

The Influence of African Rhythms on Modern Music: A Case Study of Afrobeat in Nigeria

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Abstract

This abstract provides a concise overview of the discussion on Afrobeat, encompassing its historical roots, global influence, challenges, and future prospects. Afrobeat, originating from Nigeria, has achieved enduring global recognition for its rhythmic complexities and socially conscious themes. The genre's journey, marked by collaborations and adaptability, is discussed, along with the challenges it faces, such as commercialization and socio-political complexities. The abstract concludes by highlighting Afrobeat's potential for future innovation and the importance of educational initiatives in preserving its authenticity.

Keywords: Afrobeat, global influence, cultural roots, future prospects, socio-political activism

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Overview of Africa's Rich Musical Heritage and Historical Significance of Rhythms

Africa's musical tapestry is woven with an intricate blend of traditional rhythms, cultural expressions, and communal experiences. Each region of the continent boasts its own unique musical dialect, contributing to the rich diversity that characterizes African music.

Historically, rhythms in African music have held multifaceted significance. They have served as more than just beats; they have been the heartbeat of communities, carrying stories, rituals, and emotions. From the ancient drumming traditions of West Africa to the melodic expressions of the East, these rhythms have been an integral part of everyday life, religious ceremonies, and rites of passage.

The transatlantic slave trade played a pivotal role in disseminating African rhythms beyond the continent's borders. As Africans were forcibly displaced to the Americas, they carried with them their musical heritage, which found new expressions in the diaspora. The fusion of African rhythms with local musical traditions in the Americas gave birth to genres such as jazz, blues, and funk, creating a profound and lasting impact on global music.

This historical journey sets the stage for a focused exploration into one of Africa's musical genres, Afrobeat, and its role in shaping modern global music. Afrobeat, born in Nigeria, stands as a testament to the enduring influence of African rhythms on the world stage.

2. Historical Roots of African Rhythms

2.1 Traditional African Rhythms

2.1.1 Overview of Diverse African Rhythms and Their Cultural Significance

The rhythmic heartbeat of Africa is a tapestry woven with a rich array of traditional rhythms, each carrying its unique cultural significance. This section aims to provide a panoramic view of the diversity embedded within

African rhythms, elucidating their cultural importance across various regions of the continent.

Africa's musical landscape is a mosaic, with each region boasting distinct rhythmic patterns that reflect the unique history, customs, and rituals of its people. In West Africa, the intricate drumming traditions of the Yoruba, Ashanti, and Mandinka people have given rise to complex polyrhythms, a hallmark of the region's musical identity. These rhythms are not mere sonic expressions but serve as a means of communication, conveying messages, stories, and emotions within communities.

Moving eastward, the rhythmic traditions of Central Africa feature the mesmerizing beats of the djembe, a drum that transcends its percussion role to become a vessel of spiritual expression. The Congo Basin, home to diverse ethnic groups, contributes pulsating rhythms that underpin traditional dances and ceremonies, creating a visceral connection between the people and their cultural heritage.

In Southern Africa, the rhythmic footwork of traditional dances, accompanied by instruments like the marimba, reflects the region's dynamic cultural landscape. The interplay of rhythm and movement is not only an artistic expression but a celebration of communal bonds and storytelling.

The cultural significance of African rhythms extends beyond entertainment. Rhythms are woven into the fabric of life, marking rites of passage, agricultural cycles, and spiritual ceremonies. They are the sonic embodiment of Africa's rich oral traditions, encapsulating narratives of history, mythology, and identity.

The transatlantic slave trade dispersed African rhythms across the globe, where they found new expressions in the Americas. Jazz, blues, and funk emerged as genres deeply rooted in African rhythmic traditions, creating a lasting legacy that continues to influence contemporary music.

2.2 Migration and Exchange

2.2.1 Analysis of Historical Factors, Including the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Its Impact on Global Music

The transatlantic slave trade stands as a monumental historical event that profoundly influenced the migration of African peoples and facilitated the exchange of their cultural expressions on a global scale. This period, spanning from the 15th to the 19th centuries, not only witnessed the forced displacement of millions of Africans but also became a transformative chapter in the history of music, particularly through its impact on the genres that emerged in the Americas.

The transatlantic slave trade disrupted established African musical traditions as individuals were uprooted from their homelands. However, rather than eradicating these cultural expressions, it prompted a process of adaptation and resilience among the African diaspora. In the face of adversity, captives managed to preserve elements of their musical heritage, adapting and amalgamating them with new influences encountered in the Americas.

This forced migration gave rise to a complex interplay of cultures, resulting in syncretism where African musical elements blended with indigenous traditions and European influences. The fusion of these diverse cultural elements laid the foundation for the emergence of new and unique musical genres.

African rhythms became an integral part of the musical tapestry in the Americas, leaving an indelible mark on genres such as jazz and blues. Jazz, with its syncopated rhythms and improvisational nature, reflected the influence of African musical traditions. The emotive vocal expressions and call-and-response structures found in blues further showcased the deep connection to African roots.

This musical exchange was not confined to a specific region or era but contributed significantly to the global diversity of music. The impact of African rhythms transcended borders, influencing various musical traditions worldwide. The enduring legacy of these rhythms is evident in contemporary genres like hip-hop, R&B, and electronic music, where artists continue to draw inspiration from the rhythmic innovations born out of the transatlantic slave trade.

2.3 Diaspora Musical Styles

2.3.1 Exploration of How African Rhythms Influenced Genres Like Jazz, Blues, and Funk

The influence of African rhythms on diaspora music is a captivating narrative that unfolds across genres, encapsulating the essence of the diasporic experience and the transformative power of cultural exchange. This section delves into the intricate ways in which African rhythms shaped and gave birth to iconic genres such as jazz, blues, and funk in the Americas.

African Rhythms in Jazz: Jazz, often hailed as America's classical music, is a genre deeply rooted in African rhythmic traditions. The polyrhythmic complexities and improvisational spirit found in African music became foundational elements of jazz. The syncopation and rhythmic interplay within jazz compositions echo the vibrant drumming traditions of West Africa. From New Orleans to Harlem, jazz became a melting pot where African rhythms, European harmonies, and American innovation converged.

Blues and Its African Roots: The blues, with its expressive vocals, soulful guitar riffs, and raw emotional power, is another genre profoundly influenced by African rhythms. The call-and-response structures and the emphasis on storytelling through music mirror African oral traditions. The expressive and often improvisational nature of blues guitar playing reflects the African practice of creating music as a communal and personal expression. The blues became a poignant channel for African Americans to convey their experiences, struggles, and triumphs.

Funk's Rhythmic Revolution: Funk, emerging in the 1960s and 1970s, brought a rhythmic revolution to the musical landscape. Rooted in the rhythmic innovations of African diaspora music, funk is characterized by its infectious grooves, syncopated basslines, and emphasis on the "one." Drawing inspiration from African drumming traditions, funk artists such as James Brown and George Clinton created a sonic palette that reverberated with the rhythmic pulse of Africa. The use of polyrhythms and the rhythmic interplay among instruments in funk showcase a direct lineage to African musical roots.

3. Afrobeat: Emergence and Characteristics

3.1 Birth of Afrobeat

3.1.1 Historical Context of Afrobeat's Emergence in Nigeria During the Late 1960s and 1970s

The birth of Afrobeat marks a pivotal moment in the evolution of contemporary African music, particularly in Nigeria, during the late 1960s and 1970s. This section delves into the historical context that laid the foundation for the emergence of Afrobeat as a unique and influential genre.

Nigeria's Socio-Political Landscape: During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Nigeria was undergoing significant socio-political changes. The nation had recently gained independence in 1960, and the post-colonial period was marked by a fervent desire for cultural identity and a rejection of colonial influences. Nigeria was navigating the complexities of nation-building, grappling with ethnic diversity, and seeking a distinctive voice on the global stage.

Fela Kuti and His Musical Vision: At the forefront of this cultural and political awakening was Fela Kuti, a visionary Nigerian musician and bandleader. Fela was deeply influenced by traditional African rhythms, jazz, and highlife music, and he sought to create a genre that would encapsulate the essence of African identity while addressing contemporary social and political issues.

Afrobeat as a Musical Fusion: Fela Kuti, along with his ensemble Africa '70, fused traditional Yoruba rhythms, highlife, jazz, and funk into a revolutionary sound that he termed "Afrobeat." The genre was characterized by its extended song structures, complex polyrhythms, and socially conscious lyrics. Fela's music became a powerful form of cultural resistance, challenging corruption, oppression, and neocolonialism in Nigeria.

Political Activism Through Music: Afrobeat, beyond its musical innovations, became a platform for political activism and social critique. Fela's lyrics boldly addressed issues such as government corruption, human rights abuses, and the struggles of the common people. His songs, often lengthy and groove-driven, served as anthems for those advocating for change in Nigeria and beyond.

Legacy and Global Impact: While rooted in Nigeria, Afrobeat quickly gained international acclaim. Fela Kuti's charismatic performances and unapologetic political stance resonated with audiences worldwide. Afrobeat's influence extended beyond music, permeating into the realms of art, fashion, and social movements. Even after Fela's passing in 1997, Afrobeat continued to evolve, with contemporary artists across the globe drawing inspiration from its rhythmic complexity and socio-political engagement.

3.2 Musical Elements

3.2.1 Detailed Examination of Afrobeat's Key Musical Components

At the heart of Afrobeat lies a captivating amalgamation of musical elements that collectively define its distinctive sound. This genre, pioneered by Fela Kuti, reflects a harmonious fusion of traditional African rhythms, jazz, highlife, and funk. The intricate interplay of these elements has not only shaped Afrobeat's musical identity but has also contributed to its enduring influence.

The polyrhythmic complexity within Afrobeat serves as a foundational element, drawing inspiration from traditional African drumming traditions. Multiple rhythmic patterns, generated by an array of percussion instruments such as drums, congas, and talking drums, converge to create a captivating tapestry of sound. This polyrhythmic richness, deeply rooted in African musical heritage, forms the heartbeat of Afrobeat, inviting listeners into a rhythmic journey of unparalleled depth.

Afrobeat's extended song structures, a departure from conventional Western norms, allow for the gradual unfolding of musical ideas. This characteristic mirrors the traditional African approach to music, where the focus is not on quick resolutions but on the organic development of themes. The extended format provides musicians with ample room for improvisation, fostering a dynamic and evolving musical conversation within the ensemble.

A defining feature of Afrobeat is its vibrant horn arrangements. The brass section, consisting of trumpets, saxophones, and trombones, adds a bold and expressive layer to the music. These horn arrangements contribute to the genre's infectious energy, creating melodic hooks that complement the intricate rhythms. The horns in Afrobeat serve as both musical embellishments and powerful tools for conveying emotive messages within the composition.

Improvisation is a fundamental aspect of Afrobeat's musical language. Musicians within the ensemble are granted the freedom to explore and expand upon musical themes, infusing each performance with a sense of spontaneity. This improvisational spirit not only showcases the technical prowess of the musicians but also adds a dynamic and unpredictable element to Afrobeat, making each rendition a unique and evolving experience.

Beyond its musical intricacies, Afrobeat distinguishes itself through socially conscious lyrics. Fela Kuti, a musical visionary and activist, used his music to address pressing societal issues, including government corruption, human rights abuses, and socio-political struggles. The marriage of compelling musical arrangements with potent lyrical content elevates Afrobeat beyond mere entertainment, establishing it as a genre that engages with the socio-political landscape.

3.3 Afrobeat Icons

3.3.1 Profiles of Influential Figures

Afrobeat, as a genre, owes much of its evolution and global influence to the visionary contributions of iconic figures who shaped its identity. Two pivotal figures stand out prominently in the Afrobeat narrative: Fela Kuti and Tony Allen.

Fela Kuti: Fela Anikulapo Kuti, often hailed as the “Father of Afrobeat,” was a Nigerian multi-instrumentalist, composer, and political activist. Born in 1938 in Abeokuta, Nigeria, Fela's early exposure to music came from his parents, both accomplished musicians. In the late 1960s, Fela traveled to London to study music, where he was profoundly influenced by jazz and the Black Power movement.



Figure 1. Fela Kuti

Upon returning to Nigeria, Fela began to forge a musical path that would transcend genres. He fused traditional African rhythms, highlife, jazz, and funk into a revolutionary sound, coining the term “Afrobeat.” Fela's music was not merely entertainment; it was a potent form of resistance against government corruption, human rights abuses, and neocolonialism. His compositions, often extended in duration, allowed for improvisation and served as platforms for social and political commentary.

Fela's impact extended beyond his musical prowess; he was a fearless and vocal critic of the Nigerian government. His political activism resulted in multiple arrests, beatings, and even a raid on his commune, Kalakuta Republic. Fela's unyielding commitment to justice and cultural pride left an indelible mark on Afrobeat and positioned him as a global cultural icon. Despite his passing in 1997, Fela's legacy continues to inspire generations of musicians and activists worldwide.

Tony Allen: Tony Oladipo Allen, a Nigerian drummer and songwriter born in 1940, played a foundational role in shaping the rhythmic core of Afrobeat. Tony Allen's collaboration with Fela Kuti in the Africa '70 band was

instrumental in defining the genre's percussive identity. His drumming style, characterized by complex polyrhythms, became synonymous with the Afrobeat sound.



Figure 2. Tony Allen

Allen's rhythmic innovations were not confined to Afrobeat; they influenced a broad spectrum of genres, including jazz, funk, and electronic music. His drumming was marked by a dynamic and inventive approach, creating a rhythmic foundation that allowed for the genre's experimental and improvisational elements to flourish. His influence extended globally, impacting musicians far beyond the African continent.

Even after parting ways with Fela in the late 1970s, Tony Allen continued to push the boundaries of rhythmic expression. His solo career showcased his versatility and mastery of various genres, solidifying his status as a drumming legend. Tony Allen's passing in 2020 marked the end of an era, but his rhythmic legacy remains ingrained in the fabric of Afrobeat and contemporary music.

4. Global Impact of Afrobeat

4.1 Afrobeat's Reach

4.1.1 Data-Driven Analysis of Afrobeat's Global Influence

Afrobeat, originating in Nigeria, has transcended its geographical boundaries to become a global musical phenomenon. A data-driven analysis provides insights into the extent of Afrobeat's influence on the international stage.

Streaming and Digital Presence: One key metric illustrating Afrobeat's global impact is its performance on streaming platforms. Data reveals a significant increase in Afrobeat's streaming numbers over the past decade. The genre's tracks, characterized by their infectious rhythms and socially conscious themes, have garnered millions of streams on platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube. This surge in digital consumption underscores Afrobeat's resonance with a diverse and global audience.

Chart Performance: Examining Afrobeat's presence on music charts offers a quantitative measure of its popularity. Collaborations between Afrobeat artists and international musicians have resulted in chart-topping hits. Notable examples include collaborations between Nigerian artists like Wizkid and Burna Boy with global stars, contributing to Afrobeat's visibility on charts in various countries. Afrobeat's recurrent presence on global charts underscores its ability to capture the attention of listeners worldwide.

Collaborations Across Genres: Analyzing collaborative efforts between Afrobeat artists and musicians from other genres provides valuable insights into the genre's cross-cultural influence. Afrobeat's fusion-friendly nature has led to collaborations with artists in hip-hop, pop, and electronic music. These partnerships have not only expanded Afrobeat's sonic palette but have also facilitated its integration into diverse global music scenes.

Concert Attendance and Festivals: Live performances and festival appearances offer a tangible measure of Afrobeat's global reach. Data on concert attendance and festival line-ups reveal a growing demand for Afrobeat

artists on international stages. Major music festivals around the world now routinely feature Afrobeat acts, attracting diverse audiences and contributing to the genre's live performance presence on a global scale.

Social Media Impact: Afrobeat's influence extends beyond traditional music platforms to social media. Hashtag trends, challenges, and user-generated content related to Afrobeat on platforms like Instagram and TikTok contribute to its virality. The genre's ability to engage audiences on social media platforms has become a significant factor in its global visibility and impact.

4.2 Sampling and Adaptation

4.2.1 Exploration of How Afrobeat Elements Have Been Sampled and Adapted Across Genres

The far-reaching influence of Afrobeat extends well beyond its traditional boundaries, as it seamlessly integrates into diverse musical landscapes through sampling and adaptation. One prominent genre that has embraced Afrobeat elements is hip-hop, where producers and artists frequently draw upon its rhythms, horn arrangements, and vocal nuances to create innovative beats. This synergy has resulted in chart-topping hits, establishing Afrobeat as an integral part of hip-hop's sonic vocabulary.

In the realm of pop music, known for its eclectic nature, Afrobeat elements have found a welcoming space. Catchy hooks, vibrant percussion, and Afrobeat-inspired melodies have become essential components of mainstream pop songs. The fusion of Afrobeat with pop aesthetics produces infectious and danceable tunes that resonate globally, showcasing the genre's adaptability.

Electronic music, with its penchant for rhythmic experimentation, has incorporated Afrobeat's complex percussion patterns and polyrhythms into compositions. This blending of traditional Afrobeat elements with modern electronic production techniques has given rise to sub-genres that push the boundaries of sonic innovation.

Even in rock and alternative music, genres traditionally distinct from Afrobeat, its influence has left a lasting impression. Artists experiment with incorporating Afrobeat rhythms into guitar-driven compositions, demonstrating the genre's versatility and its capacity to complement a wide range of musical styles.

Cross-genre collaborations showcase Afrobeat's adaptability at its finest. Artists from diverse cultural backgrounds come together to create music that defies traditional genre classifications. Afrobeat elements seamlessly merge with various musical traditions, resulting in innovative compositions that transcend cultural boundaries.

Beyond the realm of music, Afrobeat's cinematic quality has made it a sought-after choice for film and television soundtracks. Its infectious rhythms and evocative melodies enhance the visual storytelling experience, contributing to a diverse and culturally rich audiovisual landscape.

5. Contemporary Significance and Future Prospects

5.1 Examination of Current Artists Continuing to Draw Inspiration from Afrobeat

In the contemporary music landscape, Afrobeat stands as a vibrant and influential genre, continuing to inspire a new generation of artists. The genre's rhythmic complexity, socially conscious themes, and fusion-friendly nature have paved the way for a diverse array of musicians who draw inspiration from Afrobeat in innovative ways.

One notable figure in the contemporary Afrobeat scene is Burna Boy. This Nigerian artist has gained international acclaim for seamlessly blending traditional Afrobeat elements with modern sounds. Burna Boy's success not only resonates within Africa but also underscores Afrobeat's global appeal, showcasing its capacity to transcend cultural boundaries.

Wizkid, another Nigerian artist, has also played a significant role in popularizing Afrobeat on the global stage. His music skillfully combines Afrobeat with reggae, dancehall, and R&B, reflecting the genre's adaptability and its ability to integrate with diverse musical styles. Collaborations with international artists further emphasize Afrobeat's cross-cultural influence.

Afrobeat collectives have emerged as well, both within Africa and globally, actively engaging with the genre's traditions while pushing its boundaries. These collectives, comprised of musicians, producers, and dancers, collaborate to create dynamic expressions of Afrobeat that capture its cultural richness.

Beyond artists with direct connections to Africa, Afrobeat's influence extends into global genres. Musicians in hip-hop, pop, and electronic music continue to incorporate Afrobeat elements into their work. The genre's infectious rhythms and vibrant instrumentation have become a source of inspiration for artists seeking to infuse their music with a global rhythm and cultural richness.

Some contemporary artists are pushing the envelope further by experimenting with Afrobeat fusion. This

involves blending Afrobeat with genres such as jazz, funk, and experimental electronic music. The result is a sonic landscape that not only pays homage to Afrobeat's roots but also contributes to the genre's evolution in unexpected and exciting ways.

Similar to the socio-political activism seen in the early days of Afrobeat, contemporary artists are using the genre as a medium for cultural activism. Issues such as social justice, inequality, and environmental concerns are addressed in their music, echoing Fela Kuti's legacy of using Afrobeat as a tool for raising awareness and inspiring change.

5.2 Discussion on Challenges Faced by Afrobeat and Future Prospects

Despite its global influence and enduring popularity, Afrobeat faces a set of challenges that shape its present context. Simultaneously, the genre holds promising prospects for the future, driven by its adaptability, cross-cultural appeal, and the creativity of contemporary artists.

Challenges:

(1) Commercialization and Homogenization: One challenge Afrobeat confronts is the risk of commercialization and homogenization. As the genre gains popularity globally, there is a concern that its distinct characteristics may be diluted to cater to mainstream tastes. The challenge lies in preserving Afrobeat's authenticity while navigating the demands of a commercialized music industry.

(2) Cultural Appropriation: The risk of cultural appropriation is another concern. As Afrobeat elements become integrated into various global genres, there is a need to ensure that the cultural origins and significance of the genre are respected. It is essential to avoid superficial usage that may strip Afrobeat of its cultural depth and meaning.

(3) Socio-Political Challenges: Afrobeat's historical roots in socio-political activism pose challenges in the contemporary context. Artists engaging in socio-political commentary may face backlash or even censorship, especially in regions where dissent is met with resistance. Balancing artistic expression with political engagement remains a delicate task.

Future Prospects:

(1) Continued Global Fusion: Afrobeat's ability to fuse with diverse musical genres provides a foundation for future innovation. The genre's cross-cultural adaptability opens avenues for collaboration and experimentation, contributing to a rich and evolving musical landscape.

(2) Preservation of Authenticity: Preserving the authenticity of Afrobeat amidst its global expansion is crucial. Artists and stakeholders must actively work to maintain the genre's unique characteristics, ensuring that it retains its cultural roots while embracing new creative expressions.

(3) Social Impact and Activism: Afrobeat's tradition of social activism through music presents an opportunity for artists to address contemporary global issues. Future prospects include the genre continuing to serve as a platform for social impact, raising awareness, and inspiring positive change.

(4) Educational Initiatives: To secure Afrobeat's future, educational initiatives can play a pivotal role. Integrating Afrobeat into music curricula, both in Africa and internationally, can foster a deeper understanding of the genre's cultural significance and contribute to its continued legacy.

5.3 Recapitulation of Afrobeat's Enduring Global Influence and Potential for Further Innovation

Afrobeat, originating from the vibrant cultural tapestry of Nigeria, has transcended its roots to become a globally recognized and influential musical genre. Its rhythmic complexities, socially conscious themes, and fusion-friendly nature have contributed to its enduring appeal. Afrobeat's journey from its beginnings on the streets of Lagos to international stages illustrates its ability to resonate with diverse audiences.

The genre's global influence is evident in streaming numbers, chart performances, and collaborations that span continents. Afrobeat's infectious rhythms have found a place in the hearts of listeners worldwide, creating a shared musical language that transcends cultural boundaries. Its enduring impact lies not only in its sonic qualities but also in its ability to convey powerful messages, addressing social and political issues.

Looking ahead, Afrobeat holds the potential for further innovation. Artists continue to draw inspiration from its rich traditions, infusing the genre with fresh perspectives and experimenting with diverse musical styles. The fusion of traditional elements with modern sounds allows Afrobeat to remain dynamic and relevant, appealing to new generations of listeners.

Educational initiatives and cultural preservation efforts play a vital role in shaping Afrobeat's future. By integrating the genre into academic curricula and cultural programs, there is an opportunity to deepen understanding and ensure its legacy is passed on. The commitment to preserving Afrobeat's authenticity while

embracing contemporary influences ensures that the genre continues to evolve without losing its cultural roots.

In summary, Afrobeat's enduring global influence is a testament to its cultural significance and musical brilliance. As it moves forward, Afrobeat's potential for further innovation and its ability to connect with diverse audiences position it as a dynamic force in the ever-evolving landscape of global music.

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