

OLAKANMI OLUWATOSIN OWONIKOKO

ORCID ID: 0009-0006-6469-5683

Citation: Owonikoko O. O; *Hybrid drumming practices in contemporary Lagos: Sampler integration in live performance of gospel and event bands.*

HYBRID DRUMMING PRACTICES IN CONTEMPORARY LAGOS: SAMPLER INTEGRATION IN LIVE PERFORMANCE OF GOSPEL AND EVENT BANDS.

Abstract

This study examined the infusion of digital samplers in live drumming performances in Lagos, Nigeria, exploring how technology interacts with traditional rhythms, preferences of audience and industry demands. Using qualitative research, data was collected through interviews and observations. The study's highlighted key themes included sound enhancement, expanded performance roles, hybridization of acoustic and digital elements and economic factors such as reduction in the size of the band. Findings showed that digital samplers did not replace traditional drumming but produced hybrid musical forms where traditional heritage and modern technology exist concurrently. The crucial roles of drummers and also sound managers, emphasizes the importance of formal training for musicians in the use of digital technologies. Exploring the cultural hybridization theory, the study established that local musicians adapt modern technologies to maintain cultural practices, advance musical creativity and respond to current professional and economic demands.

Key words: Audience expectations, cultural hybridization, digital sampling, live performance, music technology.

Introduction

Over the years, there has been significant transformations in live performance practices across the world resulting from advances in technology. One notable trend in contemporary Lagos is the infusion of electronic devices such as samplers into acoustic drum performance settings. Drummers use digital samplers to produce pre-recorded sounds, electronic effects and studio-like sound textures in real time, thereby expanding the sonic sounds the acoustic drum set cannot conventionally produce (Hugill, 2012, Theberge, 1997).

The use of digital device has become a widespread practice amongst gospel bands and event-bands in Lagos. Drummers in Lagos often employ the use of drum pads and sampling gadgets to reproduce layers of percussions, synthesized sounds and orchestrate hits, commonly produced in recording studios. This practice is not born out of the availability of technology, but situated within performance context in which the audience expects to hear studio-like sound and the need to reduce the number of musicians during performance because of financial constraint (Manuel, 2018).

Scholars such as Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000) argued that this technological adoption in music performance often give birth to hybrid performance practices where acoustic instruments work together with digital instruments. This fusion makes it difficult to differentiate between acoustic sound and electronically produced sound. Thus, the boundary between traditional performance styles and modern styles based on technology is blurred, leading to new ways of making and performing music.

Within African popular music and sacred music contexts, performers do not adopt technology in a purely imitative manner. Technologies are rather localized and adapted to existing musical values and performance practices (Taylor, 2001). The infusion of samplers by gospel bands and event bands in Lagos can be understood as a process of cultural hybridization (a process of blending elements from different cultures to create new practices).

This study examined sampler-assisted drumming as a modern-day performance practice amongst gospel bands and event bands in Lagos. By concentrating on how drummers integrate digital sampling into live performance, the article contributes to wider discourse on music technology, live performance practices and changing identity of musicians in Lagos.

Literature Review

Scholarly discussions on music technology have consistently show that technological tools do not replace traditional customs, but the way these technologies are used are determined by musicians. Theberge (1997), claimed that the relevance of digital devices and electronic instruments is determined by creative decision of the users who adapt to suit specific musical and social purposes. In the same vein, Born and Hsemondhalgh (2000) noted that the use of technology often produced hybrid musical forms merging the boundaries between acoustic and electric performance.

Within African and Nigerian contexts, scholars have investigated how popular music developed through interaction with foreign influences. Collins (2002) studied how Ghanaian and Nigerian popular music cultures adopted and combined foreign instruments with technologies while retaining traditional rhythmic structures. Euba (1990) also laid emphasis on the adaptive nature of African musical practices, especially the ways traditional elements were restructured within contemporary setting. Olaniyan (2004) highlighted how Nigerian popular culture reflected wider processes of cultural exchange and transformation.

Despite these contributions, limited scholarly attention has been accorded to the use of digital samplers by drummers in live gospel and event performances in Lagos. While intense scholarly attention has been given to music technology and popular music development in Nigeria, there remains gap in knowledge concerning how drummers adapt sampling devices into live performance practice and how this has reconfigured contemporary musical identity. This study therefore contributes to the existing scholarship by focusing mainly on sampler-assisted drumming as a place where technology meets with local culture.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on cultural hybridization as its theoretical framework. The theory developed gradually within cultural studies and anthropology and postcolonial studies. No single scholar can be referred to as the author of the theory. But scholars Garcia Cancilini and Homi Bhabha are most widely known theorists of cultural hybridization. The theory explains cultural forms develop resulting from influences from interactions from other cultures. Cultural hybridization theorists argued that culture is not fixed, pure or an isolated entity. But culture changes when it comes in

Owonikoko: Hybrid drumming practices...

contact with external ideas, technologies and practices. In Music, cultural hybridization occurs when musicians adopt and adapt foreign instruments, technologies and styles to local traditions. Instead of adopting the technologies according to global trends, musicians adapt these technologies to suit their social, cultural and artistic context (Taylor, 2001). This blend of local, traditional practices with foreign practices leads to creation of new practices.

In Africa, musicians have a long history of accepting external influences to local traditions. As observed by scholars such as Taylor (2001) and Manuel (2018), adopting external influences to local traditions lead to hybrid form of music, resulting in the intersection between global technologies and local aesthetics. Among drummers in Lagos, it is a way of integrating samplers with acoustic drum sets while preserving the rhythmic and cultural identity and at the same time achieving sounds associated with modern studio recordings. Manuel (2018) asserted that the integration of samplers with traditional drum sets supported smaller ensembles, offered richer sounds and met audience expectations for quality sound heard from studio recordings, at both social events and gospel related programmes.

By applying cultural hybridization as a theoretical framework, this study explains the use of digital samplers among Lagos-based drummers not as cultural disruption, but as a process of creative synthesis between local rhythmic practices and global digital cultures. Cultural hybridization helps the study to see sampler-assisted drumming as a blend of traditional rhythms and the prevailing technology. Rather than weakening traditional drumming, the use of samplers reveals how Nigerian music continues to adapt and evolve. Ultimately, cultural hybridization helps explain how live performances in Lagos show ongoing musical change and creativity.

Methodology

This study used qualitative approach to examine how drummers in Lagos blend digital samplers into live gospel and event band performances. Ten participants-professional drummers using samplers were purposively selected based on their regular use of sampling technology in live performance settings. Participants had between five and ten years of professional experience using sampling technology, actively engaged in gospel ministries, event bands or both. Data were collected through semi-interviews and live performance observations. Interviews which lasted between thirty and fifty minutes, examined participants' experiences on the use of samplers, its influence on drumming techniques, response of audience and sampler's role within contemporary

Owonikoko: Hybrid drumming practices...

band practice. Eight live performances were observed across different parts of Lagos to provide contextual understanding of sampler use in live settings. Two performances were observed in Surulere, two on Lagos Island, two in Ojo, and two in Ikorodu. These observations provided firsthand insight into how drummers incorporated sampling technology into live gospel and event band performances.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed thematically. The transcripts were carefully reviewed and coded to highlight recurring patterns and themes relating to sound enhancement and performance expansion, integration of traditional rhythms and digital sounds, changing role of the drummer, audience expectations and contemporary sound culture, event industry demands and reduced band size and economic consideration and band restructuring. Ethical standard was observed throughout the study. The purpose of the research was communicated to the participants, provided voluntary consent, and their identities remain anonymous.

Findings

Findings and analysis from the qualitative data collated from interviews and live performance observations revealed common patterns in the integration of digital samplers into live drumming practice in Lagos. Discussions are organized under the following key themes: sound enhancement and performance expansion, integration of traditional rhythm and digital sounds, changing role of the drummer, audience expectation and contemporary sound culture, event industry demands and reduced band size and economic considerations and band restructuring.

Sound enhancement and performance expansion

A high number of the drummers described the sampler as a practical tool that enabled them expand the overall sound of their various bands without having too many musicians on stage. They explained that the sampler allowed for the inclusion effects, electronic percussion, bass drop and other background sounds. One of the participants used a Roland sampler for over two years, stated that “the Roland sampler I use helps me add other instruments such as congas, shakers and other percussive instruments”. During live performance observation, the sampler was used to simulate other percussive instruments such as congas, omele and shakers. These simulated instruments provide a background layer that the drummer relied on to enrich the overall texture.

Owonikoko: Hybrid drumming practices...

Apart from adding background layers, the sampler also allowed some level of flexibility during performance. Drummers interviewed stated that they could easily introduce some needed effects depending on the mood of the event. According to one of the drummers interviewed in the course of this study, “the sampler helps me to introduce some sounds like the electric toms especially during high intensity performances”. In multiple observed performances, the sampler was used to add percussive sounds that functioned as additional layers within the percussion section of the performance. These triggered elements worked seamlessly alongside the acoustic drum set, creating a layered rhythmic texture.

Participants generally viewed the sampler as a supportive element rather than overshadowing it. In practice, the sampled sounds function as additional rhythmic layers that complement the drum kit and enrich the overall performance texture. On the whole, the findings indicate that the sampler serves as a tool for sonic enrichment in contemporary live music performances in Lagos, without reducing the human character of live drumming.

Integration of traditional rhythm and digital sounds

One of the major findings of this study revealed how drummers in Lagos combined traditional rhythmic elements with digitally generated sounds during live performances. Drummers programmed different local and foreign percussion sounds on the sampler and blend them with live drumming in both gospel and event band performances. One of the interviewed drummers explained that he used sampler technology to programme both local instruments such as bigpot, sekere and other foreign percussion sounds, which are then integrated with his live drumming during performances. Despite the integration of digital sounds, the rhythmic foundation remains rooted in local instruments. The programmed samples contribute to the performance aesthetics, thus enhancing its appeal to diverse audiences.

Observations of live performances showed that the addition of these digital elements made the music sound modern and energetic. In some cases, the simulated instruments created an impression of a large ensemble. In addition to giving the impression of a larger ensemble, the simulated instruments produce sounds that resemble studio-quality recordings. This combination creates balance in sound where acoustic drumming, sampled local instruments and digital sounds work in harmony. In all, findings showed that instead of technology replacing traditional rhythms, it is

Owonikoko: Hybrid drumming practices...

used to reinterpret and expand traditional rhythms. In addition, the samplers give the rhythmic texture a more contemporary look.

Changing role of the drummer

There is also a significant shift in the role of drummers within live gospel and event bands in Lagos. Beyond maintaining steady rhythm, drummers are increasingly expected to operate the digital devices, trigger samples, and contribute to shaping the overall sound of the performance. This positions the drummer not only as the person that keeps the timing of the music but also as a central figure involved in directing the energy and sonic texture of live music performance. In agreement, one of the participants stated that “apart from playing the drums, I’m now saddled with the responsibility of controlling the sound”. This points to an expanded professional role that blends performance skills with technological competence.

In observed performances, drummers often alternated between acoustic playing and activation of digital sounds, coordinating transitions and climatic moments. This dual function requires technical precision, creativity and alertness. Participants described this shift as both challenging and empowering as it adds to their value within the ensemble settings. Overall, the integration of samplers has redefined the professional identity of the drummers, positioning them as both performers and live sound facilitators within contemporary performance settings. This development reveals the increasing fusion of performance practice and digital technology in live music and highlights the growing need for contemporary drummers to be technically and musically versatile.

Audience expectation and contemporary sound culture

Another important finding of this study is the influence audience expectations on the use of samplers in live performances. Participants explained that audience expect a fuller, polished and highly energetic sound. Several drummers claimed that listeners are familiar with digitally enhanced music through recordings, online streaming platforms which shapes their expectations of live performance. As a result, live bands often feel pressured to reproduce similar sonic experiences during live performances. One of the drummers interviewed stated that, “the audience want to hear just what they hear in recordings, because their ears are tuned to the digital sounds. Failure to reproduce such sounds, the audience will feel the sound as too dry and lacking

something.” Another drummer added that a band might lose perceived value if the sound is not sufficiently full and energetic.

Observations from live performances supported these accounts. In some cases, when the sampler temporarily stopped, the audience reacted negatively to the sudden change in sound quality. In one instance, someone from the audience approached the sound engineer of the band to ask why the music had suddenly become “dry”, referring to the absence of the sampled sounds. Participants further explained that electronic tones and layered percussions help meet these expectations and sustain audience engagement. In this regard, sampler integration is only a creative tool, but also a response to the gradually changing listening habits and contemporary sound culture. Therefore audience’s taste play important role in shaping performance practices and encouraging drummers to adapt to current trend in order to remain relevant.

Event industry demands and reduced band size

An important theme that emerged from the findings of the study is the growing demands within the event industry for smaller band configurations. Many participants explained that event planners, production managers and venue coordinators often demand for few musicians on stage. This demand is often linked to low budget, venue constraints and the desire for more organised stage appearance. According to one of the drummers interviewed, “event planners most times ask the band leader for a reduced ensemble because of the performance space is often small.” He pointed that, accommodating a large number of musicians on a small stage can make the setup look crowded and become difficult to manage. As a result, musicians such as conga player and other percussion musicians are excluded from the band. In such situations, the drummer has to make use of sampler to fill up the percussion section of the band’s music. Apart from being a technical adjustment, participants described the sampler as a practical response to industry realities. The sampler is now a strategic tool that facilitate musical depth while adhering to logistical and financial preferences of the event planners.

Implicitly, technological integration is closely linked to structural changes within the performance economy. The reduction in the size of the band is not really a musical decision, it reflects major changes in the way live music is organized, funded and presented. In this light, sampling technology offers a means of balancing artistic goals with practical demands of contemporary event production.

Economic considerations and band restructuring

Economic factors also influence the use of sampler by drummers in gospel and event bands in Lagos. Many participants explained that band owners often prefer to hire drummers that have samplers because this reduces the need to hire additional percussionists. As noted by one of the participants, “most band owners do not want to hire conga players, omele and other percussion players for gigs. The first thing they ask you as a drummer is if you have a sampler.” To band leaders, the use of samplers reduces the cost of hiring musicians for shows. This shows that sampler integration is not only a creative strategy but also a practical way for band owners to manage costs.

Some of the drummers interviewed further explained that smaller ensembles are often easier to coordinate, involve few logistical challenges. According to one of the participants who also doubles as a band leader, “having few musicians on stage makes it easy to coordinate the band. Since the number of musicians expected on stage are few, you face lesser challenges logistically.” In this regard, sampling technology makes it possible to operate more efficiently while still delivering a musically engaging performance.

Arguably, economic realities play an important role in shaping technological adoption within contemporary live music practice. Beyond its musical functions, the sampler supports financial viability and contributes to the reshaping of band structures in response to evolving industry conditions. There is a close relationship between technology, creativity and economic considerations in contemporary live performance settings in Lagos. In other words, economic realities have influenced how technology is creatively employed to meet the practical demands of live performance.

Undoubtedly, the use of digital samplers in live drumming is influenced by a combination of artistic, traditional and economic factors. Apart from enhancing sound and broadening creative possibilities, samplers allow drummers to adapt to audience expectations, adjust to industry demands and handle financial realities. The integration of traditional rhythms and electronic sounds highlights a developing performance environment in which musical skill and technological tools work together. In this context, sampler use reflects both musical growth and a practical response to changes in live performance structures in Lagos.

Discussion

Owonikoko: Hybrid drumming practices...

The integration of digital samplers into live performance by drummers in Lagos is not only a technical development, it demonstrates significant cultural, economic and structural shifts within contemporary music practice. Through the viewpoint of cultural hybridization theory, this integration can be understood as a fusion of indigenous rhythmic traditions with global digital technologies. The sampler is not used to replace traditional drumming, it only expands its expressive possibilities, allowing the coexistence of both acoustic performance and electronic sound layers. This hybrid form indicates how local musicians adapt the use of technologies in way to maintain cultural identity while responding to modern performance demands.

These findings are consistent with existing literature that sees technology in African music setup not as a force that erases the local traditions, but as a tool for adaptation and innovation. Scholars of music and globalization argued that hybrid musical forms often emerge when local traditions engage with global technologies. The experiences of drummers in this study are in agreement with cultural hybridization theory. The experiences of Lagos drummers reveal that technological adoption is shaped by industry demands, audience expectations and economic realities. In addition, reduction in the size of the band and the expanded role of the drummer reveal how performance structures are reshaped in response to both creative and financial considerations.

Findings from Lagos are similar to what has been observed in other African music contexts such as Ghana and South Africa, where digital technologies are increasingly becoming part of live performance practices (Collins, 2009; Rontsch, 2007). In these contexts, musicians also combine traditional rhythmic elements with electronic tools to enhance flexibility and create richer sounds. A similar pattern can be observed in global popular and worship music settings, where digital devices are used to reproduce studio-like sound in live performances. Nevertheless, what distinguishes Lagos case is the central role of the drummer, who not only performs but also manages sound production during performances, with the sampler working as a support tool rather than replacing live drumming. This further supports the idea of cultural hybridization, where local performance practices interact with global technological influences.

The implications of these findings goes beyond musical practice. For music professionals, the study indicates the need for drummers to develop not only their acoustic skills, also competence in the use of technologies such as the sampler. Findings suggests that drummers who cannot use digital tools will struggle to be relevant in contemporary live performance practice. For the music educators, the study recommends that training on the use of digital performance tools should be

Owonikoko: Hybrid drumming practices... included in training curriculum. By integrating digital tools into the curriculum, educators can better prepare students to meet contemporary performance demands, balance acoustic and electronic elements and navigate the emerging professional landscape in live music.

In all, the study contributes to discussions on how contemporary African music cultures interact with modernity, showing that technological integration can serve as a space for cultural preservation, adaptation and innovation rather than replacement.

Conclusion

The use of digital samplers in live drumming in Lagos connects together tradition, technology and practical realities is overt. Drummers are not abandoning traditional rhythms by the use of samplers, but combine acoustic and digital sounds to create richer, hybrid performances in response to audience expectations, industry demands and economic conditions. The use of samplers widened the creative role of the drummer, reconfigure band structures and aid maintaining cultural practices in modern day performance settings.

Given the highlighted practical steps for the music community, educators can include training on the use of digital performance tools to prepare students for the contemporary performance demands. These trainings will make musicians versatile and remain relevant in the live performance industry. Event organizers and band owners can consider hybrid configurations and smaller band sizes with full sounds generated through samplers. Overall, sampler-assisted drumming in Lagos demonstrates how tradition and modernity can work together, offering a type of cultural hybridization in contemporary music.

References

- Born, G., & Hesmondhalgh, D. (Eds.). (2000). *Western music and its others: Difference, representation and appropriation in music*. University of California Press.
- Collins, J. (2002). *African pop roots: Back from the ivory tower*. Temple University Press.
- Collins, J. (2009). Ghana and the world music boom. *Popular Music History*, 3(3), 275-294.

<https://doi.org/10.1558/pomh.v.3i3.275>

- Euba, A. (1990). *Yoruba drumming: The Dundun tradition*. Bayreuth African Studies.
- Hugill, A. (2012). *The digital musician (2nd ed.)*. Routledge.
- Manuel, P. (2018). *Popular musics of the non-Western world (2nd ed.)*. Oxford University Press.
- Olaniyan, T. (2004). *Arrest the music! Fela and the rebel art and politics*. Indiana University Press.
- Röntschi, M. (2007). *The impact of music technology on the South African music industry (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pretoria)*. University of Pretoria Repository.
<https://repository.up.ac.za>.
- Taylor, T. D. (2001). *Strange sounds: Music, technology and culture*. Routledge.
- Theberge, P. (1997). *Any sound you can imagine: Making music/consuming technology*. Wesleyan University Press.