

## MUSIC IN THE CHURCH: PERFORMANCE OR MINISTRATION? YESIDE ODIASE<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the controversial issue of performance versus ministration in Church Music which has given rise to contentious arguments amongst Christians and Christian musicians. This recurrent theme in Christendom is not only peculiar to Africa but worldwide. The paper attempts to resolve this obvious controversy as it strikes a delicate balance. Music in the church is Christian music as distinct from secular music. It is created by human beings to serve God's purpose; it must be from the heart. Furthermore, Church music has some element of performance but the Christian musician should go beyond the display of skills and emotions in the realm of performance and rise to the spiritual level of focusing on prayerfully selected music that will lift up the awesome and majestic name of the Almighty God; directing men and women to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christian musicians therefore are not just artistes but ministers of the gospel with the responsibility of impacting lives for Christ through music. This is a distinguishing factor. It is pertinent therefore, that the Christian musician consider himself as ministering everywhere he goes to make music. His main objective should always be to exalt the name of the Lord and to preach the gospel of Christ so that all men would be drawn to God.

### INTRODUCTION

The issue of performance in comparison with ministration has been a topic for debate in the church particularly as pertaining to church music. This pertinent and controversial issue has given rise to both subtle and visible arguments as well as confrontations amongst Christians. It appears to be a hard nut that either has not been cracked, has been half cracked or has only been scratched on the surface. Can this issue be resolved? It appears that it has been a recurring theme in Christendom not only in Africa but worldwide. This paper attempts to resolve this obvious controversy. At this juncture, it is appropriate that we consider some definitions.

### Definition of Terms

#### A. Music

Adegbeye refers to Robert M. Mitchell's definition as an English word derived from the Greek form MOUSIKE and the Latin word MUSICA. He defines music as "the art and science of combining vocal or instrumental sounds or tunes in varying melody, harmony, rhythm and timbre, especially so as to form structurally complete and emotionally expressive compositions".<sup>2</sup> Reynolds quoted by Miller also defines music as "the science or art of making pleasing, expressive or intelligible combinations of tones; the making of such combinations and compositions of definite structure and significance, and the art of inventing or rendering such compositions".<sup>3</sup> In the paper therefore, music will cover both singing and instrumentation.

#### B. The Church

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<sup>2</sup> Adegbeye. *The Worship The Worshipped The Worshipper* (Abuja: Gospel Unlimited Publication, 2007), 9.

<sup>3</sup> I. E. Reynolds. *Music and the Scriptures* (Nashville Tennessee: Convention Press, 1942).

The church is referred to as the body of baptized believers called Christians. According to Pass, a Christian is a person who has accepted the fact that he has been alienated from God as a consequence of his sinful nature and has sincerely accepted Jesus Christ as his saviour and now lives a new life by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> We can rightly assert therefore that such baptized believers are the legitimate members that comprise the church.

### C. Church Music

Church Music can be defined as music for the church. Hustad describes church music as music created by human beings to serve God's purpose, and which is expressed in worship, fellowship and missions.<sup>5</sup> Church music also refers to Liturgical music – traditional choral forms of the church like Masses, Motets, Anthems and cantatas. Church music should be reverential. It is characterized by music that lifts up the name of Christ so that he may draw all men unto himself (John 12:32). The text of the music is expected to be Bible based and theologically sound. It should be soul lifting, comforting and therapeutic. We shall now examine the definition of performance and ministration.

### D. Performance

The Nelson Contemporary English Dictionary defines the verb form 'Perform' as 'to carry out a particular activity, especially well and with great skill'. 'Performance' is also defined as the action or an act or performing a piece of music especially before the public'.

We can then deduce that performance involves two parties – the performer and the audience. In this paper, it involves making music through singing or playing musical instruments before an audience or congregation in public or in a church setting.

### E. Ministration

The word 'Minister' is defined by Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1978) as 'A Christian leader in charge of a single group of Presbyterian or Non-Conformist Worshippers and their church. 'Ministration' is also defined as 'giving of help and service especially to the sick, or to those in need of, or desiring the services of a priest. 'Ministry' on the other hand is defined to mean 'The Priest's Profession'.

With the above definitions therefore, we discover that a Christian leader is committed to leading the worshippers in church, just like a profession since he is believed to be in the Ministry, employed by God. This ministry includes all ministries in the church and especially in this context, church musicians of all categories, who are expected to carry out the ministry of leading music well and with great skill especially before the public or better still, the congregation.

If these definitions are acceptable by Christians simply as this, there will be no controversy. If it was only a matter of semantics, maybe the controversy could be resolved easily. On the contrary, the issue of Performance and Ministration as regards Church Music has gone beyond a matter of Semantics.

### The Purpose of Music in the Church

The main purpose of music in the church is Worship. Kraeuter opines that worshipping God is really our reason for existing, therefore the life of worship must permeate everything we do and say.<sup>6</sup> This certainly includes the music we make. Music is also meant to teach God's word (Colossians 3:16) as well as to release God's power. (Acts 16:25-26). Music builds up the faith as we tell of God's wondrous works (Ps. 107:22) it also brings unity within our services.

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<sup>4</sup> D. B. Pass. *Music and the Church* (Nashville Tennessee; Convention Press, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> D. P. Hustad. *Jubilation II: Church Music in Worship Renewal* (Carol Stream: Hope Publishing Company, 1993), 22.

<sup>6</sup> T. Kraeuter. *Keys to becoming an Effective Worship Leader* (Hillsboro: Training Resources, 1991).

Miller summarizes the tasks of the Music Ministry in the church as follows:

1. Teach Music and music appreciation.
2. Train persons to lead, sing and play music.
3. Encourage persons to participate in music activities.
4. Provide music for services and organizations of the church.
5. Provide and Interpret information regarding the work of the church and denomination.<sup>7</sup>

This indeed is an enormous task for the church. It is very glaring that the role of music in the church goes beyond mere performance. It is more than entertainment. It goes beyond someone singing and others applauding. It is worship to God. It is ministration first to God and then to man. Worship is a relationship with God and worshipping God is really our reason for existing.<sup>8</sup>

### **Worship as Celebration**

Webber asserts that worship should be a time of celebration. It connects people to the past, gives meaning to the present, and inspires hope for the future as the soul and spirit become blended into the drama of Christ's life, death and resurrection. He further compares William Shakespeare's concept of life being 'a stage' and everyone 'an actor' to church worship which is meant to be a refreshing time in the presence of God. Webber rightly shows dissatisfaction in the worship of today as he states, thus,

But for so many people today worship has become dull, intellectual, cold, formal, and alienating; or it has become, consciously or unconsciously, a form of emotional exercise, that ultimately has little effect on what goes on in a person's life during the rest of the week. Why?<sup>9</sup>

He seems to have an answer to this question in the fact that the secular mindset of our culture works against worship as a celebration. This makes it difficult for us to experience worship as a means of putting us into contact with the supernatural. As far as Webber is concerned, we have pushed God to the borders of our existence.

It appears that this assertion by Webber offers some explanation to the reason why some Christians do not believe in showing excitement or emotions in church. The influence of the past seems to have affected people in their response to worship especially in church. This makes the worship experience like a grave yard. The same people come out of the church service and become different people entirely as they become free to express themselves. It is obvious however that music has great emotional power which cannot be totally severed from man as expressed thus,

From time to time the church has been fearful of the emotional power of music and has attempted to curb its ecstatic moments. Yet the emotions are a powerful force for good and cannot be divorced from the total man.<sup>10</sup>

Yet Christians need to be careful of the negative aspect so that the church would not be turned into a place of commotion or activity without real purpose

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<sup>7</sup> E. F. Miller. *Building an Effective Church Music Ministry* (Ibadan: Publishing Board Nigerian Baptist Convention, 1993), 30.

<sup>8</sup> R. T. Kendall. *Worshipping God* (Ibadan: Scripture Union (Nig. Press and Books Ltd., 1992), 22-23.

<sup>9</sup> R. E. Webber. *Worship is a verb* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publisher Inc., 1992), 23-24.

<sup>10</sup> A. C. Lovelace, and W.C. Rice, *Music and Worship in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009).

The current picture is one of emotion, commotion, and promotion. Hymns and anthems are chosen to please the congregation or to secure a specific emotional response...<sup>11</sup>

It is important therefore, that music ministers or Church musicians take precaution in this area, so that the ministry of music is not used as a means of manipulation. People should be free to express their feelings but should not be forced to do this. The Holy Spirit should be allowed to lead the Pastor, Music Ministers, Musicians and all who are in leadership position so that God is glorified in the worship of the triune God. The melody, harmony accompaniment and the whole structure must be interesting. The words must communicate divine truth.<sup>12</sup>

### **Applause in the Church Setting**

Giving an applause after music ministration in church has been an issue for debate in the Christian circle particularly amongst the traditional Baptist. An applause by the clapping of hands, or by shouting, screaming or shouting 'praise the Lord' has been a bone of contention amongst believers. Some Christians believe that an applause or a loud ovation is secular and therefore applicable to cinema or club houses or better still music performance through singing or Drama or even choreography. On the other hand, another group of Christians are liberal about it; for them, it does not make any difference. The third group is the contemporary group. For them, an applause is part of worship.

The writer believes that there is nothing wrong with applauding after a good music ministration in church as long as the glory is directed to God. Adegboye rightly maintains that the Christian should use his music not for self-glory but to praise and worship the king of kings and the Lord of lords.<sup>13</sup> Sometimes, the human nature responds simultaneously to what is good, skilful and beautiful. Who then is to blame? We believe it is the heart that matters; as long as this is done discreetly, with a sincere heart and as unto the Lord where it is appropriate and healthy. However, the minister has to return the glory to God, the giver of all good gifts and skills. It is important to note at this juncture, that Africans, generally are quite emotional and expressive when it comes to music.

### **Concert Artistes**

Naturally, concert artistes are easily referred to as performers and the music they produce as performance. The question that comes to mind is: Are all concert artistes' unbelievers? Do we have believers amongst them? The fact remains that there are true believers amongst them and it therefore means that believers can also be involved in performance. However, the Christian musician considers every outing as an opportunity to minister the gospel message to people.

What about Public Recitals? Should Christians shy away from being professionals? Do we exclude them from academics? There is an academic side of music, surely! How do we encourage Christian musicians to be professional and skilful if they do not get involved in academics to get more knowledgeable? These are pertinent questions and issues that need to be handled with maturity and balance. Training for the Christian musicians is very essential if they would be the best for their master, Jesus Christ.

### **Performance or Ministration: A Matter of Attitude**

It has been observed that music in the church in this contemporary era is easily referred to by Christians as ministration. This is a more spiritual language and a more comfortable one for use in the church. It is believed that when the Christian sings or plays an instrument, he is ministering spiritual both

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Bonnie Oberg, "Ministering in Music or Just Singing a Song" <http://www.proclaimanddefend.com>

<sup>13</sup> D. Adegboye, *Towards A Fruitful Music Ministry* Exhortation given at Living Spring: Ile-Ife, Osun (2009), 10.

to God and to the people. It could be a song of praise, worship, exhortation or even a song of encouragement. It could also be a song of Prayer, Evangelism, Salvation, or Repentance.

There is a fine line between musical performance and music ministry; the difference is in the heart of the musician. Performance is concerned with a quality product while ministry is concerned with a holy process.<sup>14</sup> It is however apparent that there is an element of performance even in ministration if we look at the surface meaning of the word performance – which connotes an act of singing or playing an instrument on stage with an audience.

How then would we classify a Christian who sings outside the church setting, and as result, people get saved delivered and healed because of the anointing of God on him? Will this kind of music be classified as performance because it was done outside the church – not even a crusade? Certainly not. We may conclude then, that it depends on the attitude of the musician.

Little wonder then that Best comments that music should be done as unto the Lord wherever the setting may be.<sup>15</sup> This goes for concert artistes as well as for choirs. He further states that performers should understand that their performance is directed to God while people listen in,

Those listening must understand that they  
are not being sung to but are overhearing  
an offering and continue this offering by  
faithful hearing.<sup>16</sup>

True heartfelt worship involves the attitude and actions of the worshipper which should be that of reverence and adoration.<sup>17</sup> The attitude of the performer is of utmost importance whether he sees himself as a performer or a minister. It must be emphasized here that when Christians display God-given skills, they are involved in performance but it goes beyond that, they minister on a higher level to bless the people as they give glory to God.

### **Gospel Music in the Contemporary Church**

Gospel music which is derived from the Greek word *Evangelion* means Good News.<sup>18</sup> It is a type of Christian Music which is distinct from church music. It is interesting to note that Adedeji distinguishes this genre of music from church music on the basis of function, organizational structure and Performance – Practices Contents; and from others (for example American or European gospel music), “on the basis of language, style and performance practices contexts”.<sup>19</sup>

Gospel music is Christian music, but we have discovered that not every Christian music is gospel music. Gospel music deals with the proclamation of the Gospel news that Jesus saves and the lyrics of a Gospel song should include words-like the love of God for man, man’s sin, confession, repentance, forgiveness, salvation, redemption, justification, reconciliation and eternal life.<sup>20</sup>

It has been observed however, that the Nigerian gospel music which began in a very simplistic way has become so diversified because of modernization and technological development. Adedeji enumerates twelve different styles which have been developed; a combination of both the old and the new, namely:

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<sup>14</sup> www. “Music Performance VS Music Ministry” [www.bscky.org/blog/Blog/Music-Performance](http://www.bscky.org/blog/Blog/Music-Performance). Accessed February 5, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> H. M. Bes, *Unceasing Worship* (Downer Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 145.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> D. Adegbeye, *The Worship The Worshipped The Worshipper* (Abuja Gospel Unlimited Publication, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> F. Adedeji, “Definitive and Conceptual Issues in Nigerian Gospel Music”, *Music Review* 2 (2001), pp. 45-46

<sup>19</sup> F. Adedeji, “Classification of Nigerian Gospel Music Style”, *Nigerian Music Review* 15 (2004), pp. 62-80

<sup>20</sup> D. Adegbeye, *What every Christian should know, Be, Do and Flee* (Offa, Kwara: Gospel Unlimited Foundation, 2007).



native, traditional, gos-pop, gospel-highlife, gospel-reggae, gospel fuji, gospel waka, juju gospel and assorted.<sup>21</sup>

These developments account for the controversy and debate going on among Christians concerning performance and ministration. The various gospel styles in one way or the other have found their way into the church setting and some of them have been regarded as worldly. It is becoming therefore difficult to differentiate between church and secular music even in church settings.

Some denominations like the Deeper Life Bible Church are more conservative. They will not accept just any kind of style, because they could be regarded as entertainment or worldly. They prefer conventional church music like hymns, choruses and spiritual songs. Some other denominations want as many styles as possible in order to attract people in joining the membership of the church; and that means more money, more popularity.

The challenge for Christians now is to decide on the actual focus of Church music and concentrate on it. When people gather in church on Sunday mornings or during the week, is it for entertainment purposes or for show? Certainly not. Rather the gathering should be unto the Lord and it is for worship. God's plan is that his people worship him in spirit and in truth. (John 4:24) God expects that his people lift up his name and he will in turn draw all men unto himself (John 12:32).

The worldliness we see around today especially in the area of music confirms that we are in the last days when many would no longer want to hear the gospel truth but rather say 'if we cannot beat them, let us join them'. This is ungodly!

### **The way forward: True Worship**

The debate about music in the church being an issue of performance or ministration should not be a problem if Christians understand the meaning of True Worship. Stacker and Forbis rightly express that,

Worship is an encounter with God that is  
full and rich in meaning. This being the case,  
all believers in Jesus Christ should seek  
earnestly to have authentic experiences of  
worship.<sup>22</sup>

If the church is truly a gathering of believers in Christ Jesus, true worship will certainly be the ultimate goal of everyone gathered. However, this is not the case; the gathering is made up of mixed multitude – believers and unbelievers. This is not surprising. The Bible records in the book of Job 1:6 that when the children of God gathered, Satan also gathered. However, the true believers need not give up on what is ideal – true worship!

It is a fact that the church is faced with challenges presented to us by technology but we must make sure that technology does not distort the symbols and elements of worship. All components of worship which include content, spoken word, music, physical movement must be communicated through symbols that are understood by the congregation.<sup>23</sup> We must not allow technology merely to entertain people but rather to involve them in worship and in creative ways.

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<sup>21</sup> F. Adedeji, "Classification of Nigerian Gospel Music Styles", Nigerian Music Review 15 (2004), pp. 62-80.

<sup>22</sup> J. R. Stacker and W. Forbis, *Authentic Worship: Exalting God and Reaching People* (Nashville, Tennessee: Convention Press 1990), 11.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.,

Olukoju,<sup>24</sup> Ayegboyin and Ishola<sup>25</sup> and Adedeji<sup>26</sup> rightly assert that the African socio-cultural heritage is a reflection of the Nigerian church worship-which is indispensable. This accounts for the use of drumming, dancing, audience participation not only in music but also in the preaching of the word.

It appears that different churches with their different beliefs and backgrounds have their stance and biases in the issue at stake. Adedeji rightly asserts that the Christian church is regarded as the source of mother of Nigerian Gospel music which has various denominational categories and consequently with peculiar theological beliefs especially in the area of music.<sup>27</sup> The Diversity of these theological beliefs is partly responsible for the various styles in Nigerian gospel music. It is evident that these factors are reflected in church worship. What is acceptable in a church may be a taboo in another. Gospel artistes also reflect the theological prejudices of their denominational background in their choice of styles and techniques.<sup>28</sup> We can also conclude that this is also reflected in the issue of Church music being regarded as Performance or Ministration. Music presented in some churches may be regarded as very spiritual while in some other churches regarded as highly worldly or Satanic. How do we strike a balance then as the church of God?

Music in the church is not static. It has undergone a lot of changes just as people and the times are changing. The contemporary church is changing; 'there is a resurgence of interest in other art forms, such as sacred drama and sacred dance'.<sup>29</sup> However, God remains unchanging: thus,

“The instruments of today are only refinements  
of the flutes, stringed instruments, trumpets  
and drums with which the children of Israel  
Praised God, and the God we worship is the  
same yesterday, today and always”<sup>30</sup>

God’s standards remain the same. This is indicative of the fact that the Bible – God’s word, remains authentic and infallible. Therefore, whatever the music, whatever the style chosen, all music be done according to God’s word, God’s will, and for his glory. “In worshipping God, does man ever perfectly worship and adore? “No, but each worship encounter and each creative moment is a new and fresh approach”.<sup>31</sup> Each new day, there is a new and refreshing encounter with God, in His presence.

Music in the church should be purposeful. The blessing should be both ways. God should be blessed and the worshippers as well. Congregational worship should bring blessings, ‘singing is a Christian privilege, it should offer participation, attune the heart with God, have a unifying influence, express personal feelings, strengthen character, be an educational force and good stewardship.’<sup>32</sup>

Christians therefore need wisdom, discernment of spirit, prayer and more of studying and teaching the word of God to be able to decide what is appropriate in a worship service and what is not, no matter how beautiful or attractive the music may be. The question should be, ‘will God be glorified?’. As the scripture says, all things are lawful but not all things are expedient (I Corinthians 6:12).

What then does the future hold for music in the church? We can comfortably conclude that the true believers would need to hold on to their faith and guard their salvation jealously with fear and trembling.

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<sup>24</sup> E.O. Olukoju, “Music in Religious Worship”, *Orita* xix.2 (1987): 118-123.

<sup>25</sup> D. Ayegboyin and S.A. Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches: An Historical Perspective* (Lagos: Greater Heights).

<sup>26</sup> F. Adedeji “Elements of Africanism in Nigeria Indigenous Church Music: Christ Apostolic Church as Case Study, *The Gourd Rattle Journal of Musicology*, 1 (2000): pp. 75-88.

<sup>27</sup> F. Adedeji, “Redefining Nigerian Gospel Music within the Contexts of Musical Aesthetics, Theological Relativism and Socio-Cultural Dynamism”, *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology*, Vxi. 2 (2011): pp. 188.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>29</sup> H.M. Best, *Unceasing Worship* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> A.C. Lovelace and W.C. Rice, *Music and Worship in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), p. 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>32</sup> E.F. Miller, *Building an Effective Church Music Ministry* (Ibadan: Publishing Board Nigerian Baptist Convention), pp. 49-50.

The Christian musician should ensure that the music he makes is worship unto God whether in the church setting or outside the church setting. Music in the church must be worshipful and pleasing unto God.

On the surface however, can we rightly say there is no element of performance in ministration? From the definition cited earlier, to perform is simply ‘to do’ to ‘perform a duty’, to entertain an audience’. There is obviously some element of performance in ministration. If the Christian musician sings or plays an instrument that brings laughter or that makes the congregation smile giggle or get excited, or arouse some emotion, there is obviously some element of entertainment evident there. However, just as we have diversity in styles, we have diversity in the use of Language-Semantics. Some ‘very spiritual’ Christians would never mention the word ‘perform’ – it is a taboo. While some more liberal Christians can interchange the words. We need to be careful all the same, not to turn the Church of God into a cinema house, lest we lose the reverential element which is also attached to worship, and very crucial too.

## CONCLUSION

Performance is generally associated with practical demonstration and execution of musical ideas which may include concerts, recitals, social parties, cultural shows, musical competitions and the likes. Ministration on the other hand, is associated with divine responsibility which involves impacting lives through the gospel message of Jesus Christ. This can be considered as a distinguishing factor. It is pertinent therefore, that the Christian musician consider himself as ministering everywhere he goes, even in ‘ordinary performance’ or entertainment. His main objective should be to praise God or preach the gospel of Christ to draw all men unto God.

It is pertinent that Christians exercise some maturity in sensitive issues such as this. There is a crucial need to be balanced in the decisions we make so that controversial issues or debates do not carelessly allow more divisions amongst the Christian fold. We need to be more understanding and accommodating without compromising our faith so that the last prayer of Jesus in John 17:21 – the prayer of unity for the church, may be actualized in Christendom. Let us quit fighting about semantics and the issue of performance versus ministration. We must continue to strive for perfection as Christian musicians since no one can claim to have reached that perfect state until the Lord Jesus Christ returns. Our prayer should therefore be like that of Charles Wesley thus,

Finish then Thy New Creation, Pure and  
Spotless let us be; Let us see thy great  
Salvation Perfectly restored in Thee:  
Changed from glory into glory, Till in heaven  
we take our place, till we cast our crowns  
before Thee Lost in wonder, love, and Praise.<sup>33</sup>

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