

2020 Report Based on 2019 Trip to Africa
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With the COVID-19 development preventing my ability to be in Africa this summer, I thought that this would be a good time to reflect upon my African activity during my 2019 visit. With a long-time mission of assisting in the development of musicians and music education in Africa, I try to spend my summer months being physically present in Africa, communing with the musical, educational, and culturally-affiliated communities, as well as institutions for the blind, because I myself am a totally blind African-American man. I travel to Africa alone, but, upon arriving, am immediately brought into association with various educational, cultural, and social development organizations that have adopted me as a familial (and familiar) figure in their communities. I have been involving myself in this self-sponsored mission since 1983, with the bulk of my work being accomplished in Nigeria, where I have been serving as guest lecturer for the University (and universities) of Nigeria, and more recently, also with the two most prominent music conservatories in Nigeria. This activity was initiated when a well-known music store in New York was going out of business, with the owners retiring in 1983. The owners, who knew me very well, agreed to sell me a lot of materials – books, recorders, and accessories – at a minimal cost, with the knowledge that I would be taking them with me to Africa to donate to institutions there. The effort grew when a distributor of musical instruments and related materials, who knew about what I was doing, agreed, or offered, to sell me many things at cost. Later, I found a way to get many materials for blind institutions, leading me to become associated with social service organizations in Africa. Also later, a particular African airline enabled me to take over materials when I made trips to Africa, because their government, knowing what I was doing, decided to help me out. This continued for several years, until the United States banned flights to and from the country whose airline was helping me get materials to Africa, because of a political situation in that country. Up until that time, I had been able to transport large or heavy items with me on those trips. Now I would have to book my travels through European carriers, lessening the amount of materials I could bring with me, although I still brought over quite a load, paying excess baggage charges.

After a long period of graduate study, and recuperation period, all of which I thought was like taking a vow of poverty, I returned to Africa in 2011 to resume my previous type of activity. Today, I travel with 4 or 5 large, overweight pieces of luggage and a significant amount of hand luggage. The cost of the luggage exceeds the cost of the flight. Being

blind and traveling alone, I have always been subjected to special handling, which has become routine between me and airlines.

My 2019 trip to Nigeria was particularly rewarding because I was experiencing a tremendous upsurge in the level of talent and proficiency, as related to expertise in performing classical music and jazz. I had been working in the midst of this upsurge since 2017, so I actually experienced things getting better – a flutist receiving a scholarship to study in Nova Scotia (Canada) in 2017, a trumpeter receiving a scholarship to study in the United States in 2018, and a clarinetist receiving a full scholarship in Music at Trinity College in London, I believe the first Nigerian to receive a full scholarship there. I'm in steady communication with the trumpeter and the clarinetist. The trumpeter, who is moving into his third year at the University of Louisiana, was named winner of the David Baker Scholarship Award, the highest award given to a university student by the Jazz Educators Network, the largest jazz education organization in the world. This National award is given annually to a university student for talent, spirit, and commitment to jazz studies. He was presented the award at the January, 2020 global conference of the Jazz Educators Network, held in New Orleans, a conference that brings thousands of jazz educators, jazz practitioners, and jazz enthusiasts to a different city each year. This singular award included travel to and from the conference and hotel accommodations during the 4 days of the conference.

The trumpeter (Solomon Abang) spent 3 weeks of his Christmas/semester break with me here in New York City. The photograph of the two of us with Wynton Marsalis was taken during that break, during a pre-arranged meeting with Mr. Marsalis, who is Director of the Lincoln Center Jazz Theater and Orchestra, and probably the world's most famous trumpet player, having won Grammys in both jazz and classical music. The clarinetist (Olaolu Akindipe) will be entering his second year at Trinity College, one of the UK's most prestigious conservatories, where he has been studying with the principal clarinetist of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. They are among the many upcoming young musicians who have been attending my summer master classes and sessions, where I teach, coach, and mentor many serious young musicians and music students.

My mentees are my reason for putting this report together. As I see the talent level rising, and think about how there used to be a lack of well-trained musicians, I think or project ahead about what the eventual level of musicianship could be if some of these now-being-well-trained young musicians take part in the training of tertiary music students in Nigeria, particularly at universities that lack strong instrumental specialists who could assist in properly developing instrumental students. When I gave my concert

at the annual conference of the National Association of Nigerian Musicologists in August, 2019, my intention was to expose some of these students to the wider academic community. Because the conference did not allow time to give good exposure, even though they performed with me, I decided to include videos of some of the rehearsals or class sessions that were held during my master classes given at the University of Lagos and Mountaintop Conservatory in Lagos. If able, or later, I will try to pass on some photographs that were taken at Adenerin Ogunsanya College of Education, where I spent a 5-day residency in 2018 and 2019, giving open master classes with up to 25 students at a time, hanging around waiting for me to spend a bit of time with them individually. Those sessions were unusual for me. Dr. Olasumbo Loko can tell you about my situation, because she always had to extricate me from the students so that she could get me back to my hotel and still make it to her home in the Badagry in a timely manner, before the traffic built. A similar thing happened when I was at Lagos State University, because Dr. Ajenifuja or Dr. Yomi Bello similarly had to pull me away from the students, who wanted to spend more time with me. Sometimes the situation is a bit funny because they followed me all the way out to the car.

With most of my normal activities being centered at the University of Lagos and Mountaintop Conservatory, I was lucky to have been facilitated by Dr. Stephen Olusoji and Dr. Albert at the University of Lagos and Madam Funmi at Mountaintop Conservatory, all of whom opened their doors when they saw me coming.

I will also include a letter of appreciation from the MUSON Center, thanking me for the 14 flute study books that I donated to the library. I donated an identical set (minus Carnival of Venice for flute and guitar) to Mountaintop Conservatory, with suggestions on how the books should be used. With so much of the educational systems and processes being stymied by COVID-19, I hope that some of the things encountered in this report will serve as a revelation for some of you.

Just by chance, I find myself in an unusual position relative to development in the educational and cultural sectors of Nigeria. My involvement goes back to 1983, so I have a unique observational position, having almost immediately been adopted into various echelons of those types of activities, ranging from students, educators, and scholars to professional musicians at the very top of the Nigerian musical world, both popular and formally trained musicians. I became friends with all of them.

For most of those years, popular musicians dominated in the observable world, with classically trained musicians being known to a special segment of the well-educated Nigerian community, those wanting to partake of classical and other music of a more

formal nature. And, because Nigeria's Ministry of Culture decided to mentor me in much of what I was doing, I was also able to witness traditional culture at every level, student to state and national troupes, of many major and minor ethnic groups, often in natural settings. As one might expect, popular performers and groups were known universally, and, with Nigerian performers dominating the Continent at the moment, such is the same today. But some huge changes have begun to occur.

Prior to 2011, I had always lamented the fact that very, very few instrumental music majors progressed beyond the intermediate performance level. The teachers were not there; the student interest seemed to not be there, perhaps out of futility. But beginning in 2011, I began to encounter, and work with, a few students whose abilities were somewhat above the vast majority of music students. Because they had gravitated towards me (because to them I was a “real” musician) as a mentor, I was able to teach and coach them, and enter into their confidence, with them telling me how they learned. Usually, someone started them on the instrument, then additional instruction was garnered by resorting to online instructional music videos by competent instrumentalists. I recorded interviews of people telling me stories of that kind. Some talented students, who were extremely eager to learn, could become technically competent through this method. But they needed someone like me to mentor them musically and technically, because there was no one around who could properly guide them. This resulted in my teaching, coaching, and mentoring any instrumentalist or singer who came my way.

For me, the idea of doing this is not so farfetched. At Temple University, as an undergraduate, my major was Music Education, with an applied instrumental major. This meant that, although an instrumental major, I was put through all the challenges, devices, and subjects related to becoming a true music educator. In my particular case, this also meant taking two years of private voice lessons and voice class with a voice major teacher, two years of private piano lessons, and various classes in specific instruments like violin, brass, clarinet, and “practice orchestra”, using instruments unfamiliar to you, but learning on your own, or perhaps with a friend who played that instrument (this orchestra sounded awful!). It also meant methods courses and student teaching, at both the primary and secondary levels, orchestration, orchestral conducting, and choral conducting (both with great practitioner-professors), along with music and movement (dance). There was also choral participation, in my case, membership in the elite 40-Voice Concert Choir and combined choirs. The concert choir included many voice majors, several of whom later went on to Juilliard, the Curtis Institute, the Manhattan School of Music, and other graduate schools. Two of my own friends, both young African-American women, who went on to Juilliard, won prizes in

major international competitions, leading to operatic and concert careers, with one of them singing the title role in Carmen during a series of performances at the Metropolitan Opera. There was also orchestra, band, wind ensemble, and chamber music participation, in the case of instrumental participation, my serving as principal flutist in All-Temple organizations and principal flutist in the Pennsylvania All-State Intercollegiate Band and Orchestra. Basically, the training guided us towards situations where you might be responsible for the entire music program, or might be the only person to guide music instruction in a particular place, somewhat like what I do when I am in Africa. Of course, the music study classes that all music majors took were included in the program. My Master's program was more specialized, theoretical, and philosophical. My Ph.D. program was extremely theoretical, based on and leading towards research, with Music Education as my major and Ethnomusicology, Musicology, and African-American Studies as my minors. I am New York State certified in secondary school level education. So, because of my training, I am very comfortable with what I am doing in Africa. At the undergraduate level, I also studied with some of the best flute teachers in the United States, and later, for a while, at Juilliard and at the Academie International d'Été in France with Jean-Pierre Rampal.

There are other reasons why I have a special ability to work in the African environment. In a transpositional way, my personal life experiences were not so different. I grew up as a disadvantaged black child, in an all-black (ghetto) environment, with persons of all types, both good and bad. But, because of high aptitude, I was systematically taken out of that environment and put into a high-achieving environment, both academically and musically, which caused me to move in a different direction. I was still very, very challenged because I was still economically deprived and visually impaired (not blind), something that many people did not know. Somehow, I was able to achieve very highly at the musical level, making many similarly talented friends and acquaintances along the way, and gaining membership in several important musical organizations.

This seems to be the point where Nigerians are now, with distinctive orchestras and self-formed chamber music organizations that can provide an acceptable level of musicianship and quality musical organizations. These are all-black organizations performing in an all-black environment. My own experiences at this stage were in a predominantly white environment that performed for predominantly white audiences and whereas the African musicians have little access to trained professional teachers, I gained access to some of the best flute teachers available from the time I was 14 years old. I didn't have a quality instrument during this time, but I still managed to learn well.

Another similarity in our environments is that, although I was normally in a predominantly all-white environment, there was a community of older black classical music players, who had formed orchestras and took notice of younger musicians like me, asking us to play with them on occasion, especially when they were giving concerts, which were often in all-black settings (including churches), providing us with a nurturing effect. We younger players were better trained than the older players had been. I, and my generation, remember those days well, which gives me insight as to what the current young African musicians are experiencing. Also, my own experiences as a handicapped (visually impaired, but not totally blind) student during elementary school, and outside summer experiences through young adulthood, also in a disabled environment, created the empathy that encourages me to work with others who are challenged.

Another commonality is that we both love our own music. When I sent or posted the New York Times obituary for Little Richard, the rock and roll singer, I wrote extensively about how I came to love the music of Little Richard, saying how I had grown up in a very large family (8 children) where music was always present. I heard race music, rhythm and blues, spirituals, gospel, lots of jazz, mambo and cha-cha, Black influenced pop music, sung by Blacks and whites, etc. This music became part of my DNA, and probably affects the way I play classical music.

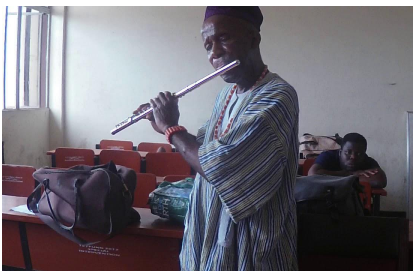
When teaching at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka I was always impressed by the way students were able to move from one type of music to another, usually African and Western, with singing, dancing and drumming etc., always seeming to be particularly impressive when engaging in the traditional forms. I still remember a particular occasion when the student leader of the African Dance Ensemble invited me to watch them rehearse. As they danced, I heard terrific drumming and asked who was playing the drums. The person accompanying me told me that it was Peace and Wilfred, two of my closer student friends. Peace and Wilfred were two violin players, who together with Nunso, formed a very creative violin trio that performed in a contemporary popular style. To encourage them, I helped them get some materials including two acoustic-electric violins, which gives you an idea of what I thought of them at the time. I had no idea that they also played African drums, certainly not at the level I heard. Of course, I was also wondering if that kind of drumming might be a detriment to their violin playing. But this was one case of how students keep their traditional skills, even as they learn more contemporary musical ideas.

As I pondered, I also thought of this as being one of the University of Nigeria Nsukka's contributions to tertiary music education in Nigeria – having students learn both African

and Western music. I actually had Peace and Wilfred play drums during one of my own performances of an original African composition, specifically because they would be able to perform on drums in the most sensitive manner. With this type of instruction, there is some assurance that when cross cultural performances of African-influenced music occur, the African component will be correct, or at least acceptable. It is somewhat like what one thinks about when classical musicians are asked to play jazz but can't quite get the swing of it. It works better when the performer has traditionally related roots in their background. I like this. For those who are not skilled in performing classical music, the African component gives them alternate ways of expressing their musicality.

Along with this report, I will be including a list of flute books that were donated to the Muson School of Music, because I want everyone to know about and have access to them. I sent an identical set of books (minus the Carnival of Venice) to the Mountaintop Conservatory. I am also including access to several YouTube videos filmed in Nigeria, several photographs, and perhaps a couple of audio recordings that were recorded in Nigeria. One of the audio recordings is a conversation with a clarinet player, Jonathan Anuforo, describing how he used video instruction in learning to play the clarinet so well, a conversation that might serve as an example for others learning to play an instrument. There are a few of the photographs of me showing the Ambassador of Music Award that was presented to me by the Association of Nigerian Musicologists during their 2019 conference. Two of the photographs were taken on the terrace of the world's most cluttered African-filled apartment, my own, which, because I live on the 26th floor, give a spectacular view of New York City in the background.

only--Because Mountaintop Conservatory did not send me a letter such as MUSON sent, I have not been able to communicate with them directly. Could someone please let them (Madame Funmi or her assistant) know that I would need to have their contact information.



[Let Us Break Bread Together](#)

Let Us Break Bread Together On Our Knees Segun Okedunmola and Adegoke Iredecarlyn Negro spiritual, flute version arranged by Richard Donald Smith As a typica...

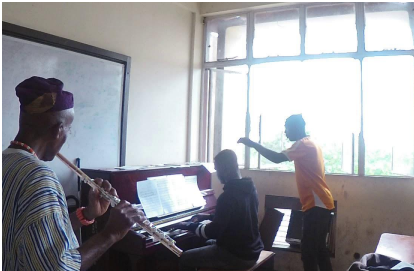
youtu.be



[Variations on a Yoruba tune, Idahun Re La N'Reti, composed and played by Richard Donald Smith](#)

Variations on a Yoruba Tune (Idahun Re La N'Reti) Composed and Performed by Dr. Richard Donald Smith and Seyi Ajibade (piano) My earlier years in Africa were...

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[I Dream of Jeannie by Stephen Foster Sung by Segun Okedunmola \(Take 2, after some rehearsal\)](#)

and share it all with friends, family, and the world on YouTube.

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[Concerto in B Minor for Five Flutes by JB Boismortier](#)

Concerto for Five Flutes in B Minor by Josef Bodin de Boismortier The performers on this concerto are Dr. Richard Donald Smith, Wisdom Awuzie, Njemanze Onyek...

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Mozart Flute Quartet in D Major

Mozart Flute Quartet Wisdom Awuzie This performance of the Mozart Flute Quartet in D Major was organized and self-prepared by the participants, as part of a ...

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Afro Blue/Lady (1st file):

<https://youtu.be/TACauz2ngaM>

Afro Blue/Lady (2nd file):

<https://youtu.be/1TPbY9KnIRI>

Ola Akindipe and Jonathan Anuforo demonstrating clarinet duets:

<https://youtu.be/ZN-8auuj5W4>

Danny Boy:

<https://youtu.be/DJIW9CWSAOk>

Conversation with Jonathan - How He Learned to Play the Clarinet (1 of 2):

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JdFyws5FE2UkaROmCfn5DvaNpMBoHHIF/view?usp=sharing>

Conversation with Jonathan - How He Learned to Play the Clarinet (2 of 2):

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Et5cMPSwfwQ0L5tJUwQ8hnaeUL92nDrX/view?usp=sharing>



ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIAN MUSICOLOGISTS (ANIM)
in conjunction with
**THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS & MUSIC,
LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY, OJO**
Ambassador of Music Award
Presented to
DR. RICHARD DONALD SMITH
*In recognition of your commendable contributions to
the development and sustainability of music education and
musical practices in Nigeria.*
On this day Tuesday 20th August, 2019
Congratulation







