

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Community Development and Cultural Cohesion in the Levites Choir Ibadan's Joyful Harvest Hymn Concert

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Abstract In African church traditions, hymns are more than liturgical accompaniments; they serve as cultural texts that preserve indigenous languages, transmit moral values, and foster collective identity. Their melodic and theological accessibility often transcends denominational boundaries, making them potent tools for cultivating social cohesion in diverse communities. Within Nigeria's vibrant religious landscape, hymn-centered gatherings provide a unique lens through which to examine how faith-based artistic expressions contribute to community development. This paper explores these dynamics through the case of the Levites Choir Ibadan's fifth Concert of Hymns, *Joyful Harvest*. Using participant observation, informal interviews with choir members and attendees, and thematic analysis of the event's repertoire and organization, the study investigates how a community hymn concert promotes cultural cohesion and stimulates local initiatives. Findings reveal that the concert drew participants from multiple Christian denominations and featured collaborative performances, including a presentation by the Vale College Children's Choir. The use of indigenous languages in well-known hymns created a shared cultural atmosphere that transcended denominational divides. Beyond the aesthetic dimension, the concert mobilized resources through a fundraising effort to purchase a new keyboard for the group, demonstrating how communal artistry can translate into tangible developmental outcomes. The paper concludes that such faith-based musical gatherings strengthen cultural cohesion, nurture interdenominational networks, and provide a model of community engagement that can inform broader conversations on collaborative development within diverse societies.

Keywords: community development, cultural cohesion, hymn concerts, African church music, choral performance

1 Introduction

In the African Church, hymns occupy a space that extends beyond liturgical routine. They are carriers of theology, repositories of indigenous language and metaphor, and aural archives of collective memory. [Boaheng \(2021\)](#) states that in most churches, hymn-singing plays a didactic function in corporate worship. This means that Hymns are not only sung in churches for liturgical purposes, but also to teach morals, thereby enriching not just the minds of the singers but also their daily living. From mission-era translations of European hymnody to the indigenization of melodies and texts, hymns have become cultural artifacts that embody both inherited and locally constructed identities. Their melodic accessibility and moral resonance often transcend denominational boundaries, creating shared emotional and spiritual ground in contexts where diversity is the norm.

Community hymn concerts represent a form of public worship and cultural expression. They combine the discipline of formal choral performance with the participatory ethos of congregational singing, turning musical gatherings into spaces of inclusion and dialogue. In Nigeria, where religion is a central pillar of community life, hymn concerts are not only opportunities for artistic excellence but also for building bridges between different age groups, denominations, and social backgrounds. They often serve as platforms for mobilizing resources, promoting indigenous languages, and fostering a sense of collective identity. Other forms of public worship can include public gathering for different purposes. For instance, the culture of

Africans is inclusive in nature which means Africans do things together (Tchombe, 2024), when there is a tragic incident like death, people are often seen gathered in the community to pray and sing, spontaneously singing hymns as part of ways to show respect to the dead.

This paper examines these dynamics through the case of the Levites Choir Ibadan's fifth Concert of Hymns, *Joyful Harvest*. Rather than presenting the concert as an isolated musical event, the study frames it as a lens for understanding how faith-based musical gatherings contribute to cultural cohesion and community development. Particular attention is paid to the concert's intentional repertoire choices, intergenerational collaboration, audience engagement strategies, and tangible outcomes. This paper argues that intra-faith musical events especially those incorporating indigenous languages and fostering collaborative participation can strengthen the social fabric of communities. Although primarily involving Christian denominations, the practices observed hold relevance for broader conversations on interfaith collaboration, offering a replicable model for using artistic expression as a tool for grassroots development. Thus, linking music, culture, and social action, the study contributes to ongoing academic and practical discussions on the transformative potential of the arts in African societies.

2 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a dual theoretical orientation, drawing on Social Capital Theory and Victor Turner's concept of *Communitas*, both of which provide useful tools for understanding the link between musical practice, cultural cohesion, and community development in Nigeria. Social Capital Theory, developed in the works of Bourdieu (1986) and Putnam (2000), emphasizes the importance of networks, norms, and trust in enabling collective action. Social Capital Theory (SCT) is generally defined and measured at the interpersonal, community, institutional, or societal levels in terms of both bridging and bonding social connections (Perkins et al., 2002). It further describes the extent to which people have relationships with one another, and how those relationships further stretch to the community at large.

Moreover, Olajide (2013) emphasizes that:

The essence of social capital is quality social relations. It is the quality of relationships, understood through the use of the concept "social capital", which affects the capacity of people to come together to collectively resolve problems they face in common and achieve outcomes of mutual benefit. Thus, social capital can be understood as a process of resource for collective action, which may lead to a broad range of outcomes, of varying social scale.

In the Nigerian context, social capital has been shown to operate strongly within faith-based associations, where communal religious gatherings provide opportunities for both bonding and bridging forms of capital (Salman & Sanu Hamet, 2024). When applied to the Joyful Harvest Hymn Concert, this framework explains how the event mobilized community resources through voluntary donations, reinforced networks across denominational boundaries, and created a structure of support for the choir. By situating the concert within this theoretical frame, it becomes clear that the gathering was not only a site of musical performance but also a generator of collective resources and mutual trust.

The concept of *Communitas* by Turner (1969) further illuminates the role of shared ritual experience in promoting cohesion. Turner described *communitas* as the heightened sense of solidarity and equality that arises in collective rituals where social hierarchies are temporarily suspended. Hagggar (2024), when explaining the characteristics of the *communitas* concept, states that 'communitas is inherently bound to anti-structure, a 'bond uniting people over and above any formal social bonds'. The congregational hymn sections of the Joyful Harvest concert exemplify this process, as distinctions between choristers and audience were momentarily erased through joint singing. Similar patterns have been observed in African religious music practices, where collective participation is often prioritized over performance virtuosity (Impey, 2005). In this way, the concept of *communitas* is valuable for analyzing how the concert created an environment of shared identity and unity that transcended denominational divides.

The integration of Social Capital Theory and *Communitas* provides a comprehensive framework for examining the outcomes of the Joyful Harvest Hymn Concert. Social Capital highlights the tangible contributions of the event to community development through resource mobilization and inter-denominational networking, while *Communitas* explains the affective and cultural

cohesion achieved through shared singing and ritual participation. Together, these frameworks reveal that faith-based musical gatherings such as this do not only function as artistic expressions but also as mechanisms for sustaining cultural identity, fostering solidarity, and generating developmental outcomes within Nigerian society.

3 African Hymnody: History and Cultural Significance

The introduction of hymnody in Africa can be traced to nineteenth-century missionary activity. Missionaries from Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, and Catholic traditions introduced European hymns, often translating them into local languages. However, as [Owoaje and Adegbola \(2022\)](#), observe, these translations did not always account for the tonal and rhythmic structures of African languages, leading to misalignments between text and melody. Over time, African Christians adapted these hymns, modifying melodies and performance styles to align with local aesthetics. This process of indigenization ensured that hymnody became embedded in African Christian worship rather than remaining an imposed foreign form.

In Nigeria, hymn singing is a central element of denominational worship. Hymns such as *All Things Bright and Beautiful* and *It Is Well With My Soul* and many more are sung across Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal traditions, providing a shared repertoire that transcends denominational boundaries ([Ajose, 2025](#)). Hymns also perform pedagogical and social functions. They transmit theological knowledge, moral values, and communal memory. In agrarian contexts, harvest hymns such as *We Plough the Fields and Scatter* reinforce the connection between faith, agriculture, and gratitude.

In addition to translated and adapted Western hymns, many African churches also developed their own indigenous hymn traditions. African Indigenous Churches, particularly the white garment churches such as the Cherubim and Seraphim, Christ Apostolic Church, and Celestial Church of Christ, rely heavily on hymns believed to be spiritually revealed through visions, dreams, or prayer ([Fisher, 1970](#)). Unlike Western hymns with identifiable composers, many of these hymns are regarded as divinely inspired, giving them a distinct spiritual authority within their communities. They are often composed in Yoruba or other local languages and draw directly on African melodic idioms, rhythmic patterns, and call-and-response structures.

These African-composed hymns reflect the capability of African Christians in creating a repertoire that speaks directly to their socio-cultural and religious realities. They demonstrate how hymnody is not only preserved but also continuously generated within African contexts. For example, songs in the Celestial Church of Christ often emphasize themes of holiness, divine protection, and communal fellowship, while Cherubim and Seraphim hymns foreground prophecy and healing. Such contributions broaden the scope of African hymnody beyond the missionary inheritance, underscoring its role as a living and evolving tradition.

Contemporary practice extends hymnody beyond liturgical contexts into concerts and festivals. These events highlight hymnody as both an artistic and communal resource. African performance culture is highly participatory, and hymn concerts combine staged choral performance with collective congregational singing. This format strengthens inter-denominational ties and affirms cultural identity through the use of indigenous languages and local musical elements ([Auda, 2021](#)). In this way, hymnody has evolved from a colonial liturgical tool into a locally owned cultural resource with social as well as religious significance.

4 Music and Social Cohesion

The role of music in fostering social cohesion has been widely documented. [Small \(1999\)](#) conceptualizes “musicking” as the process by which social relationships are enacted and reinforced during musical performance. Through collective participation, individuals experience themselves as part of a wider community, developing a sense of belonging that transcends individual identities. [Turino \(2008\)](#) as cited in [Korczynski \(2014\)](#) further distinguishes between presentational and participatory performance, noting that participatory forms such as congregational singing are especially effective in strengthening communal ties. In religious contexts, hymn singing provides one of the most accessible and emotionally resonant participatory practices.

In African societies, where music permeates religious, political, and social life, its capacity to unite is amplified. Music often functions as a cultural constant in festivals, rituals, and ceremonies, creating spaces where social divisions are temporarily suspended. Nigerian scholars such as [Odunuga \(2013\)](#) argue that choral singing and communal music-making contribute to peace-building and conflict resolution by providing platforms for dialogue and shared experience. These functions are not abstract but practical, as music offers a non-confrontational medium for reinforcing common values. A very good example to illustrate this clearly is during the End Sars Protest that rocked the Nigerian streets in 2020, communal songs became a unifying force for mobilization, while in Nigeria, national and religious songs have often served to bridge ethnic divides during public events. Within Christian traditions, interdenominational hymn festivals and ecumenical services demonstrate how music can draw together worshippers from different theological backgrounds.

In the context of hymn concerts, these insights underline the importance of music as both a cultural and social practice. The combination of staged performance and congregational singing creates a dual framework where artistry and participation coexist. Participants share in a common repertoire that reinforces collective identity while also affirming values such as gratitude, unity, and service. These events often draw worshippers from different denominations into a shared space, reducing barriers and emphasizing common traditions. In doing so, hymn concerts generate forms of social capital, expressed in trust, cooperation, and goodwill among participants. They also sustain intergenerational links, as younger and older singers contribute to the same musical experience. Beyond their musical value, therefore, hymn concerts operate as mechanisms for strengthening communal ties and consolidating cohesion within religiously diverse societies.

5 The Levites Choir Ibadan

The Levites-TGM is a group of professional individuals based in Ibadan, Oyo State, distinguished by their exceptional musical and singing abilities. The group creatively blends contemporary and classical genres, establishing a unique style of performance that appeals to diverse audiences. Founded in 2018 under the guidance and chairmanship of Dr. Funso Onafowokan, The Levites-TGM made its debut at the *Evening of Tributes* in honour of the late Prof. Babatunde Osotimehin, former Chairman of the National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA) and Director General of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

Since inception, the group has consistently featured at notable events including St Anne's Church, Molete's 24 Hours Praise and the Ibadan Anglican Diocese Jesus Festival Dinner. The Levites-TGM has also rendered music at tributes, burials, memorial services, concerts of praise, birthdays, Christmas carols, dinner events, and radio programmes. In 2021, the group staged its maiden concert of hymns, *Feyinti*. Since then, the annual *Concert of Hymns (C.O.H.)* has become a signature event, with subsequent editions titled:

- (1) C.O.H. 2.0 – Enthroned
- (2) C.O.H. 3.0 – E Choke
- (3) C.O.H. 4.0 – Ovation
- (4) C.O.H. 5.0 – Joyful Harvest

In 2022, the group appointed distinguished lovers of choral music as Patrons and Matrons, further strengthening its support base and visibility. Membership ranges between 12 and 15 singers across the Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass voices, each bringing exceptional talent as well as additional musical expertise.

6 The Levites' Concert of Hymns 5.0

The Concert of Hymns 5.0, organised by The Levites - The Gifted Minstrels (TGM), was held on 20th July, 2025 at the Multipurpose Hall of The Vale College, Iyaganku, Ibadan. The concert, which has been staged annually since 2021, was themed Joyful Harvest, with its scriptural focus drawn from Psalm 126:5–6. The event was chaired by Professor Anthonia Taiye Okoosi Simbine, Director General of the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER). It featured a special appearance by The Vale College Students Choir, while Francis Onose served as guest pianist and Dr. Toluwalope Owoaje as the Concert Conductor. (see [Figure 1](#))



Figure 1 The Levites performing on stage (Source: Photographed during the concert)

The concert was divided into three main parts. Part I consisted of classical hymns associated with the harvest theme, including *We Plough the Fields and Scatter* (Matthias Claudius), *Lord of Heaven and Earth and Sea* (Christopher Wordsworth), *Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Anthem* (Neander, tune: *Unser Herrscher*), and *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come* (Henry Alford, tune: *St George's Windsor*). Part II introduced diversity with *All Things Bright and Beautiful* performed by The Vale College Choir, alongside contemporary gospel works such as *Faithful* (Hezekiah Walker), *Rejoice in the Lord* (Olusegun Anani), and *Give Praise to God* (Bolaji Ogunwale). Part III, which formed the finale, concluded the harvest theme with selections including *Praise to God, Immortal Praise* (Anna L. Barbauld), *Lord of the Harvest, Thee We Hail* (John Hampden Gurney), *Lord of the Harvest, It is Right and Meet* (tune: *Alleluia Perene*), *Sing to the Lord of Harvest* (John S. B. Monsell), and *O God, Our Help in Ages Past* (Isaac Watts). (see [Figure 2](#))



Figure 2 The Vale College Choir performing on stage (Source: Photographed during the concert)

The congregational hymn sections anchored by Kayode Ajayi were the height of the concert, as both the audience and the choristers participated actively and with enthusiasm. This aspect of the programme demonstrated the communal character of the event and highlighted its function beyond performance, serving also as a participatory act of worship. Donations were taken during the programme as a means of supporting the chorale. Since the concert was free to attend, this practice reflected the community's willingness to contribute to the sustainability of the group. The concert was well attended by Christians from different denominations across Ibadan, affirming its wide appeal and ecumenical character. (see [Figure 3](#))

7 Findings and General Observations

The repertoire of the Concert of Hymns 5.0 reflected a structured approach to programming. The hymns chosen for the concert were centered on harvest, thanksgiving, and communal rejoicing. Hymns associated with classical Anglican tradition were combined with contemporary gospel pieces, creating a repertoire that was both familiar and contextually relevant. The



Figure 3 A section of the audience during the congregational singing (Source: Photographed during the concert)

programme was clearly aligned with the harvest theme and the scriptural passage of Psalm 126:5–6, which reinforced the theological intent of the event. The selection of hymns therefore functioned not only as musical performance but also as a medium for communicating shared doctrinal values.

Also, the congregational hymn section was the central moment of the concert. Both the audience and the choristers actively participated in this part of the programme, and the strong involvement distinguished it from other segments that were primarily performance based. This active involvement blurred the line between performers and spectators, making the concert a communal act of worship. The joint singing also demonstrated that the concert was not only a staged presentation but also an occasion of collective religious practice. This suggests that active participation rather than passive observation was a defining feature of the event.

The attendance reflected a wide denominational and generational representation. Christians and music lovers especially classical music lovers from different denominations were present, and the inclusion of the Vale College Students Choir extended participation to younger age groups. This inter denominational and intergenerational presence indicated that the concert served as a platform for broader Christian community interaction. However, the unifying effect of the programme was confined to Christian groups and did not include other religious constituencies in the locality.

The concert also demonstrated the role of language in creating accessibility and cohesion. Some hymns were presented in indigenous languages or in locally familiar translations, which increased comprehension and identification among participants. This showed that hymns continued to function as cultural texts capable of preserving language and transmitting values. At the same time, comprehension levels varied depending on linguistic background, which meant that accessibility was not uniform across all attendees.

Financial and institutional support was mobilized during the programme. Donations were collected as a means of sustaining the choir since the event was free, and patrons and matrons formally identified with the group. This practice demonstrated that community based support and individual patronage remain important mechanisms for funding local musical initiatives. However, dependence on such voluntary contributions raises questions about the long term financial sustainability of similar events without more structured funding models.

8 Discussion of Findings

The structured repertoire of the concert reflects a deliberate attempt to link music with theology and communal values. By selecting hymns that aligned with the harvest theme and

grounding them in scriptural references such as Psalm 126:5–6, the organizers ensured that the performances were not arbitrary but tied to a particular narrative of faith and thanksgiving. This design demonstrates how musical programming in church-related concerts can serve as an instrument of instruction as much as entertainment. Hymns like *Come Ye Thankful People Come* or *We Plough the Fields and Scatter* reinforced the harvest motif and encouraged a collective consciousness of gratitude, productivity, and divine provision. Such repertoire choices underline the capacity of hymnody to function as a medium of moral and theological transmission, thereby contributing to cultural cohesion by offering participants a shared interpretive framework. Rather than producing music for its own sake, the concert's repertoire helped the community reflect on values that are socially binding and religiously instructive.

The prominence of the congregational hymn section points to the central role of active participation in community cohesion. Unlike other segments of the concert that were strictly choral performances, the congregational hymns brought both the audience and choristers into one unified singing body. This reduced the separation between performers and listeners, creating a participatory atmosphere where everyone could identify as an active contributor. Moreso, the energy with which both groups engaged in these hymns suggests that collective singing provided a deeper level of connection than passive listening. In this sense, the congregational hymns functioned not only as music but as a social practice through which individuals experienced belonging. The fact that this section was widely acknowledged as the high point of the concert shows that audiences value participation as much as performance. This finding emphasizes the idea that cohesion is strengthened when individuals are given opportunities to engage directly in the artistic process rather than remaining passive observers.

The diversity of attendance provides further evidence of the concert's capacity to foster inter denominational and intergenerational interaction. Christians from multiple denominations were present, and the inclusion of the Vale College Students Choir ensured that young voices were represented in the performance. This mix created a setting where individuals from varied backgrounds could experience the event as part of a wider Christian community rather than as isolated denominational groups. The implication is that hymn concerts such as this one can serve as spaces where denominational boundaries are softened in favor of a collective identity. However, it must also be noted that the inclusivity observed was limited to Christian communities, which means the cohesion fostered did not extend to the larger religious plurality of Ibadan. Nonetheless, within the Christian community, the concert served as a model of how music can draw together different age groups and denominational traditions, reinforcing intergroup solidarity and mutual recognition.

The use of indigenous languages in the hymn performances demonstrates the significance of language in the negotiation of cultural identity and accessibility. By rendering certain hymns in local languages, the choir created a point of entry for participants who might otherwise feel excluded by performances conducted solely in English. This practice highlights the dual function of hymns as both liturgical resources and cultural texts. They not only communicate theological truths but also preserve linguistic heritage and foster a sense of cultural ownership. Also, the deliberate choice of familiar translations allowed participants to sing along more confidently, thereby deepening engagement. At the same time, variations in linguistic background among the audience meant that while some found the indigenous renditions more accessible, others may have experienced reduced comprehension. This finding underscores the complex role of language in balancing inclusivity and cultural preservation, where efforts to strengthen identity for some may unintentionally limit accessibility for others.

Finally, the mobilization of financial support during the programme demonstrates how faith-based cultural events can produce developmental outcomes beyond the artistic domain. Since the concert was free to attend, donations were solicited as a means of sustaining the choir's activities, and patrons and matrons played a visible role in providing support. This model of voluntary contribution and community patronage reflects the way artistic initiatives are funded in many African contexts, where institutional support is often limited. It also indicates that faith-inspired cultural practices can stimulate resource mobilization by appealing to shared values and community responsibility. However, the reliance on ad hoc donations raises questions about long-term sustainability. Without more formal structures of financial planning or institutional partnerships, the continuity of such concerts may remain uncertain. Nevertheless, the Joyful Harvest concert illustrates that community-based music initiatives can serve both artistic and developmental purposes, mobilizing resources while reinforcing cultural and religious values.

9 Conclusion

This study has examined the Levites Choir Ibadan's *Concert of Hymns 5.0: Joyful Harvest* as a case through which the relationship between music, cultural cohesion, and community development can be understood. The findings show that the structured repertoire of hymns, the strong emphasis on congregational participation, the inter-denominational and inter-generational attendance, the use of indigenous languages, and the mobilization of financial support all contributed to the event's wider social impact. The concert functioned not only as a musical performance but also as a site of community building, where faith-based artistry intersected with cultural and developmental outcomes.

The use of Social Capital Theory and Turner's concept of *Communitas* provided a useful lens for interpreting these dynamics. Social Capital explained how networks of trust and cooperation were reinforced through voluntary donations and denominational collaboration, while *Communitas* illuminated the temporary unity experienced during congregational singing, where social boundaries between audience and performers were blurred. Together, these frameworks demonstrated that the Joyful Harvest concert exemplified the dual capacity of religious music gatherings to generate both tangible and intangible outcomes for communities.

The study concludes that faith-based hymn concerts in Nigeria represent more than artistic expressions; they are cultural practices that sustain identity, foster solidarity, and mobilize resources. In contexts where institutional support for the arts remains limited, such gatherings illustrate how communities rely on shared cultural forms to strengthen bonds and achieve developmental goals. The Levites Choir's Joyful Harvest concert thus provides a model for understanding how music can be leveraged for cultural cohesion and local development in contemporary African societies.

10 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed for enhancing the role of hymn concerts in promoting cultural cohesion and community development in Nigeria.

First, greater emphasis should be placed on participatory segments within such concerts. The congregational hymn section of the Joyful Harvest concert was observed to be the height of the programme, demonstrating the importance of active involvement in fostering unity. Choirs and organizers should therefore design programmes that balance performance with opportunities for collective participation, ensuring that audiences are engaged as co-creators of the musical experience.

Second, deliberate efforts should be made to sustain inter-denominational and inter-generational participation. The involvement of the Vale College Students Choir showed the potential of including younger voices, while the attendance of Christians from different denominations highlighted the value of broad-based collaboration. Organizers of future concerts should institutionalize partnerships with schools, youth groups, and churches of varying traditions to strengthen inclusivity and broaden the reach of such initiatives.

Third, the use of indigenous languages should be encouraged in hymn performances, as this enhances accessibility and reinforces cultural identity. However, care must be taken to balance linguistic diversity so that no group feels excluded. One possible approach is the inclusion of multilingual renditions of selected hymns, which can reflect Nigeria's linguistic plurality while maintaining unity in performance.

Fourth, there is a need for more sustainable financial planning to support community-based choirs. While voluntary donations and patronage played a key role in sustaining the Levites Choir, reliance on such informal mechanisms may not guarantee long-term stability. Choirs should explore more structured models of support, including partnerships with religious institutions, cultural foundations, and private sector sponsors. This would ensure continuity and allow for more ambitious programming without the risk of financial instability.

Finally, scholars and cultural institutions should pay closer attention to the role of faith-based musical gatherings in community development. As the Joyful Harvest concert demonstrates, such events contribute not only to religious life but also to cultural cohesion and resource mobilization. Further research into similar gatherings across Nigeria would provide comparative

insights and strengthen the case for recognizing music as a significant driver of social and developmental outcomes.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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