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Égwú Àmàlà: *The Paddle Dance of Nigeria's River Communities*

By Idenze Ezeme

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**Egwu Amala - From Umuoma
Ishiagu, Aniocha South LGA Delta
State, Nigeria**

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ÉGWÚ ÀMÀLÀ

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Égwú Àmàlà, also called the Paddle Dance, is a traditional dance from the Aboh people of Delta State and the Ogbaru people of Anambra State, Nigeria. It is an essential part of their culture and is mainly performed by women. The dance represents unity, leadership, and life by the river.

01

History of Égwú Àmàlà



Egwu Amala cultural dance performance by Aboh women

Égwú Àmàlà has been performed for many years and comes from the river traditions of the Aboh and Ogbaru people. These communities

depend on the River Niger for fishing, travel, and trade. The dance was created to honour the river and celebrate their way of life.

According to oral history, Égwú Àmàlà started when a river goddess appeared to a woman in a dream. The river goddess gave the woman a paddle and taught her the dance steps and songs. When the woman woke up, she remembered everything and taught it to others. This is why the dance is sometimes seen as a gift from the river goddess.

Long ago, Égwú Àmàlà was performed during boat festivals, new leader coronations, harvest celebrations, and ancestral ceremonies. The dance also had a spiritual meaning, as the people believed it brought good luck, safety, and prosperity. Even during colonial times, the dance remained an essential part of their culture. Today, it is performed at festivals, traditional events, and national celebrations to keep the tradition alive.

02

Importance of Egwu Amala Dance



Egwu Amala Dance. Photo: Proudly Asaba

Égwú Àmàlà is an essential tradition in riverine communities. It is performed at festivals, burials, and coronations to celebrate the people's connection to the river. The dance movements mimic paddling a canoe, showing the teamwork needed to travel on water. The people tell stories about leadership, beauty, and community life through the dance.

03

Structure and Roles in Égwú Àmàlà

Égwú Àmàlà has different roles, similar to people working together in a canoe:

- Obuzor/Obuanyinya (Leader): The main dancer who leads and controls the performance.
- Umu Amala (Paddlers): The dancers who represent those paddling the canoe.
- Okwommili (Water Bailer): The dancer symbolizing the person

removing water from the canoe.

- Okpeazu (Navigator): The dancer at the back, representing the person steering the canoe.

These roles show the importance of teamwork and leadership in the community.

04

Dance Style and Accessories of Égwú Àmàlà

Égwú Àmàlà is a graceful and rhythmic dance performed with traditional music and drumming. Dancers wear colourful outfits and move like rowers in a boat.

- Small paddles (to show canoe rowing)
- Horse tails (for beauty and grace)
- Handkerchiefs (for expressive movements)
- Maracas and gongs (to add music)
- Traditional flutes (to provide melody)

Égwú Àmàlà is more than just a dance—it is a way for the Aboh and Ogbaru people to express their history, beliefs, and way of life. It represents their connection to the river, teamwork, and cultural pride. Through its unique steps, roles, and music, Égwú Àmàlà remains an important tradition that keeps their heritage alive.

Égwú Àmàlà - From Umuoma Ishiagu, Aniocha South LGA Delta State, Nigeria - African Culture TV

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nze is an Igbo history and culture enthusiast with an in-depth passion for exploring the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and historical narratives of the Igbo people. His works is mostly focused on pre-colonial Igbo societies, traditional belief systems, leadership systems, and the impact of European colonialism.



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