Theatrical Dimensions of Christian Hymn Performance in Nigeria

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Certification

This is to certify that **Samson Oladosu EBE** with Matric No **LCU/PG/003042** carried out this research work titled '***Theatrical Dimensions of Christian Hymn Performances in Nigeria***' in the department of Performing Arts, Music and Film Studies, Faculty of Arts, Lead City University, Ibadan, Oyo State, for the award of Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD) in Performing Arts and that this has not been previously submitted.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the Almighty God who makes all things beautiful in its time.

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Acknowledgement

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Abstract

Hymns have long served as both spiritual anchors and performance staples in Nigerian Christian worship, traditionally confined to church liturgies. In recent years, however, chorale groups, community choirs, and independent ensembles have begun presenting hymns in concerts, community events, and theatrical productions, signaling a shift in their cultural and artistic role. This study situates Christian hymn performance within broader discussions of performance, culture, and spirituality, asking how hymns can evolve when staged outside conventional church contexts. The research specifically examines The Whole Armour Hymnatorio, a performance experiment that merges hymn singing with a dramatic oratorio framework. The objective was to investigate how theatrical elements including acting, stage design, costume, and the integration of indigenous instruments reshape hymn performances into hybrid expressions that are both worshipful and artistically innovative. The study also sought to explore how these performances balance spiritual depth with cultural representation, while engaging audiences in new ways. The study was anchored on Performance Theory, Dramaturgical Theory, Cultural Theory, and the Ethnomusicological Theory of Music-Making. It adopted an Explanatory Sequential Research Design implemented in two phases. In the first phase, quantitative data were gathered from audience members through descriptive survey methods during the live performance event. In the second phase, qualitative content analysis was conducted on the recorded performance video, providing deeper insights into the integration of theatrical and cultural elements. Findings indicate that theatrical elements significantly enhanced audience engagement and emotional connection, while preserving the spiritual integrity of the hymns. The use of multilingual hymns and Nigerian traditional instruments such as the goge, oja, and African drums enriched the performances with cultural depth, reinforcing national identity and broadening accessibility across diverse audiences. The study also identified the Hymnatorio as a new performance model that bridges conventional hymn singing and contemporary theatre. In conclusion, the Hymnatorio demonstrates the potential of hymnody as both a liturgical and artistic practice. It contributes to scholarship in performance studies, musicology, and liturgical arts, while offering a viable framework for integrating cultural heritage into Christian worship. The study recommends further experimentation by performers, directors, and scholars in adapting hymns to contemporary African contexts, ensuring that preservation and innovation coexist harmoniously in modern hymn performance.

Keywords: Hymnatorio, Theatricality, Worship, Culture, Performance.

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