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Interpretive Approach to Conducting African Choral Works: A Conductors Task

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Abstract

Conducting requires dynamic interpretation in order to convey meaning and intention. Without proper interpretation, a piece of music could lack meaning to the audience and the performer, thereby not accomplishing its original intention. Every piece of music has a specific desired meaning that the composer has in mind to convey to the audience. The interpreted compositions being performed by conductors in recent times have been distorted to the audience as the conductor-performer could not meaningfully penetrate deeply into the composer's ideas and emotional intentions. The writer aimed to strike a balance between the composers' and the conductor's views by embracing an interpretive approach to conducting selected choral works to realize the composer's intentions. The significant interest of the writer is to explore the techniques of musical response in choral music performance and examine the interpretive approach to conducting African choral works: A conductor's task. The interpretative approach in conducting African choral works in this study is limited to realizing the composer's intentions. The purpose is to provide helpful information on this prolific figure in the music ministry, especially now that he is still alive.

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The paper, hinged on the Theory of Interpretation by Richard Wagner (1868), employed a bibliography and oral interview as primary data collection; the writer also used secondary sources such as books, journals, the internet, etc. The study underscores the art of directing/conducting, interpretation, elements of interpretation in conducting, and score preparation/study. Findings reveal that meaningful interpretation of African music depends on the director's ability to capture the mood of the music, the shape of dynamics, colour of tone, drive the rhythm, express the form, and most importantly, develop an inner sense to read into the mind of the composers. Therefore, reaching excellence in conducting African choral music in performance requires expertise in score reading and adequate interpretation of each African choral piece, studying and teaching new pieces. Based on the findings, the study recommends, among others, that the school of music should develop a curriculum that emphasizes meaningful interpretations of African music in a performance. Scholars and researchers in the art of conducting should still explore studies in the proper application of score studies towards realizing a meaningful insight into the composer's mind in a performance.

Introduction

Conducting songs is indispensable in the choral group experience. The conductor dictates the pace of the music as he/she directs choirs and ensembles. Conducting and directing are words often used to describe organising and coordinating group music performances using musical and extra-musical skills to induce musical interpretations and meanings. Choral conducting and directing involve planning, organising, teaching, coordinating, instructing, and preparing a choral group for a performance. It is the art of leading a musical performance through visible gestures to control the shaping of sounds the choir makes. It is a way by which artistic direction is communicated to a choir during the performance. It requires a deep understanding of musical elements such as dynamics, expressions, tempo, and articulation. The poor performances of choral works noticeable in many social gatherings in Nigeria today call for serious attention.

A composition may be cleverly written, but its vivacity and vitality often depend on how it is performed, which is dependent upon how the music is being interpreted (Ojo, 2003, p. 2). According to Ogunlade (2014:2), "the era at which conductors see the arts of conducting as a mere waving of hands to indicate a beat pattern, cue, and cutoff gestures have gone". Conducting/directing requires a thorough study of the music scores and a reasonable interpretation of the composer's intention for effective musical communication. Leinsdorf (1981) also corroborates Ogunlade when he said, "(i) Great composers knew what they wanted. (ii) The interpreter must have the means to grasp the composer's intentions. (iii) Music must be read with knowledge and performed with imagination every printed note and word". Those above attested that our music should be interpreted with our choirs towards realising the composer's intentions.

The benchmarks for the "interpretive" approach" in this study, as postulated by Pablo (2012: 3);

Capture the mood: researching through a composition background and sight-reading the piece. Just as a movie actor will read an unfamiliar script to get acquainted with the scope of the music. Shape the dynamics: adopting a basic interpretative approach as the conductor increases and decreases volume in keeping with melodic and harmony intensity fluctuations. Colour the tone: Use tonal variations ranging from bright to dark and vibrato to enhance the moods conveyed. Mould the articulation: Create a seamless legato, mix in slurs and staccatos, and punctuate phrase breaks with silence. Contour the meter: Start with more robust and weaker beats configurations, then fine-tune relevant emphases. Drive the rhythm: Move from a weak pulse to a strong beat and from short to long notes so that your music pulsates with forwarding motion. Express the form: Bring out the high points of pieces and pull back and subdue moments, saving the conductor's gestures for climate peaks.

Pablo's approach" examines "the techniques of eliciting a musical response in choral music performance. To this effect, the writer further reviews the techniques that increase understanding, which come to play in interpretation. This attempt sought to present the best way to meaningfully conduct African choral work with the correct interpretation towards realising the composer's intentions. This study is therefore set to fill the gap between the prowess of professional African choral conductors and amateurs.

Theoretical Framework

This paper hinged on the Theory of Richard Wagner (1813-1847). According to Ossaiga (2014: 24), this theory was named The Theory of Interpretation as it was first published in 1868. Ossaiga (2014), quoting Wagner, asserts that;

...composers cannot be indifferent about how their compositions are presented to the public, and the audience cannot be left to interpret the works being performed. Wagner's theory was based on interpretation, advocating that the conductor set the appropriate tempo and understand and express the musical performance ... Wagner's viWagner'spression in conducting is the tempo. He had a preference for slower tempi than those conducted by his contemporaries. The slower tempi allowed meaningful opportunities. (Ossaiga: 2014: 24)

Wagner's theory applies to this study as it suggests the required dynamic interpretation to convey meaning and intentions, without which a piece of music could lack sense to both the audience and the performer. The theory applies to this study as it describes the impact and indelible transformative role played by the conductor. It is concerned with recognising the qualities of "interpretive" conducting techniques" in evoking" musical meanings and responses.

The Art of Directing/Conducting

Hansen posits that the art of directing has dramatically changed from Century to Century (1997, viii). Lamb (1988:3) sees conducting as the "profession" that has become a more refined and exacting art over many years. However, conductors differ considerably in the gestures they use and, to a degree, in the fundamental beat patterns". Brock Elheran (2004: v) also corroborates that there are legions of conductors and conductorial aspirants. However, there needs to be more good conductors. The only solution is to take an inventive approach to conduct problems and not succumb to the vainglorious attitude that has made the conducting profession intellectually suspect.

Green opines that standing in front of an orchestra, band, or chorus and beat time does not make one a conductor. Until one can bring forth thrilling music from a group of singers or players to inspire them to excel, to train them through one's music, one is to become a musician themselves, presumably to feel the power of music so intensely that the audience is lifted to new heights emotionally - a gently persuaded, through music (1981: 11). Femi Adediji also agreed with Green when he said that "Choral Directing" refers to training, teaching, administering, and leading the choir in performance or music ministrations (Adediji, 2012). Synonymously, choral conducting is described as a musical language or expression, a visual representation of the conductor, and a means of communicating musical ideals visually to the ensembles via hand gestures and facial expressions. It is considered a perpetual motor skill that must be practised carefully and diligently to be learned properly.

Since the twentieth century, choral conductors have become increasingly cognizant of complex considerations and execution hones (Ojo, 2017, p. 10). It is one of the most challenging endeavours of a musician. Idoloh (2002:56) observes that 'the creative function of music performance entails the ability to recognise musical expressing the skillfully and imaginatively to produce a new or spectacular kind of music in the form of song....' Therefore' the task of the conductor is beyond the waving of the

hand. It entails performing the intent of displaying dexterity on any choral or instrumental conducting task. That is why it is imperative for the conductor always to strive to showcase his/her creative, interpretive, and technical flair in their performances. (Onyeji, 2008). On this note, choral conducting proceeds to hold its significance as melodic execution through unmistakable motion, forming the choir is how aesthetic headings are being communicated to the choir amid the execution (Odusanya, 2015, p. 1).

In this manner, it requires understanding melodic components such as flow, expression, rhythm mixing, verbalisation, and, most critically, a great understanding of the work to be performed. Igbi (2018: 9) opined that 'the performer is the arrowhead of musical Creativity with the onus of bringing to life songs notated on a score, making the intentions of the composer vividly, speaking directly to the emotion of the listeners, and generally striving to maintain a high standard at any given opportunity . 'It, therefore, implies that the conductor cannot afford to fail on the performance stage since there may be no other given the opportunity to correct the negative impressions from the audience again. Creativity in conducting is an essential manifestation of specific characteristics of creative individuals, and his/her driving force makes a difference in choral performance. The following have been identified by Csikszentmihalyi (2014, 58;73) as the peculiarities of a creative individual. According to him, creative individuals:

1. Have a great deal of energy, but they are also often quiet and at rest,
2. Tend to be wise, yet also naive at the same time,
3. Have a combination of playfulness and discipline, or responsibility and irresponsibility,
4. Alternate between imagination and fantasy at one end and a rooted sense of reality at the other,
5. Seem to harbour opposite tendencies on the continuum between extroversion and introversion;
6. Are also remarkably humble and proud at the same time,
7. To a certain extent, escape rigid gender role stereotyping and tend androgyny;
8. They are thought to be rebellious and independent,
9. They are very passionate about their work, yet they can be extremely objective about it,
10. The openness and sensitivity of creative individuals often expose them to suffering pain, yet with a great deal of enjoyment.

Creativity is an imaginative approach to doing things in an unexpected way other than how they are utilised is conjured. Among other things, one needs to generate new possibilities or new alternatives. The test of Creativity measures the number of alternatives people can generate and their uniqueness. One must be bold in introducing the necessary flexibility to achieve a better performance in choral music for worship because only change is constant. Durrant (2009) reports that "consideration of counts as effective conducting gesture and communication skill can promote better conducting and, consequently, better, more expressive singing" The writer does not wish to count beats but adopts creative gestures to effect dynamics beyond the script of music to make the congregation benefit maximally from the musical performance.

Aluede (2002:70) notes that 'the beauty of a composed work is usually represented or misrepresented by the technical ability of the performer (interpreter)...the performer, in this respect, is very important because he feeds the end users – the listeners.' Berenson (1993: 61:74)) opined that interpretation relies on evoking the content within the music, on what is perceived and what is to be discovered and rendered audible. The word "interpret" in step with Ojo (2017), method "to provide "an explanation

for" - "to clarify" - "to make" clear" the meaning of", and this "identical definition of the phrase applies to tune as well, the conductor or performer "making clean" to the audience the message has given him by using the composer. The core purpose of conductors is that the song they conduct in a practice session, and overall performance will offer each performer and listener memorable musical reviews. Those studies take vicinity inside the innovative space between the performer/listener and the track. (Guck, 2006, p. 191;209). It should be noted that interpretation in music is entirely the means for securing the more significant thing called expression, and in discussing this more substantial thing, the activity of two people is always explored; one is the composer, and the other is the performer (Ojo, 2017, p. 13).

Interpretation

Interpretation is making musical decisions based on the knowledge of the score, composer, style, history, context, and other criteria. Berenson (1993: 61; 74) opined that interpretation relies on evoking the content within the music, on what is perceived and what is to be discovered and rendered audible. The word "interpret" in step with Ojo (2017:13), method "to provide "an explanation for" - "to clarify" - "to make clear the meaning of", and this "identical definition of the phrase applies to tune as well, the conductor or performer "making clean" to the audience the message has given him by using the composer. The core purpose of conductors is that the song they conduct in the performance session offers listeners memorable musical reviews. Those studies take vicinity inside the innovative space between the performer/listener and the track. (Guck, 2006, p. 191;209). It should be noted that interpretation in music is entirely the processor means for securing the more significant thing called expression, and in discussing this more substantial thing, the activity of two people is always explored; one is the composer, and the other is the performer (Ojo, 2017, p. 13).

John Manson in his book "Interpretive Choral Singing", John Manson defines "*interpretation* as the recreation of an emotion preconceived by the originator of some works of art in such a manner that it can be understood and felt by another. For music, it effectively portrays those feelings which the composer intended to be projected by his creation (1961:4). From the view of Guck and Manson, an interpreter must understand the emotion and its method of expression. Ogunlade (2014:24), quoting Ekweume, also points out that the interpretation of music by the conductor is more than transforming what is on the printed page of music into sounds to convey to the audience what the composer intended when he put the score on paper. The conductor must also bring to life those things which are not obvious in the musical score but convey the composer's intention. Webb (1993:251) also corroborates with Ogunlade and Ekweume, who observed, "interpretative marks in the music represent bold, expressive decisions; they are the base of performance, planned carefully and stated to the audience also meld into a composite expressive sound in performance."

Incongruent with the view of Webb and Ogunlade, Dipert (1980) opined that conductors should present as intended by the composer because conductors are more likely to achieve performance with more outstanding aesthetic merit if they follow the composer than if they do not (Dipert, 1980, p. 205;208). From the views of Webb (1993), Ogunlade (2014), and Dipert (1998), the human can conclude that interpretative marks in conducting should be given serious attention as the conductor possess a vast technique of choral musicianship also being conversant with the style and characteristics of the music played. Interpretation from the viewpoint of the conductor, according to Ojo (2017:14), differs from interpretation in singing and playing in that the conductor must transmit the emotions in music as opposed to listening to them; we have to make interpretative decisions and then adjust our sound and timing to communicate the feelings we want to project. Both the decision-making and the execution aspect of that process require deed practice.

Considering scholars' views on musical interpretation in choral performance as a conductor, thoughtful interpretation relies on a thorough and deep understanding of the music, composer, etc. The essentials are anticipated to serve as benchmarks for the conductor to develop interpretative abilities and self-creative heartfelt interpretations. There may be no higher manner to gain a loyal interpretation of a musical work than to observe it to advocate for the composer, who is always in the audience to hear his or her work performed. Of course, each conductor will render a different realisation of a musical work. Humans believe that all conductors should interpret and cultivate the idea and desire to allow the composer's composers, both the letter and the spirit, to display and emerge in possibly new ways in their performance.

Elements of Interpretation in Conducting

Meaningful adoption of the use of elements of interpretation in conducting must be considered. It, therefore, requires an understanding of the core elements of musical interpretation, including beat and tempo, dynamics, cueing, inhalation and articulation, expression and gesture. The conductor's ability to proficiently, effectively and meaningfully communicates the nuances of those core elements through gestures as they serve as necessary ingredients for the conductor's orchestral or choral performance.

Beat and Tempo

The director may instruct a pianist or organist to play a note or chord in some choral compositions so that the choir members may establish their starting notes. The conductor then starts the music with one or more opening beats. There is an enthusiastic preliminary rhythm before the orchestra and choir start playing. The beat of the music is typically indicated by the conductor's-conductor, with or without a baton. The hand traces a shape in the air in every bar (measure) depending on the time signature, indicating each beat with a change from downward to upward motion (Ojo, 2015, p. 25). If the tempo is slow or slow, or if the time signature is compound, a conductor sometimes indicates "subdivisions". The conductor can do this by adding a minor movement in the same direction as the movement for the beat it belongs to. Changes to the tempo are indicated by changing the speed of the beat. To carry out and control a *rallentando* (slowing down the pace of the music), a conductor may introduce beat subdivisions. While some conductors use both hands to indicate the beat, with the left hand mirroring the right, formal education discourages such an approach. The second hand can be used for cueing the entrances of individual players or sections and to aid indications of dynamics, phrasing, expression, and other elements (26).

Dynamics

Dynamics indicates the degree of loudness and softness. Dynamics may be described by the size of the conducting movements, a shorter shape representing softness and extended shapes representing louder sounds. Changes in dynamic may be signalled with the hand that is not being used to indicate the beat: an upward motion (usually palm-up) indicates a *crescendo*; a downward motion (usually palm-down) indicates a *diminuendo* (Webb, 1993, p. 251). Changing the size of conducting movements frequently results in changes in the character of the music depending upon the circumstances. Most composers put dynamics in their music to express their intentions. Robinson (1976) noted that the absence of marking to guide the performer in phrasing is merely one other aspect of a policy of entrusting as much interpretation as possible to the individual singer (364).

According to Ogunlade (2014: 39) most stable degree of a volume is as follows:

Italian Abbreviation English

<i>Pianissimo pp</i>	Vey Soft
<i>Piano p</i>	Soft
<i>Mezzo piano mp</i>	Moderately soft
<i>Mezzo forte mf</i>	Moderately loud
<i>Forte f</i>	Loud
<i>Fortissimo ff</i>	Very Loud

Ojo (2015:27) also opined that to adjust the balance of the various instruments or voices, gestures like showing one's palm one's performers or leaning away from them may demonstrate a decrease or increase in volume directed toward a particular section or performer.

Cueing, Inhalation and Articulation

The conductor raises his or her hands (or hand if he or she only uses a single hand) at the beginning of a piece of music to indicate that the music is about to begin. This is a signal for the orchestra members to ready their instruments to be played and for the choristers to be ready. The conductor then looks at the different sections of the orchestra (winds, strings, etc.) and choir to ensure that all the orchestra members are ready to play and choir members are ready. According to Ojo (2017: 26), the downbeat indicates the first beat of the bar, and the upbeat indicates the beat before the piece's first note and the bar's last beat. The instant at which the beat occurs is called the ictus (plural: ictūs or ictuses) and is usually indicated by a sudden (though not necessarily large) click of the wrist or change in baton direction. In some instances, "ictus" is "also referred to refer to a horizontal plane in which all the ictuses are physically located, such as the top of a music stand where a baton is tapped at each ictus.

The gesture leading up to the ictus is called the "preparation", and the "continuous flow of steady beats is called the "take" (the "Germ" n-word for a bar, measure, and beat). The indication of entries when a performer or section should begin playing (perhaps after a long rest) is called "cueing." A "cue must" forecasts with certainty the exact moment of the coming ictus so that all the players or singers affected by the cue can begin playing simultaneously. Cueing is most important for cases where a performer or section has been playing for a short time. Cueing is also helpful in the case of a pedal point with string players when a section has been playing the pedal point for a lengthy period; a cue is important to indicate when they should change to a new note. Cueing is achieved by "engaging" "the players" before their entry (by looking at them) and executing an apparent preparation gesture, often directed toward the specific players (Ojo, 2017, p. 27).

An inhalation, which may or may not be a semi-audible "sniff" from the "conductor, is a common element in the cueing technique of some conductors. Mere eye contact or a look in the general direction of the players may be sufficient in many instances, as when more than one section of the ensemble enters simultaneously. Larger musical events may warrant using a larger or more emphatic cue to encourage emotion and energy (Ogunlade, 2014, p. 39). Articulation may also be indicated by the character of the ictus ranging from short and sharp for staccato to long and fluid for legato. Many conductors change the tension of the hands: strained muscles and rigid movements may correspond to marcato, while relaxed and soft movements may correspond to legato or espressivo. Phrasing may be indicated by wide overhead arcs or a smooth hand motion, either forwards or side-to-side. A held note is often indicated by a hand held flat with the palm up. The end of a note is called a "cutoff", "release",

the closing of the palm, or the pinching of the finger and thumb. A release is usually preceded by preparation and concluded with a complete stillness (Ojo, 2017, p. 28).

Score Preparation/Study

The choral director knows what he should look for regarding style & form, textures, appropriateness of the text, harmony, and level of difficulty of the songs regarding rhythms, ranges, tessitura, and instrumental accompaniments. According to Ekwueme, whatever the case may be, selecting the music that the choir will perform is a significant responsibility of the choral director; he laments the limited supplies of African music in print. Unlike Europe and America, where there is abundant choral music to purchase, the African choral director depends on photocopies to produce- ignoring all copyright laws (1993, 115). He encouraged the African choral director to rely on what he could get from Europe and the United States of America.

Ekwueme further posits that the director must ensure that the chosen piece is not technically far above the ability of his choir to perform and should never be above the choral director's director's understanding, appreciation, and competence to interpret and present. It should be based on more than just the quality and text but also on the strengths and weaknesses of the choir and the conductor for which the music is chosen (116). He also asserted that the music director should have more than a cursory look at the music. However, he should thoroughly study its formal structure, rhythmic organisation, melodic range, contrary and general character, harmonic structure, textual adequacy, and public interpretative properties (1993:116).

Hansen opines that if someone wants to be a good conductor, score preparations will require much work ahead of time, much only work (1997: 99). Green posits that score study deals with the mental approach to the music and with the musicianship of the conductor himself (1981: 129) and it is not something that can be learned overnight according to Rilling who gives the following valuable suggestions that;

1. The conductor must begin ahead of time.
2. It is not a good idea to learn your music along with the ensemble; the conductor should know the piece very well (possibly memorised) before the first rehearsal.
3. Uncovering the composer's structures and formulas within the music is exciting.
4. One should be encouraged if the learning begins slowly. Hansen (1997: 99-100).

Lamb asserts that the first study of the score should determine the scope and overall impact of the work, which is the thrust of the music, its climate, and the technique that the composer used to achieve the climaxes will be revealed (1988: 89). Brian Busch also in agreement with other authors says that "to know a "musical score means to know what the composition will sound well as a finished product" (1984: 53" He further stresses that once the pitches of the piece are securely learned, the conductor develops a mental image of the music, combining pitches ensemble timbre, text, texture, and appropriate style characteristics. He points out some possible problems, problems in the technique of conducting, which need to do with the nonverbal communicative gesture, meter changes, tempo changes, or complex cueing and release sequences in the music. He advised that this problem must be solved even before rehearsals begin.

Other problems he mentioned are difficult intervals in various voice parts, intonation dangers, diction problems, articulation and interpretation of the text of the music (1984: 53-54). In the book by Hansen, Riling also advises that the conductor should make a thorough, systematic analysis of every work to be conducted. He believes that analysis is the factual basis of the learning process. Hansen (1997: 100).

The following are the points to be analysed:

1. The rhythmic analysis that shows the patterns and the rhythms of the prominent motifs and structures.
2. Instrumentation and voices, those who play or sing and when each should come.
3. The harmonic analysis that shows the basis of the tonality.
4. The structural analysis that explained the forms, regarding the division of the piece, the movements, the sections within each movement, the measures and how they are grouped, etc.
5. Textual analysis and understanding, which deal with the source of the text, understanding its overall meaning and every single word. It is essential that the conductor has the textual information as a result of evaluation into the music as this could help in projecting gestural interpretation borne out of the conductor's expertise of the piece, and also guarantee consistent wondering and substantially help in the direction of memorisation (Hansen, 1997, pp. 101-102).

Ulrich (1993:34) also affirms their position of Hansen that "The conductor should do ninety per cent of score preparation before entering the first rehearsal by giving careful attention to each part of the composition." It is, the "before, pertinent as a conductor to underscore the place of score study and other essential aspects of the music to deliver the song at its best in performance.

Contemporary African Conductor

Arts of Conducting has witnessed numerous African composers known to be conductors. According to Ogunlade (2014:74), the immense contributions of the pioneers of African music in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. People like J.J. Ransome Kuti, A.T. Ola-Olude, T.K.E. Philips, T.A. Bankole, Nelson E. Okoli, Harcourt Whyte, William-Wilberforce, Chukwudinka Echezona, Samuel Ojukwu, Nwokolobia Agi, David Okongwu and Felix Nwuba to mention few in their efforts have helped tremendously in the accumulation and transmission of knowledge and skills in African indigenous choral music in their respective geopolitical zones. These African musicians have significantly impacted the conducting field, as many of these composers are beginning to feature in the conducting arts. Africans within and outside Nigeria who are musically trained now guide and direct ensembles in classical and African music performances, such as orchestral or choral concerts or jazz ensemble big band concerts, by visible gestures with the hands, arms, face, and head. Likes of Laz. Ekweume, Lt. Col. Timothy Eru. Emeka Uwokedi, Udoka Ossaiga, Mathew Abioye, Niran Obasa,, Elizabeth Orru, 'Dele Ogunlade and Oluseun Odusanya, to mention a few.

Factors Affecting Effective Interpretation in Choral Conducting

Odusanya (2023) observed that many conductors need a mental picture of the musical interpretation of the music performed, and it requires a thorough score study ahead of the rehearsal time to improve the quality interpretation of any musical piece. Aremu (2023) corroborates with Odusanya that clarity of delivery enhances effective communication as the conductor portrays a defined vision for the message he/she intends to interpret and practically embodies that message before ever lifting a hand in performance. Ojo (2023) also buttresses conductors' poor concentration on the performance due to distraction from the choristers constitutes one of the factors affecting effective communication in choral conducting performance. Okunola (2023) underscore that the need for a better relationship between the conductor and choristers may also affect effective communication during the performance.

Inferring from the respondents' opinions, the researcher also submits that it could be better for the conductor to introduce a strange gesture to the singers, especially on the performance day because it

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can mutilate the performance. He also underscores the conductor's attitude of being carried away by the choir's response during the performance, which could also constitute a distraction on the part of the ensemble.

Differences in Gesture, Facial Expression and Body Language of the Conductor

Ogunlade (2023), while responding to the question on differences in the conductor's gesture, facial expression, and body language influence the choir opined that differences in the choir's response during the performance significantly depend on the conductor's competence in conducting art. He noted that the singers are very sensitive to different conducting methods; they appreciate a connection with the conductor's gestures, facial expressions and body language. When the conductor shows musical intentions with gestures, facial expressions and body language, they feel the conductor is helping them more than when this expressiveness is absent. Aremu (2019) buttresses Ogunlade that singers want information from the conductor in several ways: through musical details, interpretative proposals etc. Alayande (2023) also elucidates that when the conducting lacks expression, the level of attention decreases, and they think that the conductor is unsure.

In furtherance to the discussion on differences in the gesture, facial expression, and body language of the conductor influence the choir, Ojo and Niyi-Ojo (2023) agree that once the choristers are used to the conductor's gestures, facial expression and body language of a particular conductor, it is capable of eliciting good response for the choir, but bringing in a new different gesture or an expression they are not used to during rehearsal may cause chaos during the performance. Dada (2019) buttresses Ojo that how the conductor expressed musicianship ability through gestures, facial expression and body language to interpret and or establish the mood of the music is highly influential to the choir. According to Ige (2023), differences in gestures and facial expressions give the choir more confidence and cohesion to sing. Ojo-yido (2023) agreed that it inspired the chorister to sing with inspiration.

However, the choir should be familiar with the conductor's gesture to elicit the correct and intended musical response from the choir during the performance. Aremu (2023) explains that facial expression, body language and appropriate musical gestures play vital roles in choral performance and are major determining factors of a successful musical performance. It also brings beauty to every choral or orchestral performance as it aids meaningful conducting performance. Ayantoyibo (2023) opined that when a gesture is correct, facial expression is good, and body language has a meaningful influence on the choir, the sound of the choir is better. The writer believes that good gestures and conducting techniques are essential to encourage singers to perform reasonably. Body language must be involved as well, participating alongside gestures and facial expressions. The body language must suit the feeling of the piece to transmit the interpretative intentions. These elements influence the sound of the choir.

Techniques of Eliciting Musical Response in Choral Music Performance

Odusanya (2023) note that great composers knew what they wanted; the interpreter must have the means at his disposal to grasp the composer's intentions; music must be read with knowledge and performed with imagination in every printed note and word. The conductor must therefore develop the skill of capturing the mood of the music to be performed, shaping the dynamics, colour the tone, Mold the musical articulation, driving the rhythm, contouring the meter and also expressing the form of the music by bringing out the high points of pieces, subdue moments, saving the conductor's boldest gestures for climate peaks.

Okunola (2023) also buttresses that the conductor should develop a good relationship with all his/her

choir members. The conductor should prepare very well before the rehearsal and be able to train group leaders among his/her choir member. The writer thinks that the conductor should develop the needed conducting skills to aid good choral singing and good expression towards excellent performance and also have a great-trained ear, good knowledge of harmony and be a pleasant sight reading knowledge.

Summary

The study has examined an interpretative approach in conducting African choral works to realise the composer's intentions. The literature covers the art of choral directing, Score preparation, Score study, Conducting techniques and views of conductors on interpretive leading towards realising the composer's intentions. The choral group, through its excellent singing and clarity during the performance, is expected to impress the message into the hearts of the audience in a way that the intentions of the composer are reiterated in their memory through a meaningful interpretative approach. For the duration of this study, findings reveal that: (1) the real meaning of music interpretation is the act of explanation, clarification, elucidation, enlightenment, justification, and details of the purpose of another person's creative piece or music, to make a complete musical meaning to not only the director but most importantly to the listener. (2) Meaningful interpretation of African music largely depends on the director's capture of the mood of the music, shaping of dynamics, the colour of tone, driving the rhythm, expressing the form and most importantly, developing an inner sense of reading into the mind of the composer.

Conclusion

Attaining excellence in African music directing requires serious hard work, commitment, dedication and consistency to the African style of music. It also requires personal discipline regarding score reading and personal interpretation of each African Choral piece, studying and teaching of new music. Every music has its inherent logic, as the creation of an individual varies instead of cultural background. Regarding this, there is ultimately only one explanation of its structure and meaning. Therefore, choral directing requires more than standing in front of an ensemble, waving hands like a traffic control job but an act of communicating precise beats or pulse, expressive melodic lines, driving rhythm, dynamic changes and nuances, significant harmonic movements and all other musical expressions of a composition. It also requires building confidence in directing music in the African style. It needs constant self-practice by standing to conduct the imaginary choir in front or without the mirror.

The conductor's expression, feelings and musical interpretation largely depend on the skill set of the music director. African choral music directors must be inspiring leaders, music literate with score reading ability with a thorough, superbly trained hand. These indicate a need for personal study and practice even before rehearsing with the choral group and the instrumentalists. African music and musicians have prospects, but there is a need for earnest and diligent musicians that will move our music outside the shore of Africa. No two performances of work are the same. We are often affected by mood, sensitivity, and the environment.

While we may conduct the same ensemble, they, too, are affected by variables that impact performance. This paper, therefore, recommends, among others, the need for periodic review by African choral conductors in interpretative approaches to conducting African choral works in a concert, church worship, and social gathering. The need for a school of music to develop a curriculum that emphasises meaningful interpretations of African music in performance, and finally, scholars in the field of art of conducting should still explore studies in the proper application of score studies towards realising a meaningful insight into the composer's performance.

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