

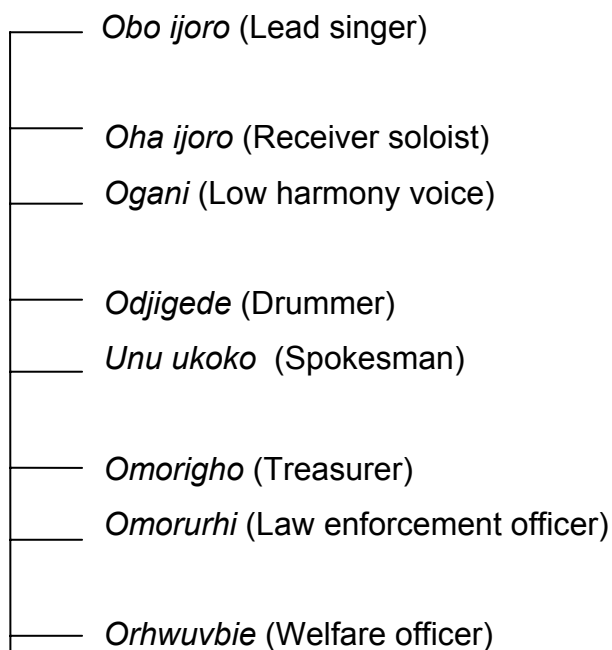
CHAPTER 5

IGORU ENSEMBLE: ORGANIZATION AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

5. 1 General and formational organization

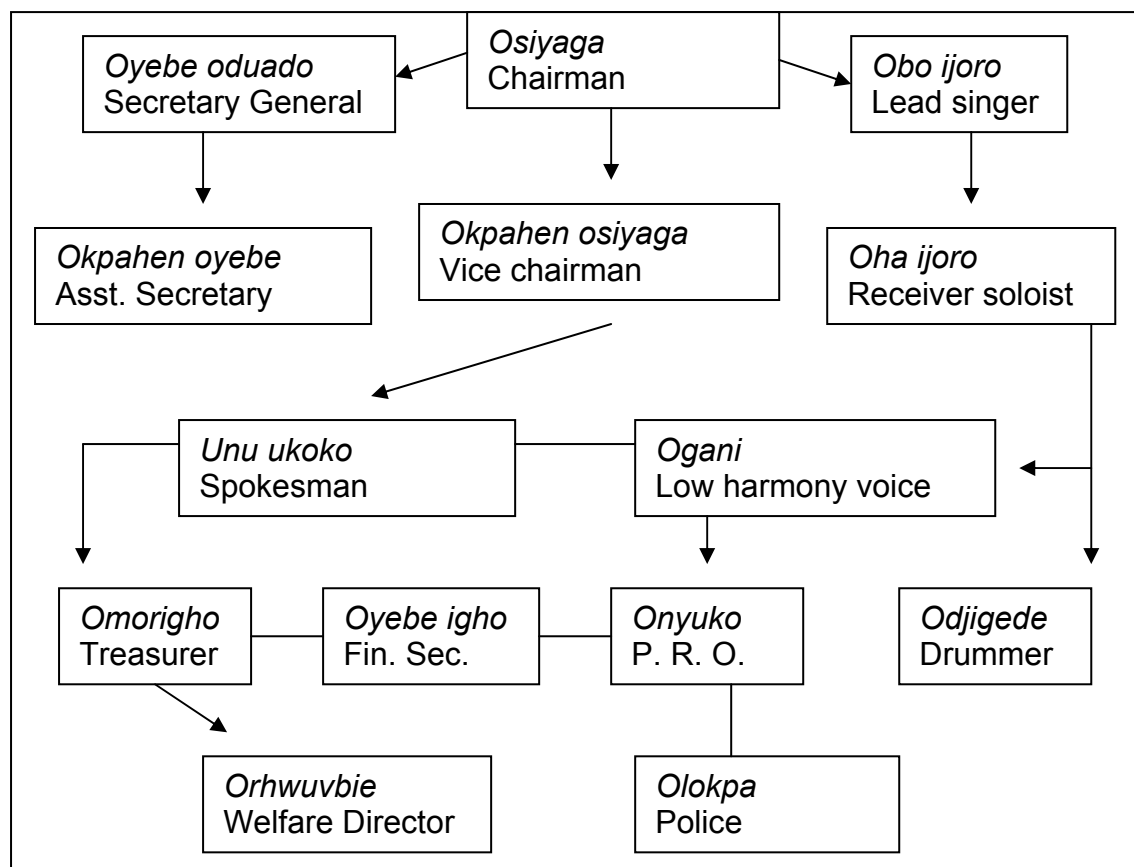
Igoru music is organized like a socio-cultural club. It comprises the administrative, vocal, instrumental and dance sections. The early Igoru ensembles had leadership positions that were held by the leading performers, with few positions to take care of the social and economic aspects. But the development in the 1930s and 1940s brought about two categories of leadership, the purely administrative and the musical. This started with Igoru ensembles that operated under the Okpe Union in Lagos, Sapele and elsewhere. The executive members of the Union take charge of general meetings and the entire affairs of the body, while the musical leaders are given the responsibility to take charge of rehearsal sessions and performances. The following tree of offices illustrates the early positions:

Figure 5 – 1: Tree of offices in rural Igoru ensembles



The lead singer is often seen as the overall leader who directs and moderates the affairs and activities of the ensemble, both at rehearsals and performances. He/she is supported by all other officers of the group. The last four positions are created to take care of the socio-economic and disciplinary aspects. In the urban centres where the ensembles functioned under the Okpe Union, the following organizational structure existed.

Figure 5 – 2: Organizational structure under Okpe Union



Song 62, page A1 – 105, captures the above organizational structure to describe the socio-cultural ensemble of fictitious sex workers in Lagos.

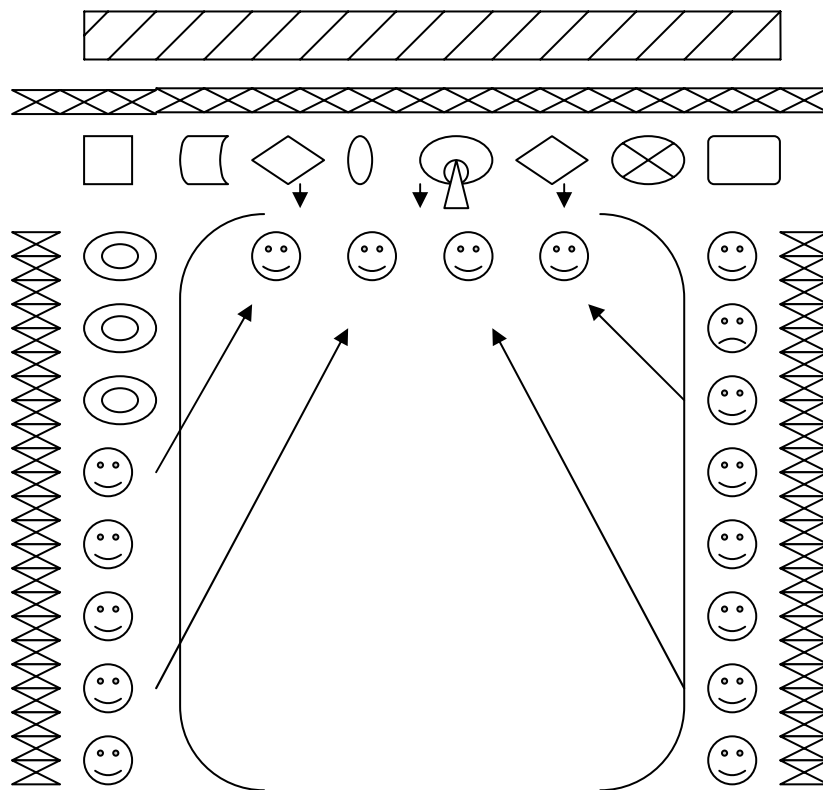
Although the composer did not mention all the above positions, the key offices in the administrative and musical roles were stated in the song. The composer, for instance, states that the chairperson took her seat and called the lead singer to sing a song. This suggests that the chairman could be different from the lead singer in the group. Depending on the group, the positions of patron and matron may or may not exist. But if they do exist, they function as father and mother to the group as is also found in Ezeagu Atilogwu [Etilogwu] of Enugu State, Nigeria (Okafor, 1998: 21). Both musical and non-musical criteria are considered for appropriate nominations and appointment of members into the various leadership positions. Some of the qualifications include musical capability, creative abilities, physical fitness, selflessness, socio-moral comportment and tolerance. The officers elect are accorded respect according to their designations and democratic principles prevail. Occasions where the lead singer is not the chairman of the group, he/she is given almost the same status in matters concerning musical rehearsals and performances.














Plate 5 – 1: Omaromwaye John Igbide (centre) and ensemble members of Jeddo

The structure above clearly indicates that the chairman or lead vocalist is the chief executive of the ensemble. He/she directs the secretary to convene meetings and rehearsals as well as to document proceedings and handle all correspondence on behalf of the group. He/she equally directs the vice chairman to deputize for him, while the assistant secretary may act for the Secretary General in his/her absence. The chief executive directs the spokesman to present and receive all negotiations, gifts, or charges on behalf of the body. The spokesman hands over all income received to the financial secretary who, after recording, hands over to the treasurer for safekeeping. The lead vocalist works directly with the receiver soloist, lower part singer (*ogani*), chorus members and drummers. All members of the ensemble participate in the singing, clapping and dancing. At rehearsals and performances, special seats are arranged for the leading vocalist and the drummers. Other supporting singers, administrative heads and some prominent members of the audience may then seat by the sides. The following is a typical performance formation in open arena.

Figure 5 – 4: Typical Igoru performance formation in open arena



Key

	<i>Obo iioro</i> (Lead singer)
	<i>Oha iioro</i> (Receiver soloist)
	<i>Ohwe iioro</i> (Chorus)
	<i>Ogani</i> (Low voice)
	<i>Odiigede</i> (Drummer)
	<i>Oghigheghe</i> (Dancer)
	<i>Unu ukoko</i> (Spokesman)
	<i>Orhwuvhie</i> : Welfare officer
	<i>Omorisho</i> (Treasurer)
	<i>Inughe</i> (Audience)
	<i>Oghwa</i> (House)

5.2 Instruments of Igoru music

Our discussion in this chapter will focus only on the membranophone class of instruments, since idiophone, aerophone and chordophone instruments are not required for Igoru performance. Although, several membrane drums exist in Okpe, only three *ukiri* are used for Igoru music. Some ensembles decidedly make use of only two or one in their performances. The *ukiri* is a short cylindrical drum which comes in different sizes, but there is no uniform standard of measurement for the construction. It is generally made from the trunk of some specially selected hard wood. The trunk is cut to the desired height or length and a cylindrical hole is borne through it from one end to the other. Thereafter, the builder carves the body, in order to sharpen it to an

expected form, such that the middle area is fairly larger than the top and bottom ends. Very often, at construction, it is carved as a three-legged

pedestal drum, though at the time of performance it does not stand on the ground. Few *Ikiri* (plural form of *ukiri*) are however constructed without legs.

Plate 5 – 2 The pedestal *ukiri*

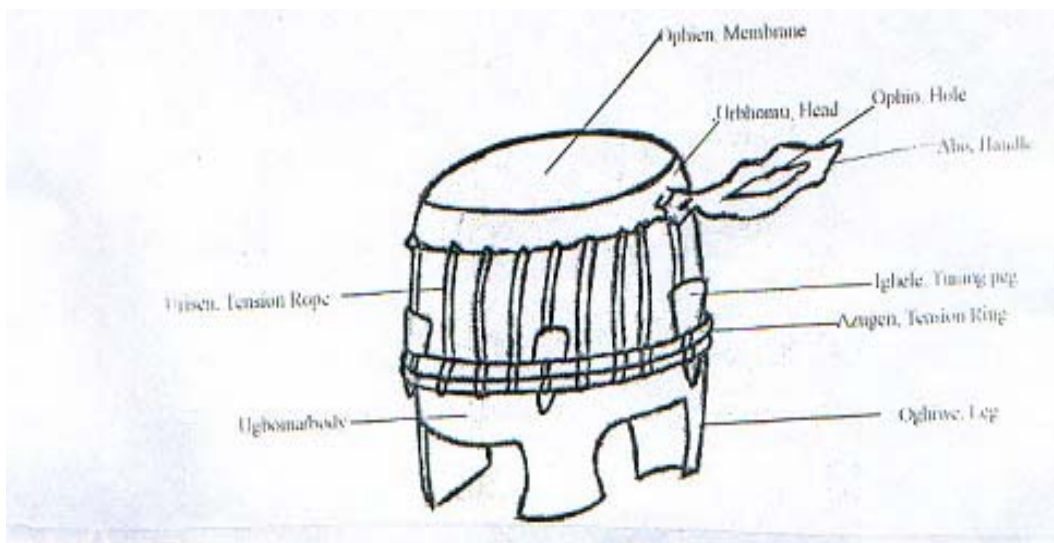


A piece of flexible thin stick is stripped of its bark and wound around the body of the drum slightly below the middle point. This is called *azugen* (tension ring). The membrane or animal skin (*ophien*) is cut to size, about 4cm wider than the upper circumference of the hollow wood. The cutting technically

provides a handle (*abo*) for the drum at an edge of the membrane. Then holes are borne around its edges and it is stretched over the hollow trunk at the top. *Irisen*, specie of flexible cane is smoothed to form flat ropes, which are vertically strung through the holes on the membrane to the tension rings. For the purpose of effective tensioning, the ropes are doubled at intervals around the drum and this adds to its aesthetic value. Finally, four pegs (*Ighele*)

shaped like the handle of a chisel are driven in-between the tension rings and the body of the instrument, to increase the tension of the ropes and the consequent tension of the membrane. The pegs serve as tuning device.

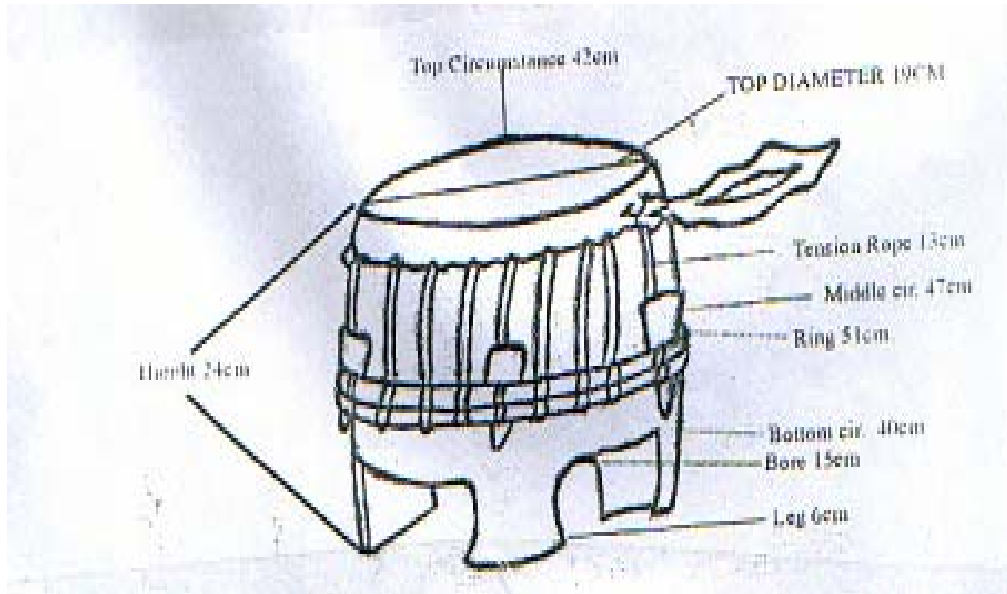
Figure 5 – 4: The structure of *ukiri*



5. 2. 1 The organization of *ukiri* ensemble

The standard *ukiri* ensemble comprises three-member drums of different sizes. This includes the mother *ukiri* (*izu ukiri*), baby *ukiri* (*omo ukiri*) and varied *ukiri* (*ukiri evbarien*). The drums are named by Igoru musicians according to their roles in the ensemble. The first two drums maintain their motifs constantly, with little or no variation, while the third drum named varied *ukiri* develops its theme with varied rhythmic patterns (see chapter two for definition). Two or more tones of varied degrees may be generated on each of the drums, depending on the playing technique adopted. The height of the baby drum is between 20 and 24cm, though no standard measure is fixed for it. The circumference is about 42cm at the top, 47 cm at the middle and 40cm at the bottom while its bore is about 36cm. See illustration below:

Figure 5 – 5: Approximated size of the baby ukiri



The varied drum has a moderate height of about 30-32 cm and a circumference of about 48cm at the top, 53cm at the middle and 432 cm at the bottom. The mother drum is the biggest of the three that form the ensemble. The height is about 40 cm and the circumference is about 62cm at the top, 68 cm at the middle and 58cm at the bottom. The two devices for the

turning of the drum are tensioning by striking the tuning pegs (*əkaren*) and tensioning by sunning or heating up (*əkarihē*). The first device involves the use of any heavy object to hit the sides of the membrane at the rim of the drum as well as to hit the tuning pegs one after the other, while the second device requires heat to dry up the humidified membrane of the drum to expand the skin and thereby raise the tone. Thus, in the dry seasons, the drum is placed

under the sun and beside the fire in wet season for about an hour or more before performance.



Plate 5 – 3: Tuning of *Ukiri*

The drum is normally trapped in the left armpit, the arm holding it firmly against the player's body. If the player sits down, his left lap may be used to

support the drum below. A short thin stick, about 23cm in length, is held in the right hand to beat the drum. A supple wrist is necessary for easy manipulation of the instrument. Nketia (1982: 111) argues:

Certain instruments function as lead or principal instruments, while others play a subordinate role as accompanying or ostinato instruments. Some instruments are used for enriching the texture of a piece of music or for increasing its intensity, while others emphasize its rhythmic aspects or articulate its pulse structure.

Nketia further discusses ensembles that consist exclusively of melodic instruments which could be mixed, such as flutes, trumpets, xylophones, lutes and lyres. He distinguishes between this and another category of ensembles that comprise instruments of homogeneous or mixed groups that are capable only of indefinite pitches such as drums, bells, rattles, clappers, etc. he adds that mixed ensembles of drums may be composed of a set of varying sonorities that may include a high-pitched drum, a medium-pitched drum, a tenor-pitched drum, and a low-pitched drum. Only two or three of the above combinations may form an ensemble, provided they show enough contrast in sonority for one to emerge as the principal instrument and the others as accompaniment. Generally, he concludes that, it is the lowest sounding drum that dominates the others as the principal instrument.

In Igoru ensemble, the mother *ukiri* produces the lowest tones; the baby *ukiri* provides the higher tones, while the varied *ukiri* supplies the medium tones. Igoru performance normally starts with vocal music. Then the mother *ukiri* comes first amongst the instruments, to be followed by the baby *ukiri*, while the varied *ukiri* comes last. These successive entries of the instruments in the ensemble, as a process, are quite systematic, such that the first is allowed to

play its melo-rhythmic sentence (about a measure) twice or thereabouts, before the next instrument makes entry. The mother *ukiri* generates two tones, here referred to as high and low tones. In the compound quadruple metre, the high tone (of the mother *ukiri*) appears on weak beats with syncopation, while the low tone comes on the strong beats. Where the low tone appears on a weak beat, it is used as an anticipation to further strengthen the strong beat that immediately follows, which is equally on the same low tone (see song 8, page A2 – 23).

The mother *ukiri* generally plays a sort of phrasing referent role and two patterns of it exist. Only one of the patterns is adopted at a time. The pattern found in song 8, page A2 – 23, and song 34, page A2 – 91 is the most common in Igoru performances. The second pattern appears in song 25, page A2 – 63. The baby *ukiri* keeps the basic pulse, a sub-phrasing referent role, and the varied *ukiri* plays complementary and colouring roles in the ensemble. The mother drum player normally provides the cadential cue that enables the ensemble to end the performance at once. In a situation where only two drums are used, the baby drum plays the roles of the varied drum together with its own role.

The varied drum is capable of generation two or more tones, but is required to play on a monotone, and to pay much attention to its varied rhythmic patterns and creative extempore. Its roles stimulate and activate dancers and audience participation. The drum establishes and develops its themes on a single measure or two-measure phrase as the case may be. The themes may then be repeated and recycled in several variations. A general overview of the varied drum patterns gives us a circle of theme and variations.

Plate 5 – 4: The *ukiri* ensemble



5. 2. 2 Vocal organization

Akpabot (1998: 40) argues that the Ibibio of Nigeria sometimes have another voice to accompany the cantor in a two-part harmony. He reveals also that the pygmies of East Africa and Hottentots of South Africa involve in contrapuntal singing. The feature of two-part harmony is prominent in Igoru music. Igoru musicians say that the performance requires four major voices, but these voices do not mean four parts. They are four major voices assigned with certain responsibilities, in order to distribute the tasks of presenting the narratives. The performers name the first two voices and describe the other two according to their roles. We have therefore coined the names for the two other voices from the terms used by the musicians in describing their roles.

The four voices are as follows:

- *Obo ijoro* (Lead singer)
- *Ogani* (Low harmony part singer)
- *Oha ijoro* (Receiver soloist)
- *Ohwe ijoro* (Chorus singer)

The *obo ijoro* is usually the most skilled singer, who leads the songs at rehearsals and performances. He/she takes all the major solo sections of the narratives. The *ogani* is also a very skilled singer, often a male singer, though few female singers possess the skill and voice range to provide the harmony part. Igoru musicians say only one person is designated as *obo ijoro* and *ogani* respectively in the ensemble. The musicians use three terms to discuss the roles of the receiver soloist. The lead singer, for instance, says to the receiver soloist '*haye* (receive it)', '*mie me* (take it from me)' or '*frui* (take it fast)'. While we have coined *oha ijoro* from the first term to describe the singer in this discourse, we have coined *efro* and *emie* from the two other terms to describe the role interchangeably in the textual transcriptions. The fourth part of the vocal organization comprises all other members of the ensemble who together sing the choruses as response to the solos and solo cues. The term *ehwe* means to answer a call and the musicians often remark *are ihwe ijoro* (you should answer songs). The vocal forms within this organization have been discussed in chapter seven.

5. 2. 3 Dance organization

Igoru music and dance are in slow pace, particularly because membership of the ensemble comprises elderly men and women. There are however moments of moderately increased tempo. The dance is not choreographed for specialized dancers; it is open to all members including excited members of the audience. Each dancer has liberty to change his/her dance steps at any

time, though they might occasionally maintain some level of uniformity in movement. In any case, because of the obvious attempts to perform some uniform dance steps, any change of step by one or two dancers on the row may influence the others. The chief vocalist is often in front pacing back and forth the stage in all directions and is supported by other members. Hugh Tracey (1970: 6 and 7) discusses the process of the Chopi Dgodo dance as follows:

The musical side is now completed in every essential, but the dance has yet to be composed and fitted to the music. The composer will call on one or two of his friends to help him play over his new work to the dance leader, who listens attentively and devises in his mind the dance routine to fit in. Then, with the plan of action clearly in his mind, the dance leader will try out his new steps and call upon the composer to give him a stipulated number of repeats of the basic sentence or phrase for each parts of the dance. Naturally there would be confusion if a clearly devised plan were not strictly adhered to by both dancers and orchestra. But the system works without the writing of a word or note on paper, and between them the whole movement takes shape. The singing of the words of the lyrics is part of the dance routine and is undertaken by the dancers. They sing as a rule in unison with occasional harmonic passages by their leader. The clear statement of the subject and counter-subjects by young male voices set against the percussion accompaniment of the mellow-toned *Timbila* makes stirring music.

Igoru dance is employed demonstratively to enact the oral narratives. The movements follow the singing as well as the drumming. The *azuzu* (manual fan) in the right hand and *agisifi* (handkerchief) in the left serve as extension of both hands and are often raised-up to mark major vocal cadences of the narratives.

This implies emphasis on the statements or points made in the narratives, in accord with the practice that the performers might point hands at their subjects.



Plate 5 – 5: Iguru performers marking major vocal cadence

The dancers form two rows on the stage, and from each of the rows come to the centre one after the other, in groups of twos or fours, to perform as illustrated in figure 5 – 3 above. The dance, when in progress involves the entire body, where the legs and hands may move alternately both in similar and contrary motions with the shoulders moving gracefully to add colour. In various patterns, the feet are moved forward one after the other. Both on the beat and off the beat, the two feet may pace a step, two steps, or four steps forward one after the other. Movement that suggests two steps with rhythmic body gesture may alternately be taken on the spot without necessarily moving forward or backward.

The balance between the legs and the hands is very systematic in the dance. The right hand may swing forward at the same time as the right leg moves a step forward and at other time may move in contrary motion.



Plate 5 – 6: Igoru dance performers at Ughwoton

Beautiful smile, of course, is an essential element that adds more values to the dance. Members of the ensemble and the audience spur the performance to climax with verbalized utterances that commend and encourage participants. Some of these are expressed as follows:

Wa do

An expression that means “You’ve performed well”

- *I----- iye*
Great, very great!
- *Aghwie abo*
Clap hands

5. 2. 4 Costume and paraphernalia

The costume and paraphernalia for Igoru performance vary for both sexes. The men tie a big wrapper, about six-yard measure (*egbru*) of any kind around their waist and put on short or long sleeve shirt (*ewun*), over a singlet (*ishimi*). The wrapper covers from the waist to the ankle and a light clothing material known as *okpogho* is chosen for the top, to avoid much perspiration. Any dancer, who eventually feels too hot in the course of the performance, may remove the shirt, leaving only the singlet. The performers wear silver bangle known as *iwuru* on their wrists. Some performers may also tie handkerchief on their wrists and muffler or scarf (*onerhon*) on their neck. The muffler is expected to extend downward like a tie. Another muffler is tied around their foreheads. The muffler is fastened to have two knot folds, one on each side, close to the ears and one or more beautiful feathers (*ulele*) are fixed to one of the folds. A cross-cultural similarity is found in Okafor’s discussion of the Ezeagu Etilogwu costume:

On the heads of the dancers, ...rest locally-made wigs shaped in oval forms. Two larger coloured ostrich or artificial fanciful feather/plumes are fastened to the front of these headgears and held down firmly on their heads with coloured scarfs tied over their fore heads. The outfit is attractive, cute and something to admire (Okafor, 1998; 46).

The female performers tie double wrapper of a kind (*oseba gbe aliku*), one slightly longer than the other, around their waist. The *aliku*, hereinafter referred to as the first wrapper, covers from the waist to the ankle, while the

oseba, the second wrapper, is tied over it from the waist to the shin. A strong fashionable rope (*umwaya*) often with a purse (*usumabe*) at the middle is tied over the first wrapper to hold it fast to the waist and keep money safely under the second wrapper which covers them (the rope and purse). During the performance, it is only the second wrapper that becomes adjustable when it becomes loose, since the first wrapper is securely held by the rope. The women put on blouse (*ewun*), over their bra and tuck it into the second wrapper and apply available cosmetics. They may either tie their traditional head tie, or use the knot muffler without a feather. Performers who have gold ornaments may also use them as necklace as stated earlier in chapter three.

5. 2. 5 Recruitment of members

Ka anyi mu nu Egwu” ([not italicized in original] Let us learn a Dance). With this invitation an individual can gather his/her ward members together – both young and old, male and female, for the purpose of forming an *Egwu Amala* group. Usually [,] the man or woman who takes this initiative is one who is competent in the performance... thus becomes the nucleus of the group when it is formed (Okwesa, 1988; 101).

As in the above observation from Aboh culture (Delta State, Nigeria), the initial recruitment in Igoru ensemble may begin in this manner. An open invitation is given by the chief organizer, who goes further to solicit the participation of skilled and talented members of the community at their various homes. When he/she has got a good number of willing members, a meeting is fixed to discuss modalities, appoint leaders, and commence rehearsals. Those who join the group at this stage, do so freely without paying fees. To enable the group take off effectively and be able to acquire the important needs of the ensemble, payment of dues may be introduced. The dues may be payable at weekly, bi-weekly or monthly rehearsals. New members are given the grace to join free during the first month, since some community

members would normally want to observe the group for sometime, to see whether it would survive or not; make meaningful progress, success and impact on the society or not, before they join its membership.

After the period of grace, the group introduces membership fees for those who may wish to join afterwards. Intending members were required to present a bottle of wine or locally brewed gin and certain sum of money to seek admission into the group. Any member of the community who is subsequently found to be talented could be encouraged to join the group with little or no cost. This was the case of Amereka Emakpọ in the Igoru ensemble of Ọkwovu Ọduado. Amereka Emakpọ (a.k.a *emro ekpako*, words of elders) was born twelve years before the first eclipse of the sun in 1947. He was about thirteen years when his musical talent became discovered. Around this period, one Collins Awọrejọ who was based in Warri felt the need to promote and sponsor any promising Igoru ensemble for recording. He therefore invited the Igoru ensembles of Jeddo and Ọkwovu Ọduado to a competition at Warri. He invited the Warri District officer who was a colonial master and a few other experts in music to form a panel of judges for the competition.

The ensemble from Jeddo performed first and received applause. But when the ensemble from Ọkwovu Ọduado ascended the stage to perform, there was an overwhelming ovation from the audience, which was a positive indication that they would win the competition. As the performance was in progress, a sudden heavy downpour arose and drenched the performers on stage. The performing group and some members of the audience believed that the Jeddo people were diabolically responsible for the rainfall, in order to disorganize the performance of their opponents. However, the assessment of the judges favoured the Ọkwovu Ọduado ensemble and it was declared winner. The members got home and spread the news around the community.

The boy, Amereka, heard this story and set it to Igoru music. On a certain day, his friend Idogho Odebala went with him on *Ifo* (exchange team work) to his father's palm oil processing farm, and as they were trampling the palm fruits in the canoe, he (Amereka) began to sing the narrative song. When they got home after the teamwork, the friend spread the news on how Amereka composed and sang this beautiful narrative of the competition experience. The elders who led the Ọkwovu Ọduado ensemble were intrigued by the news and felt the need to listen to the composition. Consequently, they met at elder Otegbikun Evaen's house by evening and sent for the boy, Amereka, to come and perform the song before them. Immediately after this performance, he was recruited into the Igoru ensemble without paying any admission fees. Whenever they had performances afterwards, the elders took him with them on a bicycle and gave him a fair share of the performance proceeds.

5. 2. 6 Training of members

Nzewi (1998: 460) argues that:

...training for expertise on master instruments, that play principal music and/or contextual roles in ensembles, is normally acquired intuitively by observing the experts. It is further consolidated with self-effort, basic to innate musical endowment or cultural ascription. Training for master musicianship roles demands mastership of the master musical instrument in the first instance. Additional requisite, is an understanding of the nature and variables of the programme of a context signified and directed by an event-music type... a gifted child would not normally need any special apprenticeship to become an expert. He/she simply graduates from a children's group or instrument species to a principal's role, once an opportunity occurs in an established adult ensemble, the performance dynamics of which he/she understands (Nzewi 1998: 460).

Peter Etalo (oral interview) argues that children learn from adult members of the community by observation and try their skills as they grow. The children

make use of any available opportunities such as beating the drums that are kept at their parents' homes and those they find at the scene of rehearsals. At adult level, when it becomes necessary to train any member of the ensemble, various techniques are employed. One of the first methods in the training process is that of conscious imitation often expressed as:

- *Kporie omana*

Play it like this

By this method, the instructor who is usually an expert takes the drum and sets the example to be followed. For the varied *ukiri* which has variations, the learning is done phrase by phrase or cycle by cycle. Thereafter, the learner attempts to put the phrases or variations together. Another technique is that of onomatopoeic verbalization of a melo-rhythmic phrases or structure in two distinctive tones. The instructor verbalizes the melo-rhythm of the instrument(s) and the learner is guided to reproduce it. Yemi Olaniyan (2001: 69) reports that the onomatopoeic statement *bo tan ma tun roko* meaning "if it ends, I shall return to the farm" is used to train children how to play the *gudugudu* drum in Yoruba land. In Igoru music, some of the onomatopoeia used to represent the melo-rhythm of the drums includes the following:

Kiki kōngigi kōgōn or *kiki kēngigi kēgēn* (for the mother *ukiri*)

Kikōn kikōn kikōn kikōn (for the baby *ukiri*)

Kēkēgēn, kēgēn kēgēn kēgēn (for varied *ukiri*)

The instructor may also teach the learner how to put the drum in proper playing position and how to place the left hand on the rim to depress the membrane and effect muting or stopping to generate higher tones. This may include a guide on how to use the drumstick to give strong and light strokes in order to generate two or more tones on the drum. When a certain level of mastery is achieved, the instructor or another instrumentalist in the group takes one other drum and tries to play together with the learner to give him

the experience of coordination. With a good deal of repetition during the training session, personal practice at other times and participation at general rehearsals, a higher level of mastery is gradually attained.

For a new member in the voice section, according to Udogu Michael Olocho, a practitioner of Igoru music:

His training begins with *uphele edamo* voice test. If the new members are more in number, the lead singer to handle their training sings a short song or phrase and instructs them to sing it after him. After some rounds, he/she allows those voices that are '*kpovi*' (sonorous) and are capable of reproducing tones accurately to keep quiet while others continue.

After this first step, the phrase by phrase method is applied in teaching a narrative song. The new member sings the phrases after the instructor. When the new member is a little sure of himself, the lead singer or old members sing with the learner, to enable him/her correct some of his/her mistakes without stopping the melodic flow. Sometimes the learner is required to sing together with the lower voice for the purpose of enhancing vocal group work which involves good aural perception.

Another level of training exists amongst lead singers. This is either by open invitation or observation approach. The first approach is taken when an ensemble, possibly a new one feels the need to be trained by a professional Igoru musician. What happens is that a special invitation is given to the desired artiste to leave his own town for the location of the host ensemble to train her lead singers over a period of time. He/she is well catered for and paid some honorarium at the end of the training. For example, Idisi Adibo of

Onyeke was invited to teach a group at Adagbrassa Amwokpe, Ajekakitie near Adagbrassa Amwokpe and Deghele Elume. Some of the lead singers he taught include Adarighofua of Aghalokpe, Johnson the blind of Adagbrassa Amwokpe and Ebiaigbe Egbedi of Deghele Elume. Udogu Olocho of Mereje was also invited to train lead singers at Deghele Elume. He remembers training Titi Ukereti and Odjugo Legos.

The second approach by observation occurs when a group of singers feel the need to acquire more skills and new songs without the knowledge of the model artiste(s). Sometimes this method may involve participation in the ensemble that is understudied. This approach was taken by Amukeye Okodide, Odjugo Legos and other lead singers in Ughwoton who travelled to Ugbitię Ekọkọ and sojourned there for three days, watching the rehearsals and performances of an Igoru ensemble.

5. 3 Medicine for voice sonority and courage

Igoru musicians practice what is called *uphele eghwe*, washing or clearing of the voice, to enable lead singers produce very clear tones and sing mellifluously. When the voice is hoarse, the singer may have to chew some *erhien*, commonly known as alligator pepper, to clear the voice. Some may chew some seeds of *erhien* with *ovben oluko*, young leaf of a plantain sucker while others may chew *ishawo okpokpo*, fresh okro, to clear the voice.

A special medicine may be prepared from a certain herb called *ehwẹromo*. The herb is collected, squashed and soused into a bowl of water and seven slices of ripe plantain are added to it. The lead singer then picks a slice of plantain in his right hand and puts it into his mouth. After chewing and swallowing it, he/she uses his bare left hand to take a sip from the liquid content of the medicine. He/she must start and end the action with the right hand, because it is considered significant for the efficacy of the medicine as the right hand is stronger than the left in majority of cases. The action of picking the slice and taking the water is repeated seven times, alternating the functions of the two hands successively. The number 3, 7 and 9 are very significant in Okpe traditional medicine practice. Whenever elders call on God, a deity or the spirit of an ancestor to give power to medicine or sacrifice, they would call three times, and remark that an elder must hear a report three times (before confirming it). The number, seven signifies gathering of power, in that the Okpe believe that the spirit of the dead lives on the earth for seven days to prepare for the journey to the wonderful world beyond. The number, nine signifies long life, because *irhirin* (9) and *rhiririn* (very long time or everlasting) are philosophically related homophones. By the time the singer finishes the seven slices, he would have also sipped from the liquid content seven times and this prepares and makes the voice very sonorous for musical performances.

The performance of Igoru music requires a lot of courage, because it is not easy to say 'boo to a goose', as the narratives make direct reference to names and images of personalities. Oral accounts testify that there were occasions when some of the subjects felt so humiliated, derided and demoralized by such performance expositions and they wept bitterly and openly at the scene of performance. For one to perform an oral narrative in songs to sanction a chief in his presence and point hand at him to reveal his identity to the audience without fear is something extraordinary. Thus, performers would prepare medicines to give them courage and protection. One of such medicines is called *uhaghwa*. The ensemble leader prepares and installs it somewhere in his house. Prior to any rehearsal or performance, he pours libation on it and says some incantations, requesting the powers that are behind it to defend them from any attacks. Each lead singer may also seek and possess powerful medicines for his/her own protection.

Apart from the courage to perform before the subjects, amongst whom may be sorcerers, the courage to overcome stage nervousness is also required. Some musicians therefore feel the need to prepare medicines that could make them bold. One of such medicines was administered to Amereka Emakpo during his first public performance. According to him, when the elders summoned him to elder Otegbikun Evaen's house to perform his Igoru composition on the competition earlier discussed, he was too shy and nervous to sing before the crowd, particularly, the women who stood by the door and window scared him most. He attempted to sing the song several times, but could not raise his voice to continue. Some of the people around thought that he had been charmed, or put under spell, but the great elder Unugbrogodo Ẹkure perceived that the little boy was simply nervous.

While others were trying to urge him on, Unugbrogodo, the most experienced Igoru musician of Ọkwovu Ọduado, quickly went home and came back with the courage-giving medicine. He then brought out a small *atẹtẹ*, woven tray, and *atita*, very small piece of stone. The tray had a red vertical line on its diameter, dividing the circumference into two semi-circles. The line is drawn with *ukpamaran*; red can wood substance, which equally covers one of the semi-circles, while the other semi-circle was painted white by use of kaolin chalk (*orhen*). The elder put the stone at the centre of the tray and poured some locally brewed gin on it with some incantations. He further took the stone and dabbed it on Amereka's chest saying "Ofa ọvbọ rua unye-e". Meaning "The housefly does not get ashamed". He dabbed it again on his back (*udu erhumu*) and uttered the same statement. Then he took the tray up, used it to fan Amereka's face. Thereafter, he instructed him to sing without shame or stage fright. He was then able to sing the song at once.

Some musicians also have what is called *ifuen*, medicine that is capable of stopping the effects of poison and uncontrollable performance mania (*oruru*). In the case of the former, whenever feelings strange of pain or ailment are experienced by any Igoru musician, if he/she has an *Ifuen*, he/she takes it and commands it to stop. For the latter, whenever it becomes necessary to have a short break or close a performance, and the musician's overflowing inspiration (*oruru*) has strong hold on him that he/she is unable to stop, the *ifuen* is administered to him/her. For some musicians like Amereka Emakpo, when the force of inspiration comes over him, his legs would begin to shake and vibrate and the songs would keep flowing from memory. According to him, his mother told him that he inherited the experience from one of her half brothers Esanukpe Itiyo who was a great traditional musician.

Esanukpe was said to have had great inspiration and also composed songs into a matchbox as Amereka does. Whenever the *oruru*, intractable inspiration, manifests in an Igoru performer, a coal-fire or lit cigarette is put into a cup of water and given to him to drink as *Ifuen*. The moment he takes a sip from the liquid, he becomes calm.