

A STUDY OF THE HISTORY, STYLE AND IDENTITY IN MUSICAL
PRACTICES OF THE CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST

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SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC, FACULTY OF ARTS, IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY OF THE OBAFEMI
AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE.

2006

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the historical sources of various forms of music used in the Celestial Church of Christ, the styles as well as the major features and performance practices that characterised the music. It identified the major contributors to its growth and development and also examined the performance styles and context. This was with a view to explicating the sociological and cultural factors that enhanced the growth of music in the Celestial Church of Christ.

Historical and musical data on the musical practices of the Church in Nigeria were collected through oral interviews of a total of thirty-one purposefully selected informants. The informants interviewed included three top leaders of the church in Lagos, Oyo and Delta States, eight highly placed full-time church ministers (Superior and Senior Evangelists), six former choirmasters practicing organists and four vocalists at the national headquarters of the Church (who are now based in different parts of Lagos and Oyo States), and ten music directors-cum-ministers of other orthodox and Pentecostal churches, who are university graduates. In addition, archival and library materials, as well as materials from the electronic media were consulted. Live performances of the Celestial Church of Christ music were recorded, transcribed and documented. The analysis of the data was done using ethnomusicological method.

The findings showed that a good portion of Celestial Church of Christ music was attributed to the prophets and prophetesses of the church, most of whom had passed on without proper documentation of their individual efforts. Other sources included liturgical music of other Christian churches and adaptations of non-religious music to religious texts. The contributions of the major participants to the growth of music in the church included delivery of revealed texts and

melodies (without any formal training in the art of music composition), adaptation of new texts to adopted tunes from some other sources, documentation of revealed songs and involvement in the performance as well as sponsorship/financing of talented musicians. The study further revealed that the music was performed in popular African styles, in hybridised harmony and with clearly marked African melodic and rhythmic features. The choral arrangement in the typical Celestial Church of Christ did not follow the conventional Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass (SATB) style. Music was a major tool with which the Celestial Church of Christ conducted its affairs and featured prominently in most of its events. It served as a source of inspiration. for its prophets and prophetesses) Leaders of the church in charge of music were mainly artisans and other professionals. There was neither central control nor any standardisation of the musical practices of the church. Most of the hymns and hymnbooks in use were attributed to divine inspiration

The study concluded that music was indispensable element in most activities, of the Celestial Church of Christ. It was therapeutic and also functioned culturally as the key symbol that identified the church.

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NUMBER OF PAGES: 476