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# MUSIC AND HUMANITY: A BRIEF NARRATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN AND NIGERIAN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC SCENES

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**ABSTRACT**

*Music, as a universal language, transcends boundaries to reflect the shared essence of humanity. This study investigates the current music stages of Russia and Nigeria, highlighting how these diverse cultures utilize music as a tool for narrative, social commentary, and identity building. Russian music, founded in classical legacy, merges intellectual introspection with new genres like rap and techno music, reflecting the nation's historical depth and sociological progress. Nigerian music, powered by vivid rhythms and global appeal, combines traditional elements with new genres as in Afrobeats, symbolizing resilience, joy, and a spirit of communal celebration. Through comparative analysis, this study illustrates the unifying effect of music in communicating cultural uniqueness and common human experiences. It underlines music's potential to bridge divides, inspire social change, and link people across varied geographies.*

**Keywords: Music, Cultural Identity, Russian music, Nigerian music, Humanity.**

## INTRODUCTION

Music, that timeless thread of sound, holds within it a power unmatched by any other medium. It transcends the bounds of language, geography, and history, weaving itself into the hearts of people and shaping the world in which we live (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998). As one travels between Russia and Nigeria, two vastly different yet deeply resonant lands, He/She is struck by the power music holds to bring us closer to our most essential selves. In Russia, the chill of a winter morning might be softened by the melancholy strains of a violin echoing through a Moscow alleyway; in Nigeria, the warmth of an evening breeze might carry the joyous beat of drums calling a community to dance. These moments reveal what words alone often cannot, the spirit, passions, and struggles of a people. Through music, we discover not only what makes us different, but also what binds us together.

In Russia, contemporary music is a complex blend of history and modernity, often expressing the identity crisis of a nation that has faced dramatic change. Russia's music scene is rooted in a long tradition of classical excellence, with composers like Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, and Stravinsky carving out a global reputation for Russian art. Their legacies endure, their notes still ringing in the hallowed halls of the Bolshoi Theatre or echoing from the delicate touch of a pianist's hand. But Russian music has evolved far beyond its classical roots, transforming with each turn of the nation's political and cultural shifts. Today, alongside classical performances, one finds the piercing, often politically charged lyrics of Russian rock, the experimental sounds of electronic music, and the rapid-fire verses of hip-hop artists who give voice to disillusioned youth. In these songs, there is a blend of nostalgia for a storied past and a restless desire to push forward into a future yet to be defined (Taruskin, 2009).

Take, for example, the rise of Russian rap and hip-hop, a genre that has captivated the attention of younger generations grappling with social and economic change. Here, the art of spoken word becomes a vehicle for critique, rebellion, and self-expression. Artists like Oxxxymiron and Basta paint vivid pictures of post-Soviet life, exploring themes of alienation, corruption, and cultural identity (Denisova, 2019). The rawness of their lyrics and the rhythm of their beats transform everyday struggles into poetic commentary. Yet, this genre, with its roots in global influence, retains a distinctly Russian character, marked by introspection and sharp social critique that feels deeply reflective of the country's unique history and challenges. Moving from Moscow's underground music clubs to Nigeria's effervescent streets, one steps into a world alive with sound—a world that celebrates rhythm, resilience, and joy. Nigeria's contemporary music scene bursts with color and life, dominated by genres like Afrobeats, Highlife, and Afro-pop that have captivated listeners far beyond the continent. In Nigeria, music is not simply entertainment; it is a living force, driving social movements, uplifting spirits, and affirming cultural pride. Artists such as Davido, Burna Boy, Tiwa Savage, and Wizkid have achieved global recognition not merely for their catchy rhythms, but for their ability to channel the soul of Nigeria's people and share it with the world (Shonekan, 2015).

Nigeria's contemporary music serves as a testament to the resilience of a nation that has overcome hardship and is determined to tell its story in its own words. The lyrics often explore themes of love, hope, and struggle, but also speak candidly about corruption, inequality, and social change. Beneath the infectious beats and vibrant melodies lie messages that resonate with millions, offering a means of connection and collective empowerment (Collins, 2012). Music, in this context, becomes a tool for escape from hardship and social change, transcending borders to speak to anyone who listens.

The difference between the Russian and Nigerian music stages is striking, yet, so are the parallels. Both countries' musical expressions bear witness to their peoples' endurance, creativity, and capacity for individual and communal change. Russia's evolution from imperial power to Soviet state to modern democracy has left marks on its music, just as Nigeria's path from colonial rule to independence to modern nationhood has shaped its soundscape. Both nations use music to reflect on their pasts, grapple with their presents, and imagine their futures.

In experiencing these vibrant music scenes firsthand, one is often struck by the common threads that unite them. The essence of what it means to be human—our hopes, fears,

aspirations, and triumphs—resonates in every note, whether heard in a quiet Moscow auditorium or a bustling Lagos marketplace. Music has the power to lay bare our struggles, express our deepest desires, and remind us of our shared humanity. It brings us to tears, it makes us dance, and it stirs in us a passion to create, connect, and persevere.

Reflecting on the journey between these cultures, music is seen not simply as entertainment, but as an entryway into the soul of a nation. We have stood among crowds in Moscow, watching as a rapper channels his angst into lyrics that challenge authority. We have danced alongside strangers in Lagos as the beat of a drum became the heartbeat of a community, connecting us in shared joy. These moments reveal the best of what music offers us: connection, expression, and the simple, profound reminder that we are not alone in our struggles or our celebrations.

As we continue to explore the intersection of Russian and Nigerian music, one is filled with awe at how these art forms evolve to meet the challenges and opportunities of their times. Music becomes a living narrative, telling the stories of its people with honesty, complexity, and beauty. It offers both countries a stage from which to be seen and heard—a stage upon which the human spirit, resilient and unyielding, takes center spotlight. And so, through the power of music, we come to understand not just our differences, but also our shared humanity.

**THE RUSSIAN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC STAGE**

Walking the storied streets of Moscow and St. Petersburg, it becomes clear that Russia's contemporary music stage pulses with life, offering a compelling mix of historical gravitas and modern experimentation. Russia's complex history is intertwined with its music—a blend of classical tradition, folk heritage, and burgeoning contemporary genres. To explore Russian music is to delve into a rich tapestry where every note is imbued with centuries of tradition while simultaneously embracing the rapidly evolving rhythms of the modern world. In this interplay between old and new, one finds music that speaks not only to Russia's past but to its present and future.

In the grand theaters and concert halls of Moscow, one can experience Russia's enduring love affair with classical music. From an early age, children are introduced to the works of Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, and Shostakovich, creating a cultural reverence for these timeless compositions. Attending a performance of Rachmaninoff's "Piano Concerto No. 2" at the Moscow Conservatory remains etched in my memory—the air electric with anticipation as each note of the piano struck with passionate intensity. The audience was transfixed, many moved to tears by the power and grace of the music. This is the heart of Russian classical tradition: music that penetrates to the soul, calling forth intense emotions that range from melancholy and longing to triumph and resilience (Brown, 2002).

Yet, Russian contemporary music is far from bound by tradition alone. In the same streets where classical sounds reverberate, one finds vibrant echoes of folk music. Instruments such as the balalaika and gusli serve as reminders of a proud cultural heritage. At a festival in a park, we once watched a folk ensemble perform, blending traditional melodies with new-age influences. The balalaika, with its sharp, metallic twang, and the haunting notes of the gusli transported the audience back in time, even as the performers experimented with tempo and

electronic elements. This respect for folk music roots acts as a bridge, connecting Russia's past to its current exploration of identity.

However, the story of Russian contemporary music would be incomplete without the voices of the underground. Russia's political and social turbulence has given rise to a fierce music scene that channels dissent, frustration, and a desire for change. Hip-hop, in particular, has found a unique foothold, offering a platform for younger generations to speak out against corruption, inequality, and disillusionment. The lyrics are often raw and unfiltered, tackling sensitive issues in ways that demand attention. In an underground club in St. Petersburg, we have watched rap battles that have left deep impression on us. The performers used sharp, biting rhymes to convey the struggles faced by ordinary citizens. Their words, laced with anger and defiance, reverberated through the crowd. People listened with rapt attention, some nodding in agreement, others shouting encouragement. Here, music became a political statement, a raw and visceral reflection of a nation grappling with its identity.

Russian electronic music, too, deserves mention. DJs and producers blend traditional Russian sounds with modern beats to create a genre-defying auditory experience. It's not uncommon to find a track that begins with a haunting choral piece or a snippet of a Soviet-era anthem before transitioning into a pulsing techno rhythm. The juxtaposition is striking—a testament to the adaptability of Russian musicians who merge their rich history with contemporary beats. Festivals such as Alfa Future People showcase this spirit, bringing together thousands of electronic music lovers to dance beneath flashing lights as historic echoes mix with the thrum of basslines. The energy is palpable, as if the audience is aware that they are part of a cultural evolution unfolding in real time (Taruskin, 2009).

Dance, too, plays a pivotal role in Russian contemporary music culture. Russia's renowned ballet tradition is a natural influence, and modern dance styles often incorporate elements of classical technique. It is mesmerizing to watch performances where fluid balletic movements are interspersed with urban street dance, creating a fusion that feels uniquely Russian. On one occasion, our group of students watched a dance troupe that combined intricate ballet footwork with breakdancing, all set to a mix of electronic and orchestral music, highlighting the feelings of Y. Steinholt, 2004 …*the resulting performance was both graceful and raw, a visual metaphor for the collision of tradition and modernity that defines so much of contemporary Russian art*. Through this lens, it becomes clear that Russian contemporary music is a force that reflects and shapes national identity. It honors its classical roots and folk traditions while embracing new forms of expression that speak to the modern world. Whether it is a violinist evoking the grandeur of a past era, a rapper calling for social change, or a DJ blending ancient chants with hypnotic beats, the Russian music stage offers a dynamic, multifaceted experience that captures the spirit of a nation.

In the end, music in Russia is more than an art form; it is a living narrative, an evolving story that captures the essence of what it means to be Russian in a constantly changing world. Walking the streets of Moscow and St. Petersburg, one feels the pulse of this narrative. It echoes in concert halls, vibrates through underground clubs, and weaves through the rhythms of daily life. The music tells of a people who cherish their heritage while pushing the boundaries of self-expression, using sound to reflect, challenge, and celebrate who they are.

## THE NIGERIAN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC STAGE

The streets of Lagos buzz with an energy unlike any other—a rhythmic hum that courses through the veins of Nigeria's largest city and into the heart of its music. Nigerian contemporary music is vibrant, diverse, and deeply intertwined with the culture and spirit of its people. Whether it is the catchy beats of Afrobeats blaring from roadside speakers, the traditional sounds of the talking drum at a ceremony, or the smooth harmonies of highlife music echoing through a night spot, the music of Nigeria reflects the pulse of a nation that is fiercely proud of its identity and unyielding in its resilience. To explore the Nigerian contemporary music stage is to journey into a world where joy, struggle, hope, and community are interwoven into every note and beat.

Nigeria's musical diversity is breathtaking. From Lagos to Abuja, and across the various regions, one can hear music that tells the story of a nation defined by its multifaceted culture and history. Afrobeat, the iconic genre pioneered by Fela Kuti, serves as a powerful lens through which the nation's sociopolitical struggles have been narrated for decades. Fela's music was and continues to be a rallying cry for justice, a critique of corruption, and an assertion of the power of the common man. His complex fusion of jazz, highlife, funk, and traditional African rhythms inspired generations, and his legacy echoes loudly in contemporary Nigerian music.

Today, Afrobeat has evolved into Afrobeats—a genre that has taken the world by storm thanks to stars such as Burna Boy, Davido, Tiwa Savage, and Wizkid (Shonekan, 2015).

Often, we watch as Burna Boy captivate the crowd with his powerful voice and commanding stage performances. *In moments like these, the energy of Afrobeats becomes palpable—a collective heartbeat that bridges generations and transcends borders* (Collins, 2012).

Nigerian music is not limited to Afrobeats, however. The nation's musical tapestry includes genres such as hip-hop, highlife, fuji, and gospel. Nigerian hip-hop artists blend local languages and Pidgin English with Western influences to create a unique sound that resonates with youth across the country. Artists such as Olamide, Phyno, and M.I. Abaga use their platforms to address issues ranging from social inequality to personal struggles, often weaving storytelling and social commentary into their verses.

Fuji and highlife, are two genres with rich histories. They continue to hold sway over older generations while captivating new audiences. The use of instruments that reflect its cultural heritage is central to Nigerian music. The talking drum, known for its ability to mimic human speech, the shekere, a percussion instrument made of a gourd covered with beads, adds texture and syncopation to traditional and modern music alike. These instruments are more than just tools; they are symbols of cultural pride and resilience, passed down through generations and adapted to fit the ever-changing music scene (Uche, 1999).

Dance is inseparable from Nigerian music. It is not just movement but an expression of emotion, identity, and unity. Styles such as shaku shaku, legwork, and the more traditional bata dance are performed with energy and grace, often telling a story or conveying a particular mood.

Nigerian music speaks of a people who refuse to be silenced, who celebrate their identity with every beat, every word, and every dance move. It is an art form that, like Nigeria itself, is full of life, complexity, and boundless energy—a fitting soundtrack to a nation in constant motion.

## A BRIEF COMPARISON OF THE RUSSIAN AND NIGERIAN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC SCENES

Reflecting on the musical landscapes of both Russia and Nigeria, it becomes evident that, while the two cultures are starkly different in many ways, the music that emerges from these societies reveals profound insights into their shared humanity. Both nations, despite their geographical distance and cultural distinctions, use music as a tool for self-expression, social commentary, and unity, offering a space where emotion, intellect, and community can converge in powerful ways.

Both cultures share a passion for storytelling, but their approaches are distinct. Russian music often uses historical and philosophical themes, reflecting on the nation's turbulent past and the intellectual currents that have shaped it. On the other hand, Nigerian music narrates the lived experiences of its people—whether through the rebellious rhythms of Afrobeat or the conversational flow of Nigerian hip-hop, music here is as much about identity as it is about social change. It is deeply rooted in the people's daily lives, addressing issues such as poverty, corruption, and political instability, while simultaneously celebrating the indomitable spirit of the Nigerian people.

Russian and Nigerian music serve the same essential purpose: they bring people together. In both Russia and Nigeria, music is a shared experience that transcends personal differences and becomes a collective force. Whether it is in the grandeur of a Russian concert hall or the open streets of Lagos, music unites people, offering them a space to connect with their emotions, their history, and each other.

Nigerian music is a means of musical self-expression and storytelling, addressing social and political issues (Fatukasi,A.O 2023). Nigerian musicians blend the old with the new, seamlessly incorporating traditional rhythms into contemporary genres like Afrobeats, fuji, and highlife. What struck me most during my time in Lagos was the pervasive sense of optimism in the music—a reflection of a people who, despite the many challenges they face, continue to find strength in their culture and identity. At an Afrobeats concert in Lagos, I saw thousands of people united, singing and dancing in a communal celebration of life. The music was infectious, pulsing with rhythms that echoed Nigeria's indigenous roots while speaking to a global audience through the universal language of sound. Nigerian music is not introspective in the same way that Russian music often is; instead, it is outward-facing, deeply connected to the present moment, and always forward-looking.

But when it comes to instrumentation, the differences between Russian and Nigerian music are striking. Russia's classical music, with its orchestral compositions and grandiose soundscapes, often incorporates instruments like the piano, violin, and cello to convey deep emotional nuance. Even modern Russian music, which fuses electronic beats with traditional sounds, retains the influence of these classical instruments, creating a layered and textured listening experience. In contrast, Nigerian music relies heavily on indigenous percussion instruments like the talking drum, shekere, and djembe, which offer a more immediate and

visceral connection to the rhythms of the African continent. The complex beats of Afrobeats and highlife are rooted in these rhythms, which are as much about creating a communal atmosphere as they are about individual expression.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the music of both Russia and Nigeria, though vastly different in style and execution, demonstrates the universal power of music to communicate, heal, and unite. It reflects the complexities of each culture, offering insight into the individual and collective experiences of their people. In Russia, music provides a contemplative space to reflect on history and identity, while in Nigeria, it serves as a celebration of resilience and joy. In both countries, however, music acts as a bridge between the past and the present, creating a harmony that is uniquely human and deeply connective. We have come to understand that, despite cultural differences, humanity's core aspirations remain the same: to express, to connect, and to find meaning in the world around us. Music, in all its forms, is the vehicle through which we achieve this connection, transcending boundaries and creating a space where we can all find common ground.

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