

MUSICAL INTERRUPTION AND CRITICAL SPECTATORSHIP: A BRECHTIAN ANALYSIS OF SONGS IN SAMARU PROJECT.

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Abstract

Songs in street theatre do not merely accompany action; they shape its rhythm, structure its progression, and mediate its relationship with the public. Music is a defining yet under-theorized element of Nigerian street theatre practice. While theatre researches acknowledge the presence of songs in public performance traditions, limited attention has been given to songs beyond aesthetical embellishments especially in street theatre. The aim of this paper is to document the efforts of the A.B.U. theatre practice in the employment of songs and music in fostering audience engagement in street theatre practice. This study adopts a qualitative methodology, employing analysis of song scripts and performance observation to investigate the structural and critical functions of music in contemporary Nigerian street theatre. Drawing on Bertolt Brecht's theory of Epic Theatre, particularly his concepts of alienation (Verfremdungseffekt), musical interruption, and commentary, the paper argues that songs in Samaru Project function as deliberate dramaturgical intervention rather than decorative accompaniments. Through interlude placement, repetition, direct address, and declarative lyricism, songs interrupt narrative flow, comment on staged action, and redirect audience attention toward social evaluation. The paper argues that in street theatre, songs are as viable and central as acting to kindle critical spectatorship. The paper concludes that foregrounding song as a structural and ideological device in public performance contexts and advances understanding of how music operates as a mechanism for critical engagement in communal spaces is crucial. The paper recommends that there is the need to conduct impact studies with spectators to locate the depth in which songs encourage critical spectatorship in street theatre for a holistic understanding of the efficacy of songs in street performances.

Keywords: Epic Theatre, Gestus, Critical Spectatorship, Musical Dramaturgy, Nigerian Performance, Street Theatre.

Introduction

Street theatre thrives on immediacy, visibility, and direct engagement within public space. Unlike proscenium performance, it unfolds in open environments where distraction, interruption, and unpredictability are constant conditions; from vehicles passing and honking, hawkers advertising their products and services, children returning from school and chattering, to loud sounds of grinding machines and generators. Within these contexts, performers rely on expressive strategies capable of capturing attention quickly, sustaining audience presence, and communicating meaning with clarity. Among these strategies, music emerges as one of the most effective and resilient

communicative devices. Songs in street theatre do not merely accompany action; they shape its rhythm, structure its progression, and mediate its relationship with the public.

In communal spaces, musical expression is deeply embedded within performance culture. Song, chant, and call-and-response patterns reflect indigenous performance traditions in which music, movement, and narrative are inseparable (Abah, 2013). Within contemporary street theatre performances, songs often serve functions that extend beyond cultural continuity or aesthetic enrichment. They act as structural connectors between scenes, mnemonic anchors for key messages, and participatory bridges between performers and audiences (Brown & Volgsten: 2006). However, while music's presence in street theatre is widely acknowledged, its dramaturgical construction and critical function remain under-examined and under-documented.

To unpack the dramaturgical construction and critical function of songs, this study approaches the application of music in street theatre particularly Samaru Project through the lens of Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre, principally his use of song as a device of alienation (*Verfremdungseffekt*). For Brecht, music was not intended to intensify illusion or deepen emotional immersion; rather, it functioned as interruption, commentary, and analytical pause. Through repetition and direct address, songs draw spectators into collective engagement, transforming passive onlookers into responsive spectators (Brecht, 1964). In performance, songs disrupt narrative continuity, expose social contradictions, and invite spectators to think critically about staged realities. Applying this framework to Samaru Project enables reconsideration of songs not as ornamental interludes but as deliberate dramaturgical interventions.

Focusing on the Samaru Project as case study, this paper examines how songs operate as structural, communicative, and critical devices within contemporary street theatre practice. By analysing lyrics, thematic construction, interlude placement, and in some instances spectator's reactions, the study demonstrates that songs in Nigerian street theatre function as apparatuses that reframe performance action and stimulate reflective spectatorship. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing discourse in performance studies and applied theatre by foregrounding the dramaturgical and ideological significance of musical form in public performance contexts.

Statement of the Problem

Music is widely recognized as an integral component of street theatre performance, serving functions that range from audience mobilization and participation to thematic reinforcement and performance continuity. However, while scholarship on street theatre acknowledges the presence and importance of musical elements, there remains limited documentation on how music and songs operate as devices for critical spectatorship. This gap in practice-based documentation creates a disconnect between theoretical discussions of music in street theatre performance and the lived creative processes through which song and music advance performances. Without such documentation, the dramaturgical role of music in shaping audience engagement, message transmission, and performance flow in street theatre remains insufficiently articulated. Practice-based analyses of the function of music in street theatre performances therefore become necessary for understanding how music operates as invitation to spectators to think critically about staged realities by functioning as interruption, commentary, and analytical pause.

Music in Street Theatre

Street theatre is a very crucial avenue to raise people's consciousness to their problems (Iroh, 2020, p. 89). Swamy (2011, p.1) noted that "though street theatre bears close affinity to the folk theatre, it is more of a participatory process in its approach. In that sense it is people centred art rather than a mere performance oriented art form." In other words, street theatre operates like communal festivities but in this case, the aim is not for celebration, but for initiating change and communicating socially relevant issues among the masses. The bottom line of street theatre performances is that they are aimed at the masses; an avenue they easily relate to and readily participate in. Street theatre is like the testing ground for change that is to come, the "rehearsal for revolution" in the words of Augusto Boal (2008). If street theatre must serve the role of rehearsal for revolution, or change that is to come, then the spectators must be awake, engaged and 'sitting at the edge of their chairs' (Brecht, 1964).

Based on the fact that performances often occur in open and unpredictable environments, performers rely on expressive devices that can quickly attract attention, communicate meaning clearly, and sustain audience engagement. Music has therefore become one of the most enduring structural and communicative elements of street theatre practice to raise people's consciousness. Scholars of popular and community performance note that street theatre frequently draws from indigenous performance traditions in which music, rhythm, and chant are inseparable from dramatic expression. Kershaw (1992), in his work on performance in public spaces, argues that performance outside conventional theatre buildings must establish rapid connections with audiences. Musical elements such as rhythm, repetition, and call-and-response patterns help create these connections by inviting audiences into the performance experience. In many cases, music becomes the primary means through which performers establish rapport with spectators in informal performance environments. Beyond establishing rapport, between the performers and spectators, music also serves as the link through which action or series of action in the performance are examined and re-examined to stimulate critical spectatorship.

Schechner (2013) observes that public performance traditions across cultures integrate song and movement as part of a holistic performance language rather than treating them as separate artistic elements. Within street theatre, this integration allows music to function simultaneously as narration, commentary, and audience engagement. Street theatre's reliance on collective participation further explains the importance of music. The use of song in street theatre is also closely tied to memory and message retention. Since street performances often address social or political issues in compressed timeframes, performers rely on musical repetition and simple lyrical structures to make key ideas memorable. According to Swamy (2011, p. 2):

...the term street theatre denotes a group drama played out in the outdoor; in which group of actors can also interact with the members of the audience directly. Unlike other folk theatre forms the purpose of street theatre is not only to entertain but also to trigger activism. Aesthetic parameters are just as important as the objective of disseminating messages of development and broader social and democratic values. Minimum use of properties or costumes and set up and use of colloquial languages peppered with songs and dance and other folk art forms are the important aesthetic features of street plays.

In interpreting of Swamy's (2011) position, songs are viewed and used as aesthetic parameters in street theatre. Contrary to this view, songs through the lens of the Epic Theatre become the subject for disseminating messages side by side drama and other artistic forms. Musical expression helps translate dramatic action into culturally familiar forms that audiences can easily interpret and respond to. The accessibility of song makes it particularly suited to multilingual and multi-generational audiences commonly found in public performance settings. In this light, music contributes to the dramaturgy of street theatre by signaling transitions between scenes, introducing characters, summarizing dramatic action, or redirecting audience attention when distractions occur in open performance spaces. Through rhythm and melody, performers can maintain performance continuity even when environmental interruptions arise.

Music and Songs in Nigerian Street Theatre

Music has long been embedded within Nigerian performance traditions, functioning as a communicative and expressive force that shapes theatrical experience and audience participation. Within Nigeria's rich cultural landscape, dramatic performance has never been purely textual or verbal; rather, it integrates music, rhythm, and embodied vocality as essential elements of meaning-making. Early theatre traditions; from ceremonial performance to Yoruba Travelling Theatre illustrate this integration, often establishing a performance language that foregrounds song as a dynamic mediator between actors and audiences (Udengwu, 2018). This lineage of integrated musical performance continues to inform contemporary street theatre practices, where songs serve not only to attract attention but also to structure and sustain public engagement.

Furthermore, existing analyses within Nigerian performance scholarship emphasize the centrality of music as a communicative medium within dramatic performance. Music is not merely decorative; it functions as a semiotic resource through which performers convey meaning and evoke audience responses. In Nigerian theatrical contexts, music's role as a communicative device extends across genres, shaping emotional tone, signaling dramatic shifts, and anchoring performance within local cultural idioms (Mokwunyei, 2023). However, existing studies have not sufficiently examined how song might operate specifically within street theatre, as tools for critical spectatorship. Obatomi & Salaudeen (2025, p.167) observed that:

The Samaru community theatre Project utilizes songs as an instrument to criticise predominant community vices that hinders social development...[and] serve as complements to the eventual messages embedded in the community drama. They were used to criticise salient social vices that are of great concern to the Samaru communities and its environs so as towitness social change.

Beyond criticism, songs operationalised through the Epic Theatre offers the spectators the opportunity to look again; pause and think for a moment, re-evaluate their realities presented through songs. Herein lays the passage to critical spectatorship. In Nigerian street theatre traditions, music often reflects local cultural performance practices in which storytelling, drumming, dance, and song are interdependent. Ukuma & Mbachaga (p. 2) observed that:

In contemporary society, the effect of music on the population is by far more far-reaching than any other art form. Most of the exhibited dress sense, hair styles and all as seen in today's generation

are undeniably informed more from the music world than they are from film, stage drama, dance, and other arts. The underlying concern here is the fact that we are prone to be corrupted by subliminal messages – those that are beyond the threshold of conscious perception.

It is true that music can corrupt the listener especially in the lyrics projected in certain songs. As much as music is able to corrupt, it is also able guide, instill good morals and encourage criticality especially because it is closely tied to memory and message retention and palatable in rendition. This paper is therefore occupied with songs in street theatre as a cogent channel through which critical spectatorship is kindled.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Bertolt Brecht's theory of Epic Theatre, particularly his use of music as a device for alienation (*Verfremdungseffekt*) and Gestus. Brecht rejected the illusionistic tendencies of dramatic theatre and instead employed songs as interruptions that exposed social realities and encouraged audiences to adopt a critical stance toward staged events. In Epic Theatre, music does not merely heighten emotion; it comments on action, reframes narrative meaning, and prevents passive identification. Songs function as analytical tools that transform spectators into observers capable of reflection and judgment. Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre redefined the function of music within dramatic performance. For Brecht, songs were not decorative or emotionally immersive devices; rather, they were instruments of interruption and critique. In *Brecht on Theatre*, he insists that "the spectator should not be allowed to identify himself unreservedly with the characters on the stage" (Brecht, 1964, p. 136). Brecht's cept of Gestus refers to the embodiment of social relations through gesture, posture, and performative attitude (Brecht, 1964). Gestus reveals the social conditions underlying action rather than individual psychology. In musical performance, Gestus may emerge through collective stance, vocal emphasis, and rhythmic assertion that condense a social position into a visible and audible form.

To stimulate critical spectatorship in the A.B.U. street theatre practice, the techniques and styles of Brecht are being reengineered to reflect the realities and contexts of the immediate society; from the use of Hausa songs, *kidi* (instrumentals) to demonstrative singing known as *gada* (a popular game among young girls where they fall into the arms of their peers and they are thrown into the air while singing. They take turns until every one of them participates). In most Hausa communities, these are activities that take place in the evenings especially under the moonlight. As such, spectators can easily relate to these activities, some may even relive childhood memories. The implication of this is that the tone of the engagement is being set to reflect the fact that the performers are aware of the spectators' cultural realities and the spectators may be inclined to know what more there is on offer. Furthermore, integrating these cultural activities with Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre points to the fact that every day practices within some cultures can easily fit into theatre theories and practices and vice versa on the one hand and on the other hand, techniques and styles can be borrowed from one culture into another to enhance street performances and in this case, critical spectatorship.

Applying this framework to Samaru street theatre enables an examination of how songs operate beyond aesthetic embellishment. Interlude songs, attention-calling chants, and thematic musical insertions interrupt dramatic flow, summarize social contradictions, and directly address

spectators. Through repetition, direct address, and episodic structure, songs invite audiences to consider social issues not as inevitable conditions but as realities open to critique and transformation. Brecht's framework therefore provides a critical lens for analyzing songs and musical dramaturgy in Samaru Project.

Samaru Project

The course THAP 203: Practical Workshop II popularly known as Samaru Project and fondly called SAMPRO by students of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria is a 200 level course that entails working in Samaru; the host community of the University and its environs, around social concerns in the various communities that make up Samaru. Even though the primary focus of this course is the Samaru community, sometimes projects extend beyond Samaru community to other communities that may share similar concerns. The course follows a process of data gathering by the students from residents of Samaru over a period of weeks, followed by analysis of concerns gathered, which is later verified by community members through community dialogue in the community. The community dialogue functions like a town hall meeting where community leaders, community members; male and female, student-facilitators and the course coordinators discuss the concerns identified during the data gathering phase of the course.

Once this is done, the students and some community members create drama skits and return to Samaru to perform them on the streets over a period of days or weeks as the case may be. The idea here is that rather than offer prescribed solutions, theatre is used to provoke critical reflection and encourages the community to collectively identify and generate its own responses to these issues.

This paper focuses on the 2025 Samaru Project experience which was in collaboration with a Non-Governmental organization, Stand With A Girl (SWAG) and the focus was around Sexual and Reproductive Health awareness and enlightenment especially among girls and women. Therefore, this particular Samaru experience revolved around concerns such as early marriage, girl child education, gender based violence, female genital mutilation, consent, menstrual hygiene, family planning among others and spanned a period of two months. However, popular concerns that Samaru Project had previously focused on such as drug abuse, theft, and environmental hygiene were also spotlighted.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodology and implements a case study approach to examine the dramaturgical function of music in street theatre; Samaru Project. A case study approach is appropriate because it enables in-depth analysis of musical construction, placement, and operationalisation in performance within its naturalistic public setting. Data were drawn from three primary sources: (1) documented song scripts and performance outlines used in Samaru Project; (2) direct observation of live performances in public spaces; and (3) researcher field notes documenting musical sequencing, performer-audience interaction, gestural embodiment, and spatial dynamics from performances presented five times at different locations over a period of two months.

The song texts were analyzed as dramaturgical units, paying attention to lyrical structure, repetition, interlude placement, thematic emphasis, and direct address. Observational data focused on how songs interrupted dramatic action, perceived audience response, and embodied social attitudes through songs. Songs were examined not for aesthetic quality alone but for their structural function within performance and were evaluated according to their placement within the dramatic sequence; relationship to preceding and subsequent scenes; degree of interruption or narrative suspension; gestic embodiment of social relations. The study does not assume direct historical influence of Brecht on Samaru Project rather; Epic Theatre functions as a critical lens through which musical strategies are examined.

Musical Strategies and Brechtian Values in Samaru Project

A total of 15 songs were curated for this project and 13 of these songs are analysed in this paper. Some of the songs had long existed, passed down from one generation of students to another, while some songs were composed on the spot by teams and individuals in the class to reflect the themes of the project. All the songs used in this project were in Hausa language. For example, the song “Mu ne, mu ne, mundano...” meaning “We are the ones, as usual, we are back again...” has become the anthem of the course. As an undergraduate in 2007, this was the first song that was taught to my class and it is still being sung today. This therefore shows the pedagogical essence of songs which spans generations.

Bertolt Brecht’s Epic Theatre positioned music as a structural and ideological device rather than as emotional accompaniment. Songs, in his model, interrupted dramatic illusion, commented on social action, and prevented passive identification. Rather than deepening empathy, music introduced distance, enabling spectators to observe events critically. When examined through this lens, several musical strategies in the Samaru Project reveal Brechtian resonances in their dramaturgical construction.

The Opening Chant: Establishing Theatrical Awareness

Song 1

Mu ne	It is us
Mu ne	It is us
Mun dano	We are here again x2

Song 2

Call: Mune na bara, mu ne na bana	We are here, we are present
Response: Toh gayya mu su	Inform them
Call: Mu ne na shekaran basasa	We are the ones from ages past
Response: Toh gayya mu su	Inform them x2

Song 3

Jama'a eh sannu ku da zuwa	We welcome you people
Muna mu ku marhaba	We welcome you
Muna mu ku gesuwa	We greet you
Jama'a eh kuka sa kunin ku	People be attentive
Ku zo ku ji mu fa x2	Come and hear us

Ku zo ku saurara x2

Come and listen to us

The opening performance chants and song accompanied by minimal dancing and mime, announces the performers' presence, welcomes the spectators and situates the audience within a recurring communal ritual. Through repetition, call and response, and a catchy tune, they create an inviting atmosphere, making the audience feel comfortable and valued. Rather than allowing the performance to begin invisibly or seamlessly, the chant foregrounds the act of performance itself. This self-announcing gesture echoes Brecht's rejection of theatrical illusion. By openly declaring presence, the performers signal that what follows is constructed and purposeful. In Brechtian terms, this functions as a preliminary distancing device. The audience is not absorbed into narrative illusion but is first reminded of the performers' agency and the performance's social intent. The chant establishes theatrical consciousness before dramatic action unfolds, encouraging the audience to enjoy the performance and also prepare them to gain knowledge and insight.

For example, in Makera, a community in Samaru, as the team arrived, they were welcomed by children, singing and dancing to "Mu ne, Mu ne, Mundano". The children accompanied the student performers as they went from one corner of the street to the next to mobilise community members. There were the drummers and flutist in the arena too who played popular traditional tunes before the performance commenced. This attracted members of the community who were curious to know what was going on. Though the Epic Theatre highlights the strategies to follow to achieve alienation through music, this strategy even though unplanned, provides additional perspective to creating alienation in local contexts where spectators especially children recognize *wasankoikoyo* (drama or performance) and actively participate in it.



Plate 1: A scene in the performance depicting a young man, intoxicated after consuming hard substances.

Interlude Songs as Episodic Interruption

Samaru project's use of interlude songs between scenes closely aligns with Epic Theatre's episodic structure. Brecht fragmented narrative continuity to prevent emotional immersion and instead allow audiences to process each episode analytically. These songs summarize preceding action, reinforce central themes, redirect attention and prepare spectators for the next scene.

Song 4

Sha re sha re mama ta koya mani x2
Wanke wanke mama ta koya mani
Ama, shan wiwi kokerin kai na ne
Ama, shan taba kokerin kai na ne
Ama, Shan sholi kokarin Kai na ne

My mother taught me to sweep
My mother taught me to wash plates
But smoking marijuana is my doing
But smoking cigarette is my doing
Abusing substances is my doing

This song reframes the preceding dramatic scene by specifically addressing the issues of drug abuse and addiction, providing the spectators with a clearer understanding of the consequences of such choices and emphasizing the importance of making responsible decisions in a sing song manner, one they call recall, hum or sing even after the performance ends. The lyrical shift between parental instruction and individual wrongdoing dramatizes contradiction. This moment reveals the social gap between moral expectation and personal action. The scene portraying the young abled individual, wasting away; time and human resources that can be channeled into productive use and this song, cautions the spectators, especially the youth on the uselessness of drug abuse. More so, that these negative behaviours can change especially because they are self-imposed. This song was accompanied with demonstration and mime of washing plates, sweeping, smoking and inhaling substances to embody reality and prevent emotional immersion. The song exposes responsibility rather than dramatizing victimhood. This exposure aligns with Brecht's belief that theatre should reveal human behaviour as changeable and socially conditioned.

Song 5

Call: Lungu lungu x2
Response: An sain su
Call: Tabe tabe
Response: An sain su
Call: Piade piade
Response: Duk su ne

In hidden corners,
You'll find them there
Molestation,harassment
You'll find them there
Rape,
They are the perpetrators

This song calls out and warns community members who are perpetrators of crimes such as rape and molestation, drawing their attention to the fact that they are known and would be apprehended soon. These songs aim to spread awareness and promote accountability, urging the community to take action against such vices. These interlude songs interrupt narrative flow rather than smoothing it. Their repetition and thematic clarity transform them into reflective pauses. In Brechtian terms, they operate as musical commentary, moments that halt dramatic progression to foreground the social issue under discussion. These songs are followed by another song:



Image 2: A scene in the performance depicting an altercation between a husband and a wife

Song 6

Ku zo mu hada kain mu
Mu gyara zukatan mu x2
Ku zo mu had akain mu
Mu gyara muhalin mu x2
Ku zo mu hada kain mu,
Mu gyara gidajen mu x2
Domin dukan mu fa
Daya mu ke x2

Let us come together
To fix the disposition of our hearts
Let us come together
To fix our attitudes
Let us come together
To fix our homes
For we all
Are one

Brecht argues that in Epic Theatre “the music must not ‘accompany’ but must ‘comment’” (Brecht, 1964, p. 84). Rather than intensifying emotional immersion, songs should interrupt the flow of action and provide analytical distance. This song functions precisely in this manner. In Brechtian terms, this song creates episodic segmentation, “breaking action into discrete, observable moments that narrates the plot rather than develop it” (Brecht: 1964, p. 37). This unity-focused song, steps outside dramatic action to articulate a collective principle that focuses on people’s attitudes and behaviours, in the home and the society at large drawing attention to the fact that when members of the society work in unison, concrete progress can be achieved. As seen in the action (Image 2) and the song that follows, the separation between dramatic narrative and musical commentary serves as a dramatic pulse that allows spectators evaluate issues presented rather than becoming absorbed in dramatic progression.

Direct Address and Breaking the Fourth Wall

Song 7

Mai baci, yafarka

The sleeper must awaken

Na zaune ya zabura x2

The one sitting must rise

Mai tafiya

The passerby,

Don Allah kasaurara mana x2

For God's sake, listen to us

Ku saurara mana

Listen to us,

Ga jawabi zamuyi x2

We have a message to deliver

At this point in the performance, having presented some critical concerns to the spectators, more so, the spectator's attention was beginning to wane. This song served as a musical pause in the action, to reinforce the subjects matter at stake. This attention calling song explicitly instructs sleepers to wake and passersby to listen. The call to attention interrupts distraction and foregrounds the performance as a conscious communicative act. The spectators are reminded that they are participants in a live civic moment, not detached observers of illusion. Rather than maintaining the illusion of a self-contained dramatic world, the performers acknowledge the real environment, acknowledge the spectators and speak to them directly to them through songs. In other words, songs and their placement helped to maintain and regulate the momentum of the performance. Outside of the literal interpretation of this song, the act of instructing the sleeper to wake becomes a condensed metaphor for social alertness, for the spectators to look inwards, question these practices in their community and reconsider their attitudes. This musical directivetherefore functions as a communal gesture, for prompting consciousness which is necessary for informed positive choices, attitudes and behaviour.

Thematic Songs as Social Commentary



Image 3: This image depicts a scene in the performance where an infant girl dies from circumcision related infection and the commotion that ensues amongst a husband, his wives and the circumciser.

Song 8

Kachiyan'yan mata
Ba doleba ne 'yan uwa
Kachiyan mata ba kyau
Iyaye ku lura, ku gane

Female genital mutilation
Is not by force
Female genital mutilation is not good
Parents be guided and understand

Song 9

Cin zarafin juna ba kyau,
Yanuwa
Cin zarafin juna ba kyau

Gender-based violence is not good,
Brothers and sisters
Gender-based violence is not good

Song 10

Call: Soyeyya ai rowan zuma ne
Response: In da so da kauna
Call: In kasha
Kaba mai soyi
Response: In da so da kauna

Love is like honey
If you go about it properly
As you enjoy it,
Let your lover enjoy it too
If you go about it properly

Song 11

In mun ce a'a
A'an mu a'a ne
In mun ce a'a
A'an mu a'a ne
Ka da ku taba mu

When we say no
Our no is no
When we say no
Our no is no
Do not touch us

Song 12

Mama zani karatu,
Bazan je aure ba
Baba zani karatu,
Bazan je aure ba
Baba mama zani karatu
Bazan je aure ba

Mother, I want to go to school
I do not want to marry now
Father, I want to go to school
I do not want to marry now
Father, mother, I want to go to school
I don't want to be married off

Song 13

Al'adan mata ba abun kunya ba ne x2
A dinga hadawa de sapta x2

Menstruation is not a shameful thing
Hygiene is paramount during
menstruation

Most of the songs in this category were composed in class by the students and some course coordinators to reflect the theme of the project. Importantly, this process served as a platform for innovation, creativity and spontaneity while providing the avenue for students to explore and

sharpen their musical prowess and talents. Songs addressing gender-based violence, early marriage, and consent function not as emotional intensifiers but as declarative social statements. Their lyrical structure is simple, repetitive, and didactic. This aligns with Brecht's notion that songs should clarify social conditions rather than obscure them in sentiment. Song 8 comes after the scene where an infant dies from circumcision related infection (Image 3) and is based on the fact that during the data gathering and community dialogue processes, female genital mutilation was still an ongoing occurrence in Samaru community. Some respondents asserted that they performed this act because they were born into it and never questioned it and some observed that the practice is supported by their religion. This song speaks in general to the community and specifically to people in this category, to ponder upon these practices and evaluate their usefulness or otherwise. In this scene, as seen in the image, as the performers lamented and cried, the spectators laughed. This makes for good alienation because the opposite reactions of the spectators imply they are not absorbed in the action taking place. However, it may be too simplistic to assume that the spectators feel detached enough to react in this manner when in fact they may not fully grasp the gravity of the situation presented. These among others are some difficulties in unraveling the true essence of 'detachment' in performance. This is where songs function as devices to deepen understanding and clear misconceptions during performance.

Songs 9 and 10 address gender based violence and the need for love to prevail for cordial marital relationships which also have implications in the larger society. Happier marriages and homes translate to happier children and safer communities. Song 11, the song on consent, operates as an explicit social assertion. It does not dramatize consent through psychological complexity; it states a principle, 'No means No' Song 12 speaks to the agency of the girl child, drawing attention to the fact that she is worth more than marriage or hawking on the streets; she has a right to quality education and self-development like every other child. Parents and the society owe her the right to pursue a fulfilled life. In fact, the lyrics of the songs place the girl-child as the speaker or in this case, the singer, stating that she wants to pursue an education. Song 13 speaks to the society and specifically to young girls. The act of menstruation should not be looked upon as a thing to be ashamed nor should it be considered as a period of shame. It should not be approached with fear or reproach by young girls and women who are at this phase of their lives. However, they must approach the process with cleanliness. The impression is that when people are enlightened and approach this phenomenon with openness, a safe and conducive environment is created for girls and women to thrive.

This declarative quality resonates with Brecht's use of songs to expose social contradictions in clear, accessible terms. These songs confronting early marriage, domestic violence, female genital mutilation and menstruation externalize responsibility and highlight accountability. The songs articulate communal awareness. This framing encourages spectators to adopt evaluative rather than purely emotional responses. Correspondingly, this point also reflects some tenets of the participatory communication theory especially in terms of liberation and action-reflection-action where social commentary through songs serves as avenue for information and enlightenment, acquiring knowledge that can lead to liberation of the mind and from ignorance. This liberation instigates reflection which gives birth to action which may not be immediately seen or externalized because most times, attitudinal and behavioural transformation begins in the mind, owing to the fact that "music exerts a great influence on humans as it serves as a source of motivation and

propelling force in his endeavours” (Ukuma & Mbachaga p. 2) on the one hand and on the other, operates subliminally, instigating reflection and criticality among the spectators, that are beyond the threshold of conscious perception.

Repetition as Critical Reinforcement

As have been presented, SAMPRO’s songs rely heavily on repetition; phrases are sung multiple times, refrains recur, and call-and-response patterns reinforce key ideas. Repetition in this context functions as: 1. aiding memory in an open public space and 2. Strengthening thematic clarity. The result is not monotonous, hypnotic immersion but sustained emphasis. The spectator is repeatedly returned to the central issue, preventing narrative distraction from overshadowing social critique. Brecht valued repetition as a means of emphasizing contradiction and exposing patterns within social life.

Collective Singing and Critical Community

Singing in Samaru Project operates like an ensemble without fancy instruments; just raw voices, sometimes accompanied by drumming, perhaps an acapella. The visibility of the singers in the arena, the sometimes croaked voices and wrong keys makes the process all the more realistic and the spectators curious. Since the lyrics are simple and repetitive and popular tunes and melodies are sometimes adopted, the spectators are more likely to sing along, clap, dance and sometimes point fingers at one another. This produces a reflective distance rather than emotional absorption which Brecht often emphasized.

The idea is to produce socially conscious spectators capable of collective reflection. In SAMPRO, collective singing fosters communal awareness while simultaneously articulating critique. The audience is not merely entertained; it is addressed, instructed, and invited into evaluative engagement. Here, alienation does not negate participation. Rather, it redefines it. Instead of emotional estrangement, SAMPRO’s musical intervention produces cognitive alertness within a communal setting. The songs do not dissolve social tension; they expose it.

Conclusion

This study has examined the dramaturgical function of music in street theatre through a case analysis of the Samaru Project, employing Bertolt Brecht’s theory of Epic Theatre as an interpretive framework. The analysis moves beyond viewing song as aesthetic embellishment to demonstrate that music operates as structural interruption, social commentary, and gestic articulation of collective attitudes. Through interludes, repetition, direct address, and declarative lyricism, songs fragment narrative continuity and redirect attention toward critical evaluation rather than emotional immersion. By foregrounding Brecht’s concepts of alienation and *gestus*, the study shows how collective singing transforms social issues into audible and visible positions, rendering them open to scrutiny and reflection within public space. Music in SAMPRO thus functions not as accompaniment but as a central dramaturgical device shaping spectatorship and meaning-making. This intervention contributes to Nigerian street theatre scholarship by offering a theoretically grounded account of musical construction and function, and it invites further research into the critical possibilities of musical dramaturgy in Nigerian public performance traditions. From the audience perspective, their ability to memorize these songs, long after the performances have ended point to the fact songs in street theatre contexts serve as participatory bridges between performers and spectators for critical spectatorship.

Limitation of the Study and Recommendation

This paper has attempted to locate songs as enhancers of critical spectatorship in street theatre however; a subjective interpretation of the audience reception and critical spectatorship is presented in this paper. For a holistic understanding of the usefulness of songs in street theatre performances, the paper recommends that there is the need to conduct impact studies with spectators to locate the depth in which songs encourage critical spectatorship in street theatre. Furthermore, for theatre to fully embody its critical and transformative qualities, practitioners must endeavor to ‘weaponise’ songs to encourage critical consciousness in performance outings. In terms of Bertolt Brecht’s postulations on the role of songs and music in theatre, efforts need to be sustained in reengineering these notions to fit indigenous contexts for enhanced participation and critical spectatorship.

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