The topic of this dissertation was prompted by a need to address the obvious lack of African representation on the twentieth-century global art (classical) music platform. Although art music has become universal, featuring composers and performers from every continent, African representation remains a void yet to be filled.

Twentieth-century Nigerian art music is defined as a modern category of Nigerian music that preserves, disseminates, and expresses Nigerian musical traits and characteristics through Western music notation and its attendant peculiarities. Specifically, this dissertation examines the social, political, and cultural factors involved in its evolution and practice.

A distinction is made between twentieth-century Nigerian art music which evolved in the twentieth century and emphasizes Western music notation, and the previously existing art music tradition in Nigeria before the advent of missionaries in the nineteenth century. While art music in its broader concept thrived in the pre-colonization era, twentieth-century Nigerian art music is a post-independence art form.

The evolution of this new art form in Nigeria was profoundly influenced by the four communities that inhabited nineteenth-century Lagos. Of particular interest and emphasis are the contributions of African immigrants (repatriated ex-slaves) for their roles in fostering culturally biased nationalistic sentiments. Paradoxically, it was cultural nationalism spearheaded by these immigrants in the nineteenth century that generated the sentiments that ultimately precipitated the concept of modern Nigerian art music.

An examination of the historical, cultural, and stylistic transition of Nigerian art music from its birthplace in the Christian church to the concert hall is pertinent to this study. Thus, the compositions of the pioneers of Nigerian art music are analyzed and contrasted against those of the first generation Nigerian composers for indications of stylistic and evolutionary trends.

Although Nigerian art music derives from both Western and indigenous sources, it remains a valid category of Nigerian music worthy of a place on global art music
platform. It is hoped that this dissertation will facilitate the incorporation of Nigerian art music into the main stream musicological studies, and public performances of art music.