

Celebrating the Cathedral Church of Christ Choir, Lagos, Nigeria, at Ninety

Godwin Sadoh

The history of church choirs in Nigeria is interwoven with the arrival of Christianity in Nigeria, which dates back to the mid-nineteenth century. The early missionaries from the United States and Europe settled mainly in the southwest (Yoruba) and southeast (Igbo) regions of Nigeria. The conversions of the local indigenes encouraged the missionaries to build several churches for worship and to continue the propagation of the Gospel in Nigeria. It was in these churches that the converts were first exposed to English hymns in four-part harmony.

Worship at the Cathedral Church

The Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos, was founded in 1867 by a group of Christian worshippers from St. Peter's Anglican Church, Faji, Lagos, where services were conducted only in Yoruba language. These worshippers were Sierra Leonians who spoke mainly English and wanted to have services in English. Hence, it was agreed that services at the Cathedral Church would be conducted exclusively in English. Consequently, the congregation at the Cathedral Church strictly committed to having all worship in English, including the sermons, hymns, announcements, and all special musical renditions by the Cathedral Choir. Another reason for embracing worship in English was that the church was designed to cater to the musical and spiritual needs of the cosmopolitan Lagos society as well as visitors from outside the country, foreign diplomats, and the various ethnic groups in Nigeria who communicated fluently in English. In other words, the congregation at the Cathedral Church comprised the elite, the well-educated, intellectuals, upper-middle-class, the affluent and apparently the cream of the Lagos society. I remember my days at the Cathedral Church as a chorister between 1980 and 1994: almost everyone communicated in English during choir rehearsals and services. Occasionally, one might hear people communicate in Yoruba, but it was always some few sentences and they would quickly switch to English.

While the Cathedral Church of Christ has received criticism for adopting a complete English service within a Yoruba state and in one of the most populous African countries, one could argue that this decision was worthy, considering the pluralistic nature of the indigenous languages in Nigeria. Linguistically, Nigeria is widely diversified, with three major ethnic groups—Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. In addition, there are multiple subdivisions of the major languages, known as local dialects that include hundreds of tongues. With such extensive linguistic diversification, the government had to adopt English as the official language of the country after independence from Great Britain in 1960 in order to unify the diverse ethnic groups. To elevate one of the local languages over another would have caused internal dissatisfaction and deep division.

Interestingly, the Cathedral Church of Christ was one of the few pan-ethnic and pan-African congregations in Nigeria. Membership in most other churches was made up of one major ethnic group; hence, services were conducted there in the indigenous language of the group. But at the Cathedral Church of Christ, there are Yoruba, Igbo, Edo, as well as descendants of Sierra Leone, Ghana, Togo, and other West African countries who migrated to Nigeria in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As the mother church of the Anglican diocese in Lagos, the Cathedral Church of Christ is always busy with services and other benevolent activities throughout the week:



Cathedral Choir

Sunday Worship

7:15 am—Holy Eucharist (Communion service without choir)
 9:15 am—Choral Mattins (Cathedral Choir sings)
 9:15 am—Contemporary Praise and Worship (Every fourth Sunday)
 9:15 am—Cornerstone Fellowship (Youth/college students)
 9:15 am—Children's Church (Sunday school)
 11:15 am—Holy Eucharist (Communion with or without the Cathedral Choir)

Sunday Evening Worship

5 pm—Evensong with the Cathedral Choir (first and second Sunday)
 5 pm—Community Hymn Singing (third Sunday)
 5 pm—Time of Refreshing (fourth Sunday)
 5 pm—Psalmody (Whenever there is a fifth Sunday)

Weekday Worship

6 am—Mattins
 6:45 am—Holy Eucharist

Saturday Worship

7:15 am—Mattins
 11:15 am—Holy Eucharist

Cathedral Choir and Masters of the Music

The Cathedral Church of Christ Choir is the oldest choir in Nigeria, with an average membership of about fifty male voices, half of whom are boys who sing the treble part. However, that number has recently exploded to over eighty strong and dedicated voices—treble (37), alto (18), tenor (13) and bass (15). The first choir was organized by **Robert Coker** in 1895, comprising young men and women. Coker was acknowledged to be the first indigenous organist and choirmaster in Nigeria, and apparently the first to occupy this lofty position at the Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos. Prior to his appointment as organist at the church, he was sponsored by the Cathedral Church to travel to England to study music in order to form a good choir suitable for Christ Church, which was later elevated to a cathedral status in 1923. Coker was regarded as a musical genius of his time. He was the first indigenous musician to attempt the performances of Western classical music in Nigeria, notably Handel's *Messiah*. Coker died on February 9, 1920.

The choir was later reorganized during the tenure of **N. T. Hamlyn**, a British musician and pastor of the church. Hamlyn replaced the women of the choir with boys and young men, following the tradition of most British cathedrals. The choir made tremendous progress that established it as a model for other church choirs. Hamlyn provided the choir with surplices and erected choir stalls at the east end of the church. A strict disciplinarian, Hamlyn was always keen on regular and punctual attendance, and was thus able to set a high standard that has been

maintained to this day. After the era of Hamlyn, there was a brief period of short appointments of organists such as that of **D. J. Williams**, **J. G. Kuye** in 1904, and later **Frank Lacton**, a Sierra Leonian who served until the appointment of Thomas Ekundayo Phillips in 1914.

Thomas King Ekundayo Phillips (1884–1969) was appointed Organist and Master of the Music after completing his musical training at Trinity College of Music, London (1911–14). Prior to his appointment at the Cathedral Church, he was organist at St. John's Anglican Church, Aroloya, and St. Paul's Anglican Church, Breadfruit, Lagos. Phillips's tenure was a remarkable turning point in the history of church music in Lagos and Nigeria as a whole. He built a solid foundation on which the present choir stands firmly today as one of the best cathedral choirs in Africa. He retired in 1962 after serving in the music ministry at the Cathedral Church for forty-eight years (Trinity Sunday 1914 to Trinity Sunday 1962).

Thomas Ekundayo Phillips was succeeded by his son, **Charles Oluwole Obayomi Phillips** (1919–2007), as the Organist and Master of the Music; he faithfully served the church for exactly three decades (Trinity Sunday 1962 to Trinity Sunday 1992). Charles Obayomi Phillips was born on September 28, 1919, in Lagos. After attending C. M. S. Grammar School, Lagos, he proceeded to Durham University, England, receiving a bachelor's degree in commerce with distinction in June 1946. Phillips started taking private lessons on piano when he was only four years old with Nigeria's most celebrated international musician, Fela Sowande, and as a choir boy at the Cathedral Church received organ lessons under the tutelage of his father. At age fourteen, Phillips had already started assuming leadership roles in music; first, he rose to the enviable position of school pianist at C. M. S. Grammar School and was later appointed by his father as the assistant organist of the Cathedral Church in 1933.

Charles Obayomi Phillips studied organ with J. A. Westrup at Durham University, and with Christopher Idonill in 1976 at the Royal School of Church Music, London. During his tenure as Organist and Master of the Music at the Cathedral Church, Phillips maintained the tradition of the Cathedral Choir and developed new ideas that made the choir soar in standard. In spite of the tremendous economic upheavals in the political, social and religious life of Nigeria since independence in 1960, music at the Cathedral Church continues to be the center of inspiration and worship.

In addition to his strenuous tasks at the Cathedral Church, Charles Obayomi Phillips served as president of the Union of Organists and Choirmasters in Lagos, an organization that oversees the maintenance of high standards of music in all Anglican churches in the Lagos diocese. He was the Emeritus



Thomas Ekundayo Phillips at the 1932 organ, at the Cathedral Church, Lagos



Charles Oluwole Obayomi Phillips playing the organ at the Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos



Yinka Sowande, brother of Fela Sowande

Organist at the Cathedral Church of Christ until his death in May 2007. After Phillips's retirement in 1992, **Yinka Sowande**, Fela Sowande's younger brother who had been Substantive Organist under Phillips for several years, was temporarily appointed as interim Master of the Music; he retired on December 31, 1992.

History was made on January 1, 1993, with the appointment of **Tolu Obajimi** as the first female Organist and Master of the Music of the Cathedral Church of Christ. She is the first woman to be appointed to the position of organist and music director in any Nigerian church. Obajimi is also the first Nigerian female organist to play recitals on the pipe organ. In addition to playing organ and piano recitals all over Lagos, she had accompanied several standard choral works such as *Messiah*, *Elijah*, *St. Paul*, *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day*, and Thomas Ekundayo Phillips's *Samuel*.

Tolu Obajimi certainly deserves special recognition and commendation for daring to step into the very shoes that even men found to be extremely challenging. Since 1993, she has expanded the mu-



Tolu Obajimi, present Organist and Master of the Music, at Cathedral Church of Christ organ

nic ministry of the Cathedral Church to the delight and with the support of the choir, clergy and the entire congregation. One of her most remarkable accomplishments was the creation of the Cathedral Church of Christ Choir Orchestra, which was launched at the 80th anniversary of the choir on November 22, 1998. The other two significant programs added to the Cathedral Church ministries under her leadership are Community Hymn Singing and Psalmody: Chanting the Psalms of David.

Tolu Obajimi's successful activities at the Cathedral Church are not surprising to those who knew her before she began at the Cathedral Church. She brought into the church's ministry several years of experience as a professionally trained musician. Obajimi studied music at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London, in the 1960s; on her return to Nigeria, she taught music at Queen's College, Lagos, for several years, and she also founded and taught at her own Tolu Obajimi Conservatory of Music, Lagos. Obajimi is presently assisted by **Richard Bucknor** as Choirmaster, **Sina Ojemuyiwa** (the best and most famous Cathedral Choir tenor) as Assistant Choirmaster, **Jimi Olumuyiwa** (former Cathedral Choir Librarian) as Assisting Choirmaster, and **Tunde Sosan** as Substantive Organist.

It is important to mention that the Cathedral Church of Christ has a rich and rigid tradition of appointing someone from within the choir to the leadership position of Organist and Master of the Music. Charles Obayomi Phillips received organ lessons from his father, Thomas Ekundayo Phillips, and gave Tolu Obajimi her first lessons in organ and trained her to the proficient level necessary for appointment as the Cathedral Organist. Even though Obajimi was never a member of the Cathedral Choir, she had been a member of the church for several years and she began by playing piano for the 7:15 am Holy Eucharist during Charles Obayomi Phillips's tenure. She was later called upon to accompany the choir at rehearsals during the week, and she participated in several concerts such as Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and Handel's *Messiah* in the late 1980s.

Tunde Sosan started off as a choir boy, and he was trained on the organ by Tolu Obajimi before he went to study at the Trinity College of Music, London. Other notable musicians who have served as honorary organists, substitute organists and/or recitalists at the Cathedral Church include **Fela Sowande** (musicologist and organist-composer), **Ayo Bankole** (musicologist and organist-composer), **Modupe Phillips** (a son of Thomas Ekundayo Phillips, he played the organ at the age of twelve), **Samuel Akpabot** (musicologist and composer), **Kayode Oni** (concert organist and choir director), **Godwin Sadoh** (organist-composer, choral conductor and ethnomusicologist), **Kweku Acquah-Harrison** (Ghanaian organist and music educator), **Albert Schweitzer** (German musicologist and organist), and **Ian Hare** of King's College, Cambridge, England.

Choir Training

The outstanding musical standards of the Cathedral Choir today can be traced

back to the hard work and foundation laid by Thomas Ekundayo Phillips. Phillips emphasized strict discipline, regular and punctual attendance at choir practices, correct interpretation of notes, voice balance, articulation, attack, composure, reverence in worship, and utmost sense of good musicianship. His expectations were very high and certainly demanding, but the choir always rose to his standards. During choir practices, as the conductor, Phillips was very sensitive to intonation. He would detect and correct any faulty notes emanating from any section of the choir. He would also call to order any chorister who did not hold his music book correctly, such as covering the face with it or placing it on the lap while seated. The present arrangement where choristers placed their books on the raised desk did not exist then.

Thomas Ekundayo Phillips was known to be very meticulous and thorough in everything he did—whether he was dealing with twelve probationers or with his augmented choir of over one hundred voices. One of the criteria to join the Cathedral Choir or his augmented choir was the ability to sight-read music. Furthermore, the singer must have had a very good voice to be able to sing under Phillips's direction. Consequently, his choir learned anthems, hymns, chants, and other standard choral works in a very short time. One of the ways he tested his choir to see if they had mastered a work was with the accompaniment. Often, at the last rehearsal of an anthem before Sunday worship, he would start the choir off with the organ, and then suddenly stop playing right in the middle of the piece; if the choir faltered and stopped, he would ask, "suppose the organ broke down during the performance on Sunday, are you going to stop singing?" His choir did not know an anthem, as far as he was concerned, until they could sing it convincingly and confidently without any accompaniment and without dropping in pitch. Honorable Justice Yinka Faji, who began as a choir boy under Charles Obayomi Phillips and now sings alto, recounts the benefits of the discipline instilled in him as a Cathedral chorister:

Membership in the choir disciplined me. To me discipline is synonymous with the choir. It is now a personal taboo for me to miss Sunday services—Mattins and Evensong. Choir practice at 6 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays as a choir boy and now as a choir man, no side talks during rehearsals, team work, orderliness, and mutual respect; these and more have been and still are the norms of the choir. The choir made me bold. I remember one Holy Eucharist Sunday service that I was to sing a solo. It was the *Agnus Dei*. When it was time to sing, I stood up and opened my mouth. As soon as I started singing, everyone in the congregation looked up and my heart started beating fast. I then said to myself, "Yinka, they are looking at you, will you fail?" I almost stopped singing; one way or the other, I completed the solo and sat down. Since then, I have become very bold to address a large crowd; in fact, I can address the entire nation. Other good virtues I picked up include composure during worship, improved speech control and good manners generally.

Before a choir boy or man can be admitted into the choir to sing in Sunday worship, he must first go through the rigorous probationary period that normally last several months. The probationary period of choir boys is eight months, while that of adults is around three months. I remember my probationary period in 1980 while I was still in high school. I attended the choir practices on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but on Sundays I would sit in the congregation for worship and was never allowed to sing with the choir until I completed my three months of probation. It felt so good in those days to put on my beautiful cassock and surplice and sing tenor in the most famous Anglican Church choir in Nigeria.

Whenever the boys completed their probation, they would be formally admitted into the Cathedral Choir at a special service in which their parents would assist them to put on the white surplice over the black cassock. This was always a moment of joy and pride for the par-



Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos

ents. Each week, the choir comes into the church at least four times with a total time of about eight hours. The Organist and Master of the Music usually devotes thirty minutes to the junior boys or those on probation from 6 to 6:30 pm before the main choir practice begins. He/she trains them in sight reading of music notation, vocal exercises, and theory of music. All this training ultimately leads to the boys taking the external examinations of the Trinity College of Music, London. Successful candidates would receive certificates if they passed the exams.

The older members of the Cathedral Choir were never left out of continuous training. Some prominent senior members of the choir were occasionally sponsored by the Cathedral Choir to the Royal School of Church Music, London, refresher course training as the funds were available. This normally took place during summer when the choir was away on vacation in June or July. On return, the choir member would give a report of all he learned, paying particular attention to the new innovations in church music as practiced in England—in the form of new anthems, hymns or hymnals, latest techniques of chanting the Psalms or singing regular church hymns and sacred concerts.

Choir Ministry

The role of the choir in the ministry of the Cathedral Church of Christ is immense. The choir leads the congregation every Sunday in hymn singing, versicles and responses (antiphonal prayers set to music), special settings of liturgical music such as *Venite, Benedictus, Te Deum, Nunc Dimittis, Magnificat* and the Ordinary of the Mass. The Master of the Music uses the choir to teach the congregation new music.

The Master of the Music is always attentive to how the congregation sings church hymns. In order to boost the standard of congregational singing, Tolu Obajimi introduced a Community Hymn Singing service slated for the third Sunday of each month. This was designed to encourage members of the Cathedral Church to attend Sunday evening worship. Apart from the roster for church societies and individuals, families are also encouraged to sponsor the service. In this service, the Master of the Music writes out the background information or history of the hymns to be sung in the program. There is no sermon; however, one or two Bible lessons are inserted into the program as epilogue. The service opens and closes with prayer. The format of the service is simply an alternation of readings with hymn singing. The historical background of the hymns is read by individual members of the congregation, while the choir and congregation sing the hymns. Before the last hymn is sung, the sponsors and committee members of the service are usually acknowledged.

Whenever there is a fifth Sunday in a month, the Cathedral Choir presents special evening music entitled "Psalmody: Chanting the Psalms of David." This was also one of the creative innovations of Tolu Obajimi. Similar to the Community

Hymn Singing, Psalmody is simply the alternation of readings, in this case the Psalms of David, by members of the congregation, with the chanting of the actual Psalms done by the congregation and/or the Cathedral Choir. The reader presents an historical background of the Psalm—who wrote it, the occasion, why, when and where the Psalm was likely written. This approach helps the congregation to have a better understanding of the theological underpinning of the Psalm, which inevitably would enable them to sing with understanding and energy. Through this medium, the Master of the Music and the Cathedral Choir teach the congregation the latest techniques of chanting the Psalms of David, thereby helping them to correct some performance errors during rendition.

Interestingly, some Yoruba Psalms set to music as anthems by Thomas Ekundayo Phillips are always included in the service. Presently, this is one of the few avenues in which Yoruba songs are performed in worship at the Cathedral Church of Christ. According to the Master of the Music, the use of Yoruba versions of the Psalms in this program showcases works of talented Nigerian composers in sacred music and Psalmody/hymnody in particular. Special settings of the Psalms were normally performed by the Cathedral Choir only, while the congregation listened with dignified attention. Examples of works in this category include Thomas Ekundayo Phillips's *Emi O Gbe Oju Mi S'Oke Wonni (I Will Lift Up My Eyes Unto the Hills—Psalm 121)* and *Nigbati Oluwa Mu Ikolo Sioni Pada (When the Lord Turned Again the Captivity of Zion—Psalm 126)*. Interestingly, during the tenure of Thomas Ekundayo Phillips, the evening services on the last Sunday of each month were always in Yoruba. The Cathedral Choir would dress in their red cassocks and surplices, augmented by the voices of the Choral Society with the ladies dressed in white *buba* and *alari* costumes (traditional gowns). The two choirs would perform Phillips's Yoruba compositions in these services.

The Cathedral Church of Christ truly proves itself to be a unique culturally blended congregation in terms of hymnals used for worship. The church exemplifies the nature of an interdenominational faith-based organization with the use of hymn books from diverse churches. The hymnals used for worship include *Ancient and Modern, Ancient and Modern Revised, Songs of Praise, Methodist Hymn Book, Hymnal Companion, Baptist Hymnal, Saint Paul's Cathedral Psalter, Church Hymnal, Alternative Service Book, New English Hymnal, Redemption Hymnal, Broadman Hymnal, Sacred Songs and Solos, More Hymns for Today*, and indigenous hymns written by Thomas Ekundayo Phillips as well as other members of the choir.

Concert Performances

The Cathedral Church of Christ Choir is well known throughout the southern regions of Nigeria for its seasonal concert performances. The choir sets the tone and standard of music through its

exceptional renditions of standard classical works. Thus, the extremely rigorous schedule of the Master of the Music is further laden with concert activities. Apart from the weekly routine of choir practices in preparation for Sunday worship, the Master of the Music must prepare the choir for concerts, which include sacred masterworks, instrumental pieces, and organ recitals. The concert performances are in the form of an Annual Choir Festival, Advent Carol Service, Festival of Lessons and Carols, Easter Cantata, and other types of variety concerts throughout the year.

Thomas Ekundayo Phillips inaugurated the Annual Choir Festival at the Cathedral Church of Christ in November 1918, to celebrate the musical accomplishments of his lovely choir and to showcase the expertise of the group. The festival is traditionally scheduled for the Sunday nearest to St. Cecilia's Day (November 22), and takes place in the two main morning services (Choral Mattins and Choral Eucharist) and Evensong. The choir sings hymns, versicles and responses, Psalms, and beautiful anthems. The evening festival opens with a short organ recital or a variety concert of solo and chamber music that lasts twenty-five minutes, and it usually closes with an organ voluntary (postlude). The organ recital is played by one of the Cathedral organists or by a guest organist such as Kayode Oni and Kweku-Acquah Harrison.

It is noteworthy that on the occasion of the eighty-first Choir Festival in 1999, the Cathedral Choir marked the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Thomas Ekundayo Phillips with the publication of some of his compositions in book form, *Sacred Choral Works: English and Yoruba*. The book contains several anthems, hymns, descants for hymns, versicles and responses, settings for canticles and Psalms, and chants for canticles and Psalms.

The Cathedral Church of Christ is British in every aspect of its worship, ranging from the use of the English language to the order of service and the music selections. In fact, all the organists have been directly or indirectly trained in

the schools of music in London. Hence, there is a tremendous influence of the British worship system at the Cathedral Church. Furthermore, most of the composers of the music used for worship are British—John Ireland, William Byrd, John Stainer, Bernard Rose, David Willcocks, John Rutter, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Samuel Wesley, Thomas Attwood, and Charles Stanley. However, in fairness to the Organists and Masters of the Music, compositions from other European nationalities are occasionally used. These include the works of Beethoven, Mozart, Bach, and Schubert.

To augment the works of foreign composers, the Cathedral Organist and Master of the Music uses the music of selected indigenous Nigerian composers, notably past and present choir members and organists. The Master of the Music has always been very careful not to promote and glorify the compositions of indigenous musicians who have no direct connection with the Cathedral Church Choir. Among the famous Nigerian musicians or choir members whose works were often performed include the father of the choir himself, Thomas Ekundayo Phillips, Charles Obayomi Phillips, Fela Sowande, Yinka Sowande, Lazarus Ekwueme, Tolu Obajimi, Sina Ojemuyiwa, and Tunde Sosan. I am looking forward to the day when my own compositions would be included in the music repertoire at the Cathedral Church.

The choral and organ compositions of Fela Sowande provided a musical and cultural link with the United States because some of Sowande's pieces are based on African-American spirituals. The texts of the spirituals share a common theme with the Nigerian songs of liberation written in the 1940s through the 1960s during the era of the nationalist movement that fought for the independence of Nigeria from the British colonialists. The Cathedral Choir could see the spiritual connection between African-American slavery and the colonial experience in Nigeria, which lasted over a century (1840s–1960). The pain, suffering, anguish, and the hope for lib-

eration from the imperialists are some of the commonalities in the themes of the songs. Even though Nigeria obtained her independence from the British government in 1960, the influence of British culture is still very strong today. It permeates every aspect of Nigerian existence, from cultural life to politics, social life, education, and Christian worship as observed at the Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos.

Following the choir festival is the Advent Carol Service in December. The choir performs selected and tuneful carols and hymns with themes that talk about the coming of Christ. The carols and hymns are interspersed with the reading of six Bible lessons that tell the story of the promises of the coming Messiah. The lessons are mostly taken from the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament, with two short ones from the New Testament.

The Festival of Lessons and Carols has always been the climax of the Cathedral Choir musical performances for the year. Therefore, the choir is always at its best, singing with clarity, tenacity and excellence. The festival takes place on the last Sunday in December of every year even if it were after Christmas Day. This allows other parish churches to have their own Christmas services earlier, so that choirs from all over Lagos could converge on the last Sunday of December to hear the Cathedral Choir.

The Easter season is another high point in the musical activities of the Cathedral Choir. The Cathedral Church of Christ Choir is popularly known for its annual evening concert on Easter Sunday. This can take the form of the performance of an Easter cantata or the performance of a major choral work such as Handel's *Messiah* as performed on Easter Sunday, April 19, 1981, and on March 31, 2002. The Cathedral Choir traditionally performed the entire three parts of *Messiah* once every three years during the tenure of Charles Obayomi Phillips; but the choir performed only parts two and three in 2002. Another Easter cantata took place on Sunday, April 7, 1996, with

the performance of the entire three parts of Thomas Ekundayo Phillips's *Samuel*. There were some few instances when the choir staged a concert on Good Friday, such as John Stainer's *The Crucifixion* under the direction of Thomas Ekundayo Phillips in 1916. According to the Cathedral historians, this was the first Good Friday cantata concert in Nigeria.

There are other times in the year that the Cathedral Choir performs concerts in and outside of the church. Notable oratorios, cantatas, and orchestral works have been performed by the choir, such as Mendelssohn's *Elijah* (performed in 1989), *Hymn of Praise*, and *St. Paul*; Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* (performed in 1953); Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*; Handel's *Ode to Joy, Judas Maccabaeus*, and *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day* (performed in 1998); Haydn's *The Creation*; Stainer's *The Daughter of Jairus* and *The Crucifixion* (performed in 1916); Walford Davies' *The Temple*; and Edward Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* performed by the Cathedral Church of Christ Choir Orchestra at the 80th anniversary of the choir on November 22, 1998.

These concerts featured solos, choral and instrumental music. The concerts often attract dignitaries, professional musicians, and students from far and near to the Cathedral Church. The venues of the concerts were either the Cathedral Church, Glover Memorial Hall, or other concert halls in Lagos. The hall was always packed to capacity. Many visitors to the Cathedral Church have commended the outstanding singing of the choir and even remarked that it could favorably compare with the cathedral choirs in England in terms of quality. Gerald Knight, former Director of the Royal School of Church Music, London, once remarked that the Cathedral Church of Christ Choir, Lagos, is second to none in the whole of West Africa.

Some of these concerts were specifically organized to raise funds for either the Cathedral Church or to buy a new organ. For example, Thomas Ekundayo Phillips presented several concerts with



Yale University

GRADUATE STUDY IN ORGAN PERFORMANCE

at Yale Institute of Sacred Music and School of Music

FACULTY

Thomas Murray, *Professor of Organ*
 Martin Jean, *Professor of Organ*
 Jeffrey Brillhart, *Organ Improvisation*

DEGREES OFFERED

Master of Music
 Master of Musical Arts
 Artist Diploma
 Doctor of Musical Arts

Church Music Studies curriculum available. Full tuition scholarships awarded to all Institute students. Generous stipends available to qualified applicants.

the Cathedral Choir in various parts of Lagos to raise funds for the building of a new pipe organ. He later embarked on a concert tour with his choir to Abeokuta on August 24, 1930, and later to Ibadan, to raise funds to build a new pipe organ for the Cathedral Church. In these concerts, the Cathedral Choir performed mostly Thomas Ekundayo Phillips's Yoruba songs to the delight of the natives of southwest Nigeria. The concerts were a huge success because the choir alone was able to raise more than half the cost of the organ. In fact, in 1927, Phillips went as far as England to appeal to British citizens for money to build the pipe organ. He was able to raise a substantial amount of money through the successful rendition of some of his Yoruba compositions by the St. George's Church Choir on Sunday, October 23, 1927. The Yoruba songs were recorded by H. N. V. Gramophone Company in London, and the royalties from the sales of the recording were all credited to the Cathedral Church of Christ's account in Lagos, towards the purchase of the 1932 organ.

The 1932 organ, which was later refurbished in 1966, is now in a very sorry state. In spite of regular servicing and replacement of deteriorated parts since 1966, the organ has reached a stage whereby no amount of repairs could restore it to its greatest glory. In 2005, in order to let everyone in the church realize the deplorable condition of the organ, the Master of the Music refused to send for the repairer when some faults developed. The situation got so bad that they had to stop playing the organ, using piano instead, much to the dissatisfaction of the congregation, including the provost (senior pastor of the Cathedral Church). The provost had to issue a directive that the faults be attended to immediately. The idea to build a new modern pipe organ for the church was originally conceived by the Women's Guild Auxiliary of the Cathedral Church, and a committee was later set up to achieve that purpose. The Women's Guild Auxiliary was able to raise some money. However, the funds could only cover the first installments for the purchase of the organ.

In view of the magnitude of the amount required and the importance of the new organ project to the history and development of the Cathedral Church, the Standing Committee decided to step in, and an organ fundraising sub-committee was inaugurated in 2006 to raise the proposed amount of 164 million Naira (\$1,640,000 USD). Members of the Cathedral Church, societies, families, individuals, the choir, and corporate bodies were enjoined to participate in the organ project in order to maintain and preserve the tradition of musical

excellence that the Cathedral Choir is noted for. Since 2006, the Cathedral Church of Christ Choir has embarked on several campaigns and concerts to raise money to build a new four-manual organ with 64 stops and 3,658 pipes. On Sunday, January 20, 2008, the provost of the Cathedral, Very Rev. Yinka Omololu, announced to the entire congregation with great joy, that they had realized the proposed amount. This feat was made possible through the generous donations of the Cathedral congregation and non-members from all over the country and around the world.

The Cathedral Choir has performed before renowned dignitaries. The choir performed before the British Royal Family, first in April 1921 at the foundation laying ceremony of the Cathedral Church of Christ by His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales. In January 1956, the choir performed before Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip when they worshiped at the Cathedral Church, and finally, on October 2, 1960, at the Independence Day service of Nigeria, attended by Her Royal Highness, Princess Alexandra. On Advent Sunday, 1972, the Cathedral Choir performed with the King's College Cambridge Choir, during their visit to Nigeria. The first broadcast by the Cathedral Choir on the British Broadcasting Corporation was aired on December 12, 1951.

Recordings

The Cathedral Choir's musical activities have never been restricted to only live performances at services and concerts. The choir has been involved in recording some of their favorite repertoire. During the tenure of Thomas Ekundayo Phillips, the choir recorded two of his songs—*Emi O Gbe Oju Mi S'Oke Wonni (I Will Lift Up My Eyes to the Hills—Psalm 121)* and *Ise Oluwa (The Work of the Lord)* for the BBC series "Church Music from the Commonwealth." In 2006, under the leadership of Tolu Obajimi, the present choir released its first recording in the twenty-first century, *Choral Music: Volumes I & II*. The two CDs contain a selection of the most famous hymns, anthems, Psalms, Te Deum, and Jubilate that the Cathedral Choir have been performing over the years. Composers of the selected works as usual are mostly British with the exception of the Cathedral Choir musicians, in particular, Thomas Ekundayo Phillips.

Choir Picnics

As the saying goes, "all work and no play, makes Jack a dull boy;" and in keeping with this, the Cathedral Church of Christ Choir does not only engage in rigorous rehearsals and performances

throughout the year, but also have their moments of relaxation, partying and enjoyment. These are called the "choir picnics" or "choir treats." These are annual events organized for the choir by the older members of the choir, choir patrons and/or patronesses or other affluent members of the congregation. It is a way for all those who enjoy and appreciate the outstanding work of the choir to express their gratitude. Choir treats have always been social gatherings held in a very relaxed and congenial atmosphere, mostly in the homes of the sponsors. There would be plenty of food, salad, desserts, and drinks. And for the younger choir boys, there are always indoor and outdoor games to play. A typical picnic day was and still is an occasion to display the football (soccer) prowess between the 'Dec side' (right side of choir stall) and the 'Can side' (left side of the choir stall) boys.

Some selected members from other parish churches are always invited to celebrate with the Cathedral Choir. This is not the only occasion in which choirs from other churches, even outside of the Anglican church, are invited to the Cathedral Choir program. There is a combined choir concert that takes place once a year. For this program, two to three members from various denominational churches would be invited to join the Cathedral Choir to form what is known as the Augmented Choir. The Augmented Choir, which normally comprised both male and female in the size of one hundred voices or more, would rehearse once a week and finally close this glorious event with a big concert at either the Cathedral Church or one of the churches in Lagos.

Another avenue of collaborative work with other churches occurs when the Cathedral Choir goes on their compulsory new year holidays in January or the summer vacation in June. Some of the church choirs in Lagos come in to sing for four weeks at the Cathedral Church. These collaborative endeavors date back to the era of Thomas Ekundayo Phillips, and subsequent Organists and Masters of the Music have kept up the tradition.

Ex-Choristers

In the ninety years of its existence (1918–2008), the Cathedral Church of Christ Choir has produced some of the most brilliant, outstanding and famous Nigerian musicologists, pianists, organists and composers. Historically, the choir has become a 'school of music' in which budding composers have had their formative years. Many of the talented musicians belonging to the Cathedral Choir family moved to successful musical careers, some at the



Fela Sowande

international level. The products of the choir have brought immense pride and esteem to the pioneer choir in Nigeria. All these musicians, including myself, give the credit to Thomas Ekundayo Phillips's work as the founding Organist and Master of the Music. The musical training, performances, discipline, and exposure to a variety of standard choral and instrumental works had a great impact in shaping the musical taste and career of the ex-choristers. Indeed, the Cathedral Choir is a breeding ground for future generations of talented Nigerian musicians. I cannot close this essay without highlighting the profiles of some of the musical giants produced by the Cathedral Choir.

Fela Sowande (1905–1987) came under the leadership of Thomas Ekundayo Phillips in the early 1900s as a choir boy. Under the mentorship of Phillips, Sowande was exposed to European sacred music and indigenous Nigerian church music. He received private lessons in organ from Phillips while singing in the choir. Sowande claimed that Phillips's organ playing, the choir training, and the organ lessons he received had a major impact on his becoming an organist-composer. It was Thomas Ekundayo Phillips who exposed Sowande to the organ works of European composers such as Bach, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Guilmant, and Dubois. Sowande went on to study music in England, where he became the first African to receive the prestigious Fellowship of the Royal College of Organists (FRCO) in 1943 with distinction. He was a broadcaster, musicologist, organist-composer, and music educator. Sowande taught as a professor of music at several institutions in Nigeria and the United States, including the University of Ibadan, Howard University, University of Pittsburgh, and Kent State University. He composed several choral and solo songs, orchestra works, but he is most famous for his sixteen wonderful pieces for solo organ.

Christopher Oyesiku (1925–) had his earliest musical training as a choir boy at the Cathedral Church of Christ Choir under the tutelage of Thomas Ekundayo Phillips, who gave the young Oyesiku his first lessons in the theory of music, musicianship, and voice. Phillips also prepared Oyesiku for the external examinations of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, London. During his days as a chorister at the Cathedral Church, Oyesiku rose to become one of the leading trebles and later became the best bass in the choir. In the late 1940s, he was the leading bass soloist in some of Gilbert and Sullivan's comic operas such as *Trial by Jury*, *H. M. S. Pinafore*, and *The Mikado*. Oyesiku later went on to study music at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London, from 1955 to 1960. Oyesiku returned to Nigeria in 1960, and in 1962 was appointed to the position of Assistant Director of Programs at the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, Lagos (now Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria). He served in this capacity until 1981. Oyesiku taught music and directed choirs at the Oyo State College of Education, Ilesha, from 1981 to 1987, and the Department of Theater Arts, University of Ibadan, from 1987

Experience Wesleyan's magnificent Aeolian organ!

Aeolian, op. 1542, originally installed in 1925 in the Briarcliff home of Asa G. Candler, Jr., is celebrating 50 years at Wesleyan College. The Schantz Organ Company has renovated the organ, and tonal additions, including a new Tuba Magna, have been made. Join us for these exciting upcoming events:

Peter Richard Conte
in Concert, Organ
Dedication Ceremony
Thursday, October 2, 2008
7:30PM, Free Admission

Macon Symphony Orchestra
with Michael McGhee, organ
Saturday, October 18, 2008
7:30PM, tickets available at
www.maconsymphony.com

Creating uplifting performances and educating expert musicians since 1836. Serious music majors from around the world concentrate in voice, piano, or organ at Wesleyan College. Refer a student or request more information about our Fine Arts Scholarships in Music. 800.447.6610.

4760 Forsyth Road, Macon, Georgia
www.wesleyancollege.edu



WESLEYAN



Godwin Sadoh at the cathedral organ in 1981



Jimi Olumuyiwa and Godwin Sadoh in cathedral choir robes in 1981

to 1994. He was well known in Nigeria, West Africa, and Great Britain as an extraordinary bass singer. He is popularly referred to as "Tarzan" at the Cathedral Church Choir for his deep and beautiful bass voice. Oyesiku performed the bass solo in several cantatas, oratorios, and variety concerts. One of the high points of his career was the opportunity given him to perform before several dignitaries in Nigeria and the Royal Family in England. He was also an outstanding choral conductor as well as music educator. He is presently retired from active music career and now lives with his wife in London, England.

Samuel Akpabot (1932–2000) was a choir boy at the Cathedral Church under Thomas Ekundayo Phillips in the early 1940s. Akpabot received a most significant introduction to European classical music as a chorister at the Cathedral Church. Akpabot sang many standard choral works such as *Messiah* and *Elijah* at the Cathedral Church before going to England to study music. He did advanced studies in music at the Royal College of Music, London, Trinity College of Music, London, the University of Chicago, and Michigan State University, where he received his Ph.D. in ethnomusicology. He was a composer, ethnomusicologist, organist, pianist, trumpeter, and music educator. Akpabot was the author of five books and several scholarly articles on Nigerian music. He taught at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, the University of Ibadan, and the University of Uyo, where he retired as a professor of music and eventually died there. He served as organist and choir director in several churches in Lagos, including St. Savior's Anglican Church. Akpabot composed choral and vocal solo songs, and orchestral works.

Ayo Bankole (1935–1976) was a choir boy at the Cathedral Church of Christ in the early 1940s. It was Bankole's father who encouraged him to join the renowned Cathedral Choir. Bankole became a private organ pupil of Thomas Ekundayo Phillips, and also studied organ with Phillips's protégé, Fela Sowande. Bankole rose to the position of school's organist at Baptist Academy (one of the famous high schools in

Lagos) at the age of thirteen, in 1948. In the late 1950s, Bankole went on to study music at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London, University of Cambridge, London, and the University of California, Los Angeles. In 1963, Bankole became the second Nigerian to receive the Fellowship of the Royal College of Organists (FRCO) diploma. He was an organist-composer, ethnomusicologist, pianist, and music educator. Bankole was a lecturer of music at the University of Lagos, and organist/choir director in several churches as well as several high schools in Lagos. Bankole composed mostly sacred music for choir, solo voice, organ, and orchestra.

Lazarus Ekwueme (1936–) is a Nigerian musicologist, composer, choral conductor, singer, and actor. He is one of the pioneer lecturers of music in Nigeria. As a scholar, he has authored several articles and books on African music and the diaspora. Ekwueme was a chorister at the Cathedral Church under Thomas Ekundayo Phillips in the 1940s. He studied music at the Royal College of Music, London, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London, and Yale University, where he obtained the Ph.D. degree in music theory. In the area of composition, he is well known for his tuneful choral works based on Igbo idioms and African-American spirituals. As a music educator, Ekwueme taught at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and the University of Lagos. Ekwueme retired as a professor of music from the University of Lagos in the early 2000s; he is presently a traditional ruler in his home town in the southeast region of Nigeria.

Godwin Sadoh (1965–) joined the Cathedral Choir as an adult to sing tenor in 1980 under Charles Obayomi Phillips, and he was a chorister until 1994. In 1982, Phillips appointed Sadoh as an Assisting Organist, gave Sadoh private lessons in piano, organ and general musicianship, and prepared Sadoh for all the piano and general musicianship external examinations of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, London. Sadoh became the Organist and Choirmaster of Eko Boys' High School, Lagos, at the age of sixteen in 1981. He occupied this position until he graduated from high school in 1982. Sadoh later studied music at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, where he became the first African to earn the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in organ performance in 2004. He studied organ and composition at Louisiana State University. Sadoh taught at the first three institutions mentioned above and also at Golden West College, California, Thiel College, Pennsylvania, Baton Rouge College, Louisiana, and LeMoyné-Owen College, Memphis, Tennessee. He was appointed professor of music at Talladega College, Alabama State, in 2007. Sadoh is the author of several books and articles on modern Nigerian music, church music, ethnomusicology, and intercultural musicology. He is one of the leading authorities on Nigerian church music and African art music. In the area of composition, he has composed for every genre—vocal solo and choral works, piano, organ, electronic media, and orchestra. Sadoh's compositions have been performed all over the United States, Europe and Nigeria; some of his works have been recorded on CDs. He has been a recipient of the ASCAP Award in recognition of the performances and publications of his music since 2003 to the present. Sadoh has served as organist and choir director in several churches in Nigeria and the United States.

Recently, the Cathedral Choir has proudly given two more graduates to the professional world of music. **Jimi Olumuyiwa**, who now sings bass, joined as a choir boy in the early 1970s. Olumuyiwa was the librarian of the Cathedral Choir for many years, and he has participated in several grand concerts including singing the bass solo in *Messiah*. In addition to his strenuous schedule at school and the Cathedral Church, he directs the Golden Bells Chorale Group, in Lagos,

a choir founded by Godwin Sadoh in the 1980s. Olumuyiwa was a former Choir Director of Eko Boys' High School, Lagos, from 1982 to 1983. Olumuyiwa recently received the Bachelor of Arts degree in music from the University of Lagos, and he rose to the position of Assisting Choirmaster at the Cathedral Church. **Tunde Sosan** joined the Cathedral Choir as a choir boy under the leadership of Charles Obayomi Phillips in the late 1980s. He continued singing with the choir after Tolu Obajimi took over the baton in 1993. In addition to singing and accompanying the choir, Sosan received private lessons in organ from Obajimi. Sosan's faithfulness to rehearsals, services and concerts by providing piano and organ accompaniment when there was no one else to do so has earned him favor with Obajimi, who has blessed him with several promotions: from Assisting Organist to Assistant Organist and presently Sub-Organist. Sosan will be completing his studies at Trinity College of Music, London.

Conclusion

As the premiere choir in Nigeria, the accomplishments of the Cathedral Church of Christ Choir are immense, and it has played a major role in shaping the direction and development of church music in Nigeria, especially in the Anglican Church. The choir continues to play a leading and model role in Lagos and in Nigeria as a whole. The magnitude of musical excellence filtered into the ears and minds of the Lagos congregations is felt not only in the Anglican church, but in other denominations as well. The annual choir festivals, Advent carol services, festival of lessons and carols, variety concerts and the choir picnics continue to attract choristers and music enthusiasts from the Methodist, Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Reformed, African, Evangelical, and non-denominational churches from different parts of the southwest regions of Nigeria to the Cathedral Church of Christ. The choir rightly connects the American culture with Nigeria through the use of

spirituals in the compositions of its ex-choristers and their musical training in American universities. As they celebrate their ninetieth anniversary in November 2008, they can certainly look forward to many more years of outstanding and meritorious accomplishments in the Nigerian church music ministry. ■

The author is grateful to his very good friend, Jimi Olumuyiwa, for providing most of the documents used in writing this essay.

Photos are used with kind permission of Christopher Oyesiku.

References

- Euba, Akin. *Essays on Music in Africa*. Bayreuth: Iwalewa-Haus, 1988.
- Sadoh, Godwin. "A Centennial Epitome of the Organs at the Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos, Nigeria." *The Organ* 81, No. 320 (May 2002): 27–30.
- _____. "The Creative Process in Nigerian Hymn-Based Compositions." *THE DIAPASON* 93, No. 8 (August 2002): 15–17.
- _____. "A Profile of Nigerian Organist-Composers." *THE DIAPASON* 94, No. 8 (August 2003): 20–23.
- _____. "Twentieth Century Nigerian Composers." *Choral Journal* 47, No. 10 (April 2007): 33–39.
- Phillips, Thomas Ekundayo. *Sacred Choral Works: English and Yoruba* (Book One). Lagos: Babafemi Ogundipe Enterprises, 1999.
- Cathedral Church of Christ Choir, Lagos: Choral Music Volumes I & II*. Lagos: Midi-Corp Limited, 2006. Compact disc.
- Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos: 64 Stops 4 Manual Pipe Organ Brochure*. Lagos: Mainland Bureau, 2006.
- Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos: Calendar of Worship and Events*. Lagos: Mainland Bureau, 2003.
- 70th Anniversary Commemorative Brochure of the Cathedral Church of Christ Choir*. Lagos: S & B Printers, 1988.
- Bulletins of Mattins, Holy Eucharist, Evensong, Choir Festival, Advent Carol, Festival of Lessons and Carols, Psalmody, Community Hymn Singing, Rededication of the Cathedral Pipe Organ, and concert programs.

Online Sources

- <http://www.thecathedrallagos.org>
<http://africadatabase.org>


professional
musician
 pastoral theological

Master of
 Sacred Music

www.luthersem.edu/msm


"We seek to give musical and theological
 flesh and bone to those who are called
 to serve the church as leaders of the
 people's song."

— Dr. Paul Westermeyer, Director





LUTHER
SEMINARY
St. Paul, Minnesota


IDEALS TO ACTION

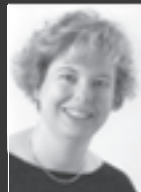



ST. OLAF
COLLEGE
www.stolaf.edu


 Armstrong


 Aspaas


 Ferguson


 Rodland


 Westermeyer