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Music and Dance Therapy in Nigeria

The Task before the Potential Nigerian Music Therapists in the Twenty First Century

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Abstract

The use of music and dance as a palliative measure, diversionary means, audio-analgesic and to control pain, is found in the musical practices of Nigerians. These different categories of the use of music can be put into two classifications: the use of music as medicine and the use of music as accompaniment to other healing rites. This paper examines: definitions of music therapy, the concept of illness in the contemporary Nigerian society, and music therapy and its social relevance. While highlighting the emerging issues before the Nigerian music/dance therapists, this paper ends by making some suggestions aimed at enhancing the present level of practice in Nigeria.

Keywords: Healing, illness, illness causation, prophylactic treatment, audio-analgesic, potential Nigerian music and dance therapists.

Introduction

Today the world is living under the threat of various diseases. Several efforts are being made around the world to cure these diseases and to bring them under control (Navneet, 2002). Unceasing efforts are being made to cure some diseases that have already been contracted. As a result, every therapy system is busy discovering various ways to bring diseases under control, and one such way has been music/dance therapy. In this direction Cottrell (2002) writes: "Since the beginning of recorded history, music and dance have played significant roles in the healing of human kind. Music, dance and healing were communal activities that were natural to everyone" (p. 15). She asserts that music and dance nourish us in ways we don't even realize. They inspire us, relax us, energize us, in short, they heal us and keep us well. They reside everywhere in our world.

Mereni (2004) states that it is not a new vocabulary neither is the practice new. In his opinion,

it is not a new word; neither is it a new practice; in fact, music therapy practice predates its science much in the same way as medical practice predates the science of medicine (Mereni, 2004, p. ix).

Age old traditions encompassing the therapeutic use of music and dance in Nigeria are evidenced by the works of Lateef (1987), Omibiyi-Obidike (1998) and Nzewi (2003). These scholars reported the incidence of the therapeutic use of music/dance in Northern, Western and Eastern Nigeria respectively.

In spite of this history, music therapy is less known or discussed in the contemporary Nigerian society. Where little is said of it, it is viewed as if the practice is almost extinct or should be left in the hands of traditional healers. In Nigeria today, musical intervention in the restoration of

health is primarily in the hands of music healers. This paper addresses the situation described above and discusses what needs to be done by Nigerian music/dance therapists in the twenty-first century. We will focus on the need for the development of training and practice of the future music/dance practitioners in Nigeria.

Definition of Music Therapy

Alvin (1975, p. 4) defines music therapy as "the controlled use of music in the treatment, education, training and rehabilitation of children and adults suffering from physical, mental or emotional disorders". Bruscia (1993) describes music therapy as an inter - personal process in which the therapist in all of its facets – physical, emotional, mental, social, aesthetic and spiritual – helps clients to improve or maintain a state of health. He observes further that music therapy is a systematic process of intervention wherein the therapist helps the client to achieve health, using musical experiences and the relationships that develop through them as a dynamic force of change.

Mereni (2004) indicates that the word therapy comes from the Greek word "therapeia" which means "healing", in the same sense as treatment of a disease: "a curative intervention for the purpose of healing a sickness or restoring health." Music therapy has to do with musical intervention. Mereni however, remarks that music therapy is not listening to music for relaxation, to relieve boredom, and/or to relieve pain or physical aches, or to listen to music to induce sleep. In his view such instances offer proof of the power of music and such a power can then be involved when we set out to employ music as the tool of therapeutic intervention. In most cases in Nigeria, music and dance are closely knit. This is so because dance is rarely ever performed without music and music in very many instances calls for dance.

The Concept of Illness and Disease Causation in Nigeria

Quoting an African proverb, Chernoff says: "In this world sickness and death are the bad thing against a person but when a person has patience and he is never sick, all that he wants, he will get" (Chernoff 1979, p. 137). This view is also strongly held by very many natives in Nigeria.

According to Fatokun (2004), God the creator is primarily concerned with the wholeness of man. This is promoted by the inclusion of herbs, trees and crops in the framework of the medical institution for nourishment and healing of the human body. This is of course why God is referred to as Jehovah Rapha – the healer of his people (Exodus 15, p. 26). Fatokun (2004) observes further that suffering, pain and diseases, as physical ills affecting the well-being of a person are generally, in the view of the Old Testament of the Bible, punitive measures from God to man for his short-comings or violation of divine rules.

The concept of illness and what constitutes it differs in different cultural contexts. Illness in the views of the people of Rivers and Cross River States of Nigeria is sharply different from orthodox medical concepts. In the area, young ladies are fattened prior to formal betrothal and so slightly obese ladies are considered to be living healthy lives while obesity among Euro-American women is regarded as an abnormal condition in their culture.

In Nigeria, disease is believed to be caused by more than one variable. These views are evident in the works of Ohaeri (1988), Osunwole (1990; 1996), Kongo (1997), Erinsho (1998) and Aluede (2005). Apart from the works cited, talking specifically of Yoruba belief system on the causes of diseases, Odejide (1978) distinguishes three factors; natural, preternatural and supernatural. In his opinion, natural factors include bad odours, and filthy or unsanitary conditions. To him, witchcraft and human curses are in the category of preternatural causes because human beings are involved in the acts. The supernatural factors are traceable to non-humans, such as spirits, ancestors and gods. Sharing same views on Malawians' ideas of disease causation, Friedson (1996) observed that among the Timbuka people of Malawi, God, Spirits and witches are etiologic agents involved in an episode of illness. When a Timbuka says an illness is from God, he says so in the context of natural causation. The two others are beyond the physical where western medical practice can be helpful.

In a similar direction, Osunwole (1996) states that available ethnographic accounts of some non-western cultures and his interactions with Nigerian healers reveal that etiology of disease is attributable to three variables in Nigeria, namely, natural, supernatural and mystical. To him, diseases which occur naturally can result from one's interaction with the physical environment (for example wounds at the farm, wounds at home, or drinking polluted water) and illnesses that are genetically inherited (for example mental disorders). He maintains further that naturally caused diseases are not difficult to manage. Supernaturally caused diseases are related to problems caused by the involvement of neglected gods, spirits and ancestors whose devotees

have failed to accord necessary rites, sacrifices and recognition. Osunwole says that mystical types of disease are humanly engineered health problems, which may be caused by witchcraft, curses or oaths. Humanly engineered health problems, as used in this context, comes in any of these forms as explained by Mbanefo (1991), and they are a curse or spell pronounced on someone by an enemy which could manifest in mental disorder or other forms of depression, juju violation, that is; if a man steals from a farm guarded by certain juju (this juju could be a mystical charm buried in the farm or hung in yam ban), he may become mad. The last of the humanly engineered problems could be caused by a person in the form of false oaths. For example, if a guilty person declares his innocence by taking an oath, he could be mad or suffer spirit possession.

Music and Dance Therapy in Nigeria: An Appraisal

Presently in Nigeria, music/dance therapy is yet to be formally inaugurated as a profession in the country. Different individuals have independently carried out research in different ethnic groups within the nation. Some of these are Professor M.A. Omibiyi-Obidike, Professor Meki Nzewi, Dr. A.E. Mereni to mention just a few. However, Dr. Mereni is the founder of the music therapy association of Nigeria (MUTAN), he teaches music at the university of Lagos in Nigeria and also runs clinics in Lagos and Okigwi in Nigeria. The existence of this profession is yet to be felt within its host country as it has not had any conferences or workshops ever since its birth in 2006. It may be correct to say that music therapy in the academic sense is yet to begin in Nigeria. Music/dance therapy has the propensity of complimenting the orthodox medical practices in Nigeria if given the proper attention it deserves.

Mereni (1997) identified some healing aspects of music/dance as restorative agents and they are:

- a. Anxiolytic music therapy – aims to free one from fear, fright or anxiety.
- b. Tensionlytic music therapy – aims to relieve one from physical and mental tension resulting from manual or spiritual labour.
- c. Algolytic music therapy – aims to relieve physical pain.
- d. Psycholytic music therapy – aims to loosen a person from the group of evil spirits.
- e. Patholytic music therapy – aims to relieve the grief of bereavement.

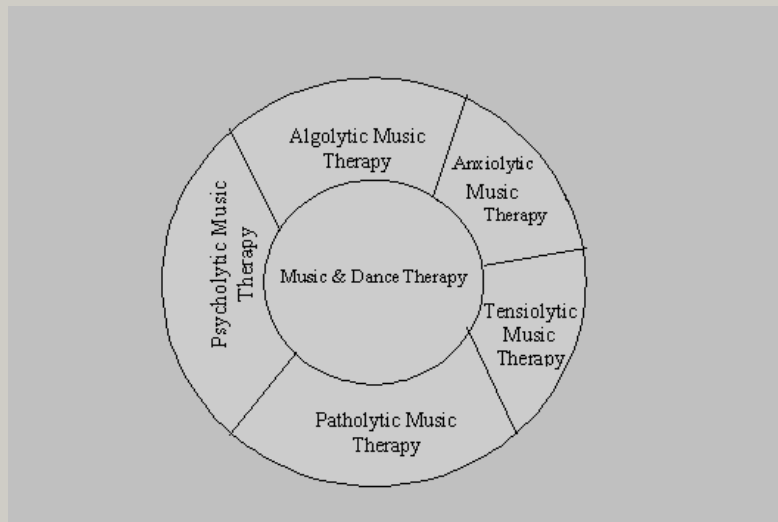


Figure 1: A diagram showing kinds of music/dance therapy

Mereni (2004) further established that the technique employed to achieve healing is through the use of dancing, drumming, response to melodies and the combination of dance and drama/psycho-drama. Mereni is not alone in this opinion. Today, interdisciplinary approaches to healing are being canvassed as never before. This move resulted in the formation of the international association of creative art therapists. If one may ask: Has music/dance any known therapeutic potentials? Inayat Khan (1973) and (1978) observed that the existence of illness in the body may be called a shadow of the true illness which is held by man in his mind. He said that by the power of music, the mind becomes exalted and so rises above the thought of the illness, then the illness is forgotten.

Through music/dance, the structure and the internal patterns of human beings are regulated. This also implies that music/dance strengthens individuals prophylactically. Low tissue salt in the human body that is a result of electrolyte imbalance is without a doubt cured when a person dances and sweats out. This is what Friedson (1996) refers to as "dancing off diseases." Music alters mood and so can bring peace to over-stimulated children. Music is also vital to the development of language and listening skills. Children with an inability to learn, who cannot maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationship with peers, who show cognitive disabilities and are generally unhappy or depressed find musical experience helpful. The dance associated with such musical experiences has proven very helpful for children who have a phobia for stability, movement, crowd, space and body shapes (Pica 1995).

Observing the importance of music as a curative agent, Gerber (1988, p. 22) remarked that "the mind does influence biochemical reactions of the total body and the creative thoughts actively stimulate endocrinological or hormonal functions which flows through our psychological feelings and physiological activities." How this happens is revealed by Goldstein (1980) who found in his study, that his subjects experienced thrills – responses to emotionally arousing music, exhibiting a biochemical response suggestive of endorphin production. Roskam (1993) confirmed it all by saying that when musically stimulated endorphins are released not only into the brain, but throughout the blood stream, healing occurs. This observation provides the basis for music therapy. From the diagram in figure 1, musical intervention in the restoration of health can be achieved through any of the five types of music therapy. For tension, anxiety, pains and bereavement, music/dance have proven very efficacious and so music has functioned as medicine in this realm. It is only the psycholytic music therapy which calls for music, dance and other rites which may have to do with exorcism, deliverance, prayers and sacrifices as the case may be. This is of course why the need for a collaborative research and practice in this field is presently being stressed as never before.

If music/dance therapy is this vital, to how much use has it been put? In Nigeria presently, the use of music to bring about healing is primarily in the hands of the traditional healers who apply music as medicine and as accompaniment to healing rites (Lateef 1987; Omibiyi-Obidike 1998; Mereni 1997; Nzewi 2002).

The Task before the Potential Nigerian Music/Dance Therapist in the Twenty-First Century

If music and sound are to become useful healing therapies, then we must broaden our scope and enlist the aid of experts. These might include anthropologists and ethnomusicologists who study cultures that traditionally connect music with therapeutic applications (McClellan, 1988, p. 187).

McClellan further stressed that documentation of healing traditions, establishment of research centres and curriculum development for the training of healers are necessary. McClellan's views obviously fit the needs in Nigeria.

1. In the first case music is a collective or an impure art form in Nigeria. As an eclectic art, it borrows from dance, history, literature, physical education to mention but a few. Considering its multidisciplinary nature, ethno medical/medical practitioners, music/dance therapists, psychologists, neurologists will need to work together in the provision of information on the use of music for therapeutic purposes.
2. This initial gathering of information will help in the formation of substantive healing theories and practice in music/dance therapy. In the formulation of these healing theories, the governments should be involved to sponsor field research and establish research centres in Universities and hospitals. The researchers should be drawn from diverse ethnic groups and fields. These researchers should, as a matter of urgency, collect healing songs of different communities, analyse them to gain insight into the general characteristics of the various music. Through comparative musical studies, their roles in healing experiences will be arrived at.
3. The employment of music for healing purposes is not novel in Nigeria. Since the social and physical fitness of people is a prerogative, the Nigerian government in collaboration with the various states, local government areas, and other related ministries should sponsor the development of curriculum for the training of music therapists. Music healing has been in use *ab initio* in Nigeria, but the situation requires enhancement and development so that its practitioners will be awakened to the emerging trends comparatively in the world. This dimension is sure to yield good results because music prescription in our hospitals and health centres is over due.

Conclusion

The thrust of this paper has been on the healing propensities of music. Within the purview of this paper, the researchers revealed that music/dance therapy could be used in effecting the well being of individuals and groups. It was observed that through music/ dance therapy, problems related to fear of crowd, places, loneliness, inability to concentrate and to communicate could be countered. While revealing the importance of this form of therapy, the researchers advanced ways in which this very important practice could be enhanced including documentation of the indigenous traditions and songs used, setting up research centres and development of curriculum for training specialists. It was however, suggested that government should be supportive of this venture if meaningful progress is to be made.

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