

Music in broadcasting

By Benson Idonije

A CONSIDERABLE percentage of a station's airtime, whether in commercial or public service setting is devoted to music. Music therefore provides unlimited entertainment in broadcasting, but its ultimate goal is the promotion of culture, an awareness which appears to have eluded today's broadcasting.

I have discussed this topic at various training interventions over the years, but course participants, for reasons that re obvious, never relate the essence of music in broadcasting to the promotion of culture. Rather, they usually outline it's specific roles such as the presentation of music programmes for the purpose of entertainment; establishing moods in drama productions; filling up airtime between one programme and the next; providing signature tunes for programme identification and attention-getting; creating items for their entertainment values in magazines; providing re-inforcement agents in magazines, features and documentaries - all of which point to entertainment.

In recent times, friends of mine who visited home from America complained that Nigerian stations sound more American than American stations, with deejays even more knowledgeable about the American scene; that they have come home, hoping to hear Nigerian and African music on air, but instead they were still being subjected, in their own country, to the same old American feeling. There was the case of a jazsz musician who thought he could orientate himself towards African music from radio and television, but he was disappointed. I advised him eventually to go some of our villages.

It all started from NBC2 in 1977. I was one of the pioneering product - presenters on the station, and I still remember that I was pulled up a couple of times for daring to play 'Sweet Mother' and 'Ikenga of Afria, music by two of the pioneering crusaders of the Ikwokilikwo movement, the reason being that the station was a light entertainment one, an alternative to NBC one. Another reason was that FM transmission responds more favourably to well mixed stereophonic productions, which happened then to be foreign popular music. Today, Ray Power 100FM appears to be leading, s well ahead of the others in the use of foreign material because of good management. After all, almost all the states now have second channels that are devoted to foreign pop, the implication of which is obvious.

Television does not fare better in this matter. Apart from occasional appearances of Olier De Coque and Stephen Osadebe, and the parenial use of "Top Celebrities' NTA 10 displays foreign videos in all its magazine with the exception of 'Friday Night Live'. Channel I5 and state stations are as guilty as the new independent stations. I know that in far away Yola, Adamawa TV features, 'Saturday Vibes,' a one hour programme of foreign popular music.

However, entertainment is desirable, the crucial functions of broadcasting. In order to provide it satisfactorily and professionally, music should be scheduled in order of categorisation bearing in mind the time of the day and the yearnings of the target audience.

I have listened extensively to stations in Lagos. Benin and Port Harcourt, and one continues

to hear the same types of music all day long. I had the opportunity of peeping into the programmes philosophies of some of these stations, and I discovered that they are well laid out with specific briefs to guide types of music and presentation approach. The problem is that of adherence by the deejays who are the direct operators of the policies. However, entertainment will make more meaning if programming is able to differentiate between 'Country and Western, rhythm and blues, traditional blues' 'rock', 'sould rock', 'reggae' 'hip hop' and the like, giving every programme definite character and identity. American stations don't make the mistake because it is their music. The popular music of Britain is rock, and they devote considerable airtime to it, analysing all its facts and their exponents. We muddle things up here because the culture of the music is strange to us. Programming our own music for instance cannot pose any problem. Everybody knows the structure and form of highlife, juju, fuji, Kalangu, Futigi, Afrobeat, Awuroba, Dadakuada so well that should any station fall foul of any mix-up, the public would complain.

I see the whole thing as an abiding problem, the product of a system, a people that are getting what they want to hear. Most of our youth, including today's broadcasters don't even know our own traditional musicians. And this is where the command performance a few months ago by the Kaduna State government in collaboration with the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, is relevant. Musicians and dance troupes from all the States of the federation net and performed at Abuja in a cultural festival that brought together Nigerian music and dancing in their various settings and dimensions. The event was not given the publicity and the recognition it deserved, but the Ministry of Information and Culture should take it over as a regular affair for the exposition of our tradition and culture. Recordings should be made of the festivals for onward use by radio and TV stations. The Commission, on its own part, should put its foot down on the percentage of Nigerian to foreign music on FM as well as AM stations. These two measures will go a long way in paving the way for the protection of our culture and encouraging the artistic fulfilment of our musicians.

Music obviously is fulfilling its role of providing entertainment in our broadcasting industry, but our culture is suffering. The two should go hand in hand so that our music is not subjugated under cultural imperialism.