

Aran Mupe: A Study in Yorùbá Vocal Expression, Tonal Organisation, and Pedagogical Design

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Abstract

Aran Mupe is a solo voice and piano composition that integrates African tonal organisation with the rhythmic and declamatory qualities of Yorùbá vocal expression. Centred in F major and cast in compound duple metre at a dotted-quarter pulse of 65, the work unfolds through a five-measure piano introduction, a principal vocal section built on related five-measure phrases, a rhythmically insistent pedagogical passage, a lyrical bridge, and a refrain-driven close. Through diatonic harmony, motivic variation, changing textures, and a controlled dynamic trajectory culminating in fortississimo, the composition balances expressive song with vocal study. Its diction-focused writing foregrounds vowel clarity, consonantal precision, and breath control, contributing to the Nigerian art song repertoire and to pedagogical approaches in Yorùbá vocal music.

Keywords: African Tonal Organisation, Diction and Vocal Technique, Nigerian Art Song, Text Setting, Yorùbá Vocal Music



Introduction

The development of Nigerian art music has been shaped by the interaction between indigenous musical thought and Western compositional techniques, particularly tonal harmony, staff notation, and concert performance practice. Omojola's foundational studies demonstrate how Nigerian composers have adapted Western idioms while retaining African musical identity, especially through language, rhythm, and performance aesthetics (Omojola, 1995; Omojola, 2012). Within this tradition, the voice and piano medium has become a central vehicle for articulating African languages in art song form. The piano provides harmonic grounding and structural clarity, while the voice carries linguistic nuance, prosody, and expressive declamation.

Yorùbá vocal performance is deeply shaped by the tonal nature of the language. Acoustic studies of Yorùbá speech surrogacy, such as Durojaye et al.'s analysis of the dùndún talking drum, demonstrate the close relationship between linguistic tone, melodic contour, and rhythmic articulation in Yorùbá expressive culture (Durojaye et al., 2023). Earlier work by Ọlátúnjí established the importance of tonal contour and prosodic organisation in Yorùbá oral poetry, highlighting the need for musical settings that respect linguistic tone patterns (Ọlátúnjí, 1984). Barber and Waterman's research further shows how tonal and prosodic devices permeate Yorùbá vocal arts, from traditional oríkì to neo-traditional popular music (Barber and Waterman, 1995).

Carter-Ényì's tonal analysis of Yorùbá musical speech surrogacy provides additional insight into how melodic contour mirrors linguistic tone, reinforcing the importance of text-sensitive compositional strategies in art song (Carter-Ényì, 2020). *Aran Mupe* participates in this lineage by combining syllabic text setting, short speech-like motives, and a transparent accompaniment that foregrounds the text.



The composition also possesses a pedagogical dimension. Its ordered vowel sequences, alphabetic fragments, and consonantal contrasts such as g and gb encourage attention to diction, breath management, and tone evenness. This dual identity as expressive art song and vocal study situates *Aran Mupe* within contemporary efforts to expand Nigerian vocal repertoire that is musically compelling and pedagogically purposeful.

Methodological Orientation

The analysis presented here draws on standard approaches in art song scholarship, including tonal and harmonic examination, motivic and phrase-structural analysis, text-setting evaluation, and performance-practice considerations. Segmentation follows observable formal markers such as phrase boundaries, cadential gestures, changes in texture, and shifts in rhythmic profile. This orientation allows for a holistic reading of *Aran Mupe* as a composition that integrates musical structure, linguistic clarity, and pedagogical intent.

Tonal and Harmonic Design

Aran Mupe is firmly anchored in F major, signalled by its one-flat key signature and reinforced through tonic sonorities at the opening and close. The harmony is predominantly diatonic and functional, with tonic, subdominant, and dominant relationships shaping phrase direction and cadential repose. This aligns with the tonal practice common in Nigerian art song, where diatonic clarity supports linguistic intelligibility, a feature documented in Omojola's analyses of Nigerian composers (Omojola, 1995).

The piano introduction establishes the harmonic field through repeated triadic chords over stable bass notes, creating a sense of groundedness before the voice enters. Occasional B natural inflections introduce colour and strengthen dominant motion without destabilising the tonal centre. Cadences are articulated through

reduced rhythmic activity, sustained bass notes, and longer vocal values, producing clear points of structural punctuation.

Melodic and Motivic Construction

The principal vocal section, spanning measures 6 to 25, is organised into related five-measure phrases beginning at measures 6, 11, 16, and 21. This phrase architecture creates a recognisable structural rhythm that supports both musical coherence and planned breathing. The melodic writing is characterised by mostly conjunct motion, occasional skips, repetition, and short sequences. These features produce a memorable contour without mechanical predictability.

Motivic consistency is balanced with variation at phrase endings, allowing the music to maintain interest while preserving unity. The piano reinforces this design through triadic chords, broken-chord figures, and brief inner-voice movement that links phrases and supports vocal direction.

Rhythmic and Metric Organisation

The compound duple metre of 6/8 provides two dotted-quarter beats per bar, supporting both flowing movement and intelligible diction. Arom's work on African rhythmic organisation highlights how compound metres often enhance the natural rhythmic tendencies of African languages and performance practices (Arom, 1991). The moderate tempo of dotted-quarter equals 65 ensures continuity without sacrificing clarity.



Figure 1 – *Rhythmic Intensity in Measure 26.*

At measure 26, rhythmic intensity increases. Repeated quaver patterns, accented entries, and detached consonants foreground articulation and create a more declamatory character. This rhythmic shift marks the beginning of the pedagogical section, where vocal exercises are embedded within the musical fabric.

The closing section employs *rallentando* and dynamic intensification to broaden the temporal space and heighten expressive impact. The rise from *fortissimo* to *fortississimo*, combined with an upward vocal trajectory, contributes to a decisive and climactic ending.

Text Setting and Vocal Technique

Text setting in *Aran Mupe* is predominantly syllabic, a common strategy in Yorùbá art song to preserve linguistic tone and clarity. Studies of Yorùbá prosody and vocal surrogacy confirm the importance of aligning melodic contour with tonal patterns to maintain intelligibility (Durojaye et al., 2023). Short phrases, repeated words, and speech-like motives further enhance clarity.

The composition's pedagogical dimension is evident in its ordered vowel sounds, alphabetic fragments, and consonantal contrasts such as *g* and *gb*, which encourage precision in articulation. Repeated syllables on the same or neighbouring pitches allow the singer to focus on vowel consistency and consonantal clarity. Brief ornamental turns and ties add flexibility without compromising textual transparency.

Piano Accompaniment and Texture

The texture throughout is melody-dominated homophony. The voice carries the verbal and melodic material, while the piano provides harmonic support, pulse, and dynamic reinforcement. The accompaniment alternates between repeated chords, broken-chord patterns, stepwise inner-voice links, and sustained sonorities.

This textural variety helps articulate formal sections, supports dynamic shaping, and maintains buoyancy beneath text-dense passages. Pedal use should remain sparing to preserve clarity, especially in diction-focused sections.

Formal Design

The formal architecture of *Aran Mupe* unfolds in a clear, sequential trajectory that supports both its expressive and pedagogical intentions. The work opens with a five-measure piano introduction that establishes the harmonic field and sets the textural foundation upon which the vocal line will later rest. From measure 6 to measure 25, the principal vocal section emerges, articulated through a series of related five-measure phrases whose recurrent structure provides coherence and facilitates planned breathing.

A marked shift occurs between measures 26 and 40, where the music adopts a more rhythmically insistent character. This passage foregrounds articulation and functions as the pedagogical core of the composition, embedding diction exercises within an energetic musical fabric. The texture then broadens in measures 41 to 46, forming a lyrical bridge that restores legato flow and prepares the listener for the closing section.



Figure 2. *Broadened texture (measures 41-46)*

From measure 47 to the end, the music returns to a refrain-like idea that is repeated and varied over firm piano chords. Dynamic intensification and cadential

reinforcement drive the work towards its climactic conclusion. Overall, the formal progression moves purposefully from tonal establishment through motivic development and diction-focused writing to lyrical expansion and a controlled, emphatic close.

Pedagogical Significance

The pedagogical value of *Aran Mupe* lies in its integration of vocal study within an expressive musical framework. The vowel and consonant exercises encourage clarity of diction, while repeated syllables support breath control and tone evenness. The five-measure phrases require planned breathing, and the rhythmic contrasts train flexibility between legato and articulated delivery.

Such features resonate with broader African performance practices documented in Kubik's archival studies and recent analyses of Yorùbá vocal traditions (Kunnuji and Wium, 2026). The work thus contributes to Nigerian vocal repertoire that is both artistically engaging and pedagogically purposeful.

Performance Considerations

Performers should feel the dotted-quarter beat rather than count six separate quavers, preserving the natural flow of 6/8. Breath planning is essential due to recurring five-measure phrases. In the pedagogical section, articulation should remain clear without becoming overly percussive, ensuring that legato is not compromised.

Singer and pianist must coordinate the final crescendo and rallentando carefully to avoid rushing. The pianist should maintain buoyant chords, lighten accompaniment beneath text-dense passages, and use pedal judiciously to preserve clarity.

Conclusion

Aran Mupe exemplifies the synthesis of African tonal organisation, Yorùbá prosody, and Western art song structure. Its diatonic harmony, motivic coherence, rhythmic variety, and diction-focused writing create a composition that is both expressive and pedagogically valuable. The work contributes to Nigerian art song repertoire by foregrounding linguistic clarity, vocal technique, and structural refinement. Future research may compare *Aran Mupe* with other Yorùbá art songs to further illuminate strategies for integrating tonal language, vocal pedagogy, and compositional design.

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Appendix: Full Score of *Aran Mupe*

Aran Mupe

Adedoyin Omotosho

$\text{♩} = 65$

Voice

Piano

Vo.

Pno.

ran mupe a fe yin fete pe A ja enu mi lu mo ti sa le wi pe e se A

ran mupe a fe yin fete pe A ja enu mi lu mo rawon won fogo fo ko re A



16 *mf* *mp*

Vo. ran mupe a fe yin fete pe A ja enu mi lu mo ti sa le wi pe e se A

Pno.



21 *mf*

Vo. ran mupe a fe yin fete pe A ja enu mi lu mo rawon won fogo fo ko re

Pno.



26 *f* *mf* *f*

Vo. a e e i o o u a fe fe beli wi pe e se a b d e e f

Pno.



31 *mf* *f*

Vo. g gb i ro e de wi pee se o ki li mi ni o o pi risi si

Pno.



36 *f* *ff*

Vo. *gbogbowanpa rapo la ti F'o goFolu wa E mi to da laworan*

Pno.



41 *mf*

Vo. *A ra re mogbohunsoke moko rin a yo si o O lu orun mounfo go*

Pno.



47 *f* *mf* *f*

Vo. *f'o ko re n f'o go f'o koo re mounfo go f'o ko o re mounfo go*

Pno.



rall. - - - - -

53 *ff* *fff* *fff*

Vo. *f'o ko o re f'o go f'o ko o re wi pe mounfo go f'o ko o re*

Pno.

