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The Royal Drums of Ubulu: *How Music Brought People Together*

By Idenze Ezeme

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THE ROYAL DRUMS OF UBULU

The Royal Drums of Ubulu: How Music Brought People Together

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Music has always been essential to people, helping them connect, celebrate, and share stories. In the Igbo culture of southeastern Nigeria, The Royal Drums of Ubulu are more than just instruments. The Uduburu is a collection of drums in the Igbo language meaning unity, tradition, and leadership. It plays a major role in people coming together, either during festivals, ceremonies, or important meetings.

This article digs deep into the history of the Royal Drums, their meaning to the culture, and how they have continued to unify the people of Ubulu and beyond.

History of Royal Drums of Ubulu

The Royal Drums of Ubulu, referred to as Uduburu, have been an essential part of the culture and the people's way of life in the Kingdom of Ubulu in southeastern Nigeria for a long time. The drums are not merely instruments but a heritage passed down to the people by their early kings, who used them to establish communication, promote unity, and represent leadership.

Historically, the Royal Drums were first introduced in the foundational periods of the Ubulu Kingdom. Early kings of the kingdom, according to historical accounts, initiated the drums as the means through which they asserted their powers and touch with their people. The drums served as an instrument of leadership and could relay messages across the community before modern modes of communication were available.

They not only played a functional role but also a spiritually significant

role. It was said that the drums communicated not just with the people but also with the ancestors and the gods, placing the drums at the core of rituals and ceremonies.

It was only the Obi of Ubulu and his court that used the Royal Drums. The drumbeats are believed to be the voice of the king, passing a message or giving orders to the people. Every pattern of drumbeating had a meaning: whether to summon the community for a meeting, announce events related to the royal family, or signal an emergency.

The drums eventually came to symbolize the king's authority and the unity of the kingdom. The sound of the drums was enjoyed throughout the region, which they utilized to dig deep into the power and influence of the Ubulu monarchy.

The process of making the Royal Drums reflects their sacred status. The drums were a craft of highly skilled artisans, often from families with a long tradition of making drums. These sacred drums were carved from selected iroko or mahogany trees for spiritual value as well as their acoustic quality. The drumheads are made of animal hides such as goat or cowhide that have been treated to produce the deep resonant sounds that define the Royal Drums.

Each drum was given unique decorations with carvings and symbols representing the heritage of the Ubulu Kingdom. These designs often featured patterns and motifs related to royal power and cultural traditions.

As the Ubulu Kingdom expanded, so did the role of the Royal Drums. They became the focus of festivals, ceremonies, and communal gatherings, bringing people together through their rhythms.

When it comes to the Royal Drums, even during colonial times, when most traditions were suppressed or changed, they remained resiliently alive as a cultural identity. They adapted to the changing times while retaining their original significance, serving as a reminder of the rich history and traditions of the Ubulu people.

Today, the Ubulu royal drums are still very special to the kingdom. They use them for traditional ceremonies as well as modern cultural ones, indicating that the history of Ubulu has been sustained by the power of its music to attract other people together.

The Royal Drums are not just musical instruments. They have a deep cultural meaning:

The drums represent the authority of the Obi (king) of Ubulu. The messages of the king are put across to the subjects whenever the drums are played. Special beats denote vital events, meetings, and ceremonies; thus, the drums are termed the “voice of the king.”

The Royal Drums also play an important role in spiritual rituals. It is believed that the sound connects them with their ancestors and the gods. Different rhythms are played to pray for blessings, protection, or good harvests.

The drum unites people together. During festivals, people come together to dance, sing, and celebrate. The beat of the drums creates a feeling of togetherness, reminding people of their shared heritage and traditions.

How Royal Drums Unite the Community

The Royal Drums form the heartbeat of Ubulu festivals, such as the New Yam Festival and other cultural events. They start off with beats, drawing men from far and wide to join in the celebrations. When this drum sounds, people dance in circles, displaying unity and happiness. Their music beckons everybody, both young and old, to a dance. This helps in the bonding of the community through its culture.

They were used to convey messages in the old days through different rhythms, they meant different things, such as calling people to meetings, announcing royal visitors, or warning of danger. In this way, communication would be speedy and efficient without the use of phones or other modern tools.

The drums were also useful during disagreements. When there was a dispute, the king used the drums to call everybody together. The community could then assemble and talk over the issue and handle it peacefully,

They are also applied in vital ceremonies, including funerals, coronations, and harvest rituals. They invoke the ancestors to participate in the celebration and request blessings from the gods. The sound of the drums is holy and induces concentration on the spiritual meaning of the event.

This art of playing and making Royal Drums is passed from older drummers to younger ones for this tradition to carry on. The young drummers who learn this art learn not just how to play but what the rhythm means and how they are connected to Ubulu's history.

They are also used today in modern events, such as music festivals and cultural displays, aside from traditional ceremonies. This allows more people to learn about and appreciate the culture, including those outside Ubulu.

The Royal Drums have also served as a brand ambassador of Nigeria's huge heritage to the outside world. They are showcased at international festivals to foster cultural understanding and unity.

Many modern-day musicians derive their inspiration from the rhythms of these Royal Drums, fusing them with other styles like Afrobeat and jazz. This mix of old and new keeps the tradition alive while making it relevant to today's audience.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Idenze Ezeme

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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