywords: African Storytelling Aesthetics, Call-and-Response Motifs, Efik Narrative Tradition, Programmatic Piano Composition, Textural Contrast

Introduction

African art-music composers have increasingly embraced programmatic writing as a means of translating indigenous narratives, oral traditions, and communal memory into contemporary art-music idioms. This creative tendency reflects a broader aesthetic movement in which African composers reinterpret local storytelling structures through modern compositional techniques,

thereby preserving cultural knowledge while expanding the expressive possibilities of the piano repertoire (Euba, 1989; Akpabot, 1986). *Nne Mi* (“My Mother”) exemplifies this trajectory, transforming an Efik domestic folktale into a richly textured musical narrative that foregrounds the inseparability of story, performance, and communal identity within African expressive culture.

The work’s structural and textural design mirrors the dramatic arc of oral storytelling, where dialogue, tension, and resolution unfold through layered voices and shifting emotional registers. Its contrapuntal opening evokes the overlapping speech patterns characteristic of children’s inquisitiveness, while subsequent lyrical passages reflect the calm authority of the grandmother figure. Such musical dramatisation aligns with African narrative aesthetics, where character, mood, and social interaction are conveyed through rhythmic nuance, modal inflection, and dynamic contour (Okunade, 2015). By integrating these indigenous expressive logics within a pianistic framework, *Nne Mi* contributes meaningfully to contemporary African art-music discourse, demonstrating how the piano can serve as a medium for cultural storytelling, intergenerational memory, and artistic reinterpretation.

Analysis of *Nne Mi*

Nne Mi is a programmatic piano work rooted in Efik storytelling tradition, unfolding a vivid domestic scene in which two young children, puzzled by mysterious sounds coming from an earthen pot, question their grandmother while neighbours gather to witness the exchange. The composition transforms this simple narrative into a richly textured musical folktale, drawing on African expressive principles in which music, story, and communal participation are inseparable (Nketia, 1974).

The piece opens with a fugue-like passage (bars 1–10), where imitative entries and contrapuntal interplay evoke the overlapping voices of the curious children. This polyphonic texture mirrors their simultaneous questioning and hesitant excitement as they approach the pot. The music then settles into a more lyrical and homophonic section (bars 11–25), marked “Peacefully”, representing the grandmother’s calm and measured responses. Stepwise melodic motion and gentle phrasing convey her wisdom and composure, even as the children, unsatisfied, continue to press for answers. The restatement of this theme in F minor subtly deepens the emotional colour, suggesting the children’s persistent but respectful appeal.

As the narrative intensifies, the middle passages (bars 26–43) introduce denser harmonies, rhythmic tension, and fluctuating dynamics, reflecting the rising restlessness of the children and the grandmother’s firm but patient stance. This leads naturally into the more dramatic section (bars 44–61), where thicker chords, syncopated rhythms, and stronger accents depict the playful quarrel reaching its peak. The broadening of texture symbolises the arrival of neighbours, whose presence heightens the sense of communal involvement. This layering of voices and rhythmic vitality aligns with the African aesthetic of collective participation, where musical texture often expands to reflect social interaction (Agawu, 2016).

The folkloric character of the work is further reinforced through pentatonic and modal inflections, rhythmic motifs reminiscent of call-and-response, and the unmistakable influence of Efik melodic contour. These elements firmly situate the piece within African narrative tradition, where music functions not merely as entertainment but as a vehicle for cultural memory and moral instruction.

In the closing section (bars 75–end), the music gradually returns to calm. A thinning texture, softening dynamics, and a gentle ritardando evoke the grandmother’s final word and the restoration of peace within the household. The work concludes with reflective quietness, echoing the moral cadence typical of oral storytelling, where resolution affirms respect for elders and the communal nature of wisdom.

Overall, *Nne Mi* operates as both folk-based art music and a dramatised cultural narrative. Its contrapuntal opening, lyrical middle sections, climactic intensification, and serene resolution together create a compelling musical arc that transforms a simple domestic episode into a richly expressive and culturally grounded piano work.

Nne mi

(My grandmother)

Efik Folksong
Arranged for piano by
David Jacob

Gracefully $\text{♩} = 86$



Musical notation for measures 1-9. The piece is in 2/4 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The melody is in the right hand, and the bass line is in the left hand. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte).



Musical notation for measures 10-17. The melody continues in the right hand, and the bass line features a more active accompaniment. Dynamics include *f* (forte).



Musical notation for measures 18-25. The melody continues in the right hand, and the bass line features a more active accompaniment. Dynamics include *f* (forte).



Musical notation for measures 26-33. The melody continues in the right hand, and the bass line features a more active accompaniment. Dynamics include *mf* (mezzo-forte).

34 Peacefully



Musical notation for measures 34-41. The piece concludes with a peaceful melody in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte).

43



1. 2.

p *p*

This system contains measures 43 through 51. It features a piano accompaniment with a first ending (marked '1.') and a second ending (marked '2.'). The music is in a minor key and includes dynamic markings of *p* (piano) in the right hand.

52



mf *mf*

This system contains measures 52 through 60. The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. Dynamic markings of *mf* (mezzo-forte) are present.

61



1. 2. *f*

p

This system contains measures 61 through 68. It includes a first ending (marked '1.') and a second ending (marked '2.'). The music is in a minor key and includes dynamic markings of *p* (piano) and *f* (forte).

69



This system contains measures 69 through 73. The piano accompaniment continues with a melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand.

74



rit..

This system contains measures 74 through 79. It begins with a repeat sign and includes a *rit.* (ritardando) marking. The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand.

References

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