

Arts and Africa

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OFEIBEA QUIST-ARCTON

Hello, and welcome to another edition of Arts and Africa. I'm Ofeibea Quist-Arcton. And in today's programme we'll be taking you to the French capital Paris, where there has been a celebration of African music, dance and rituals at the Maison des Cultures du Monde.

MUSIC - Music and singing of The Mozambican Traditional Music Ensemble at Afriques à Paris.

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The extravaganza is called Afriques à Paris, Africa in Paris with about 200 performers from all over the continent. Chérif Khaznadar is the director of the Maison des Cultures du Monde, the Institute for World Cultures and in Paris he told me the African event was really an effort to familiarise Europeans with lesser known African culture.

CHERIF KHAZNADAR

We have tried this June in France, Holland, Germany, Italy and Great Britain to present music from the Bantu speaking areas of Africa. In France this programme is very important because for the first time we will be able to present to the French public musicians and dancers from Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda, Mozambique and Zambia and their music is very, very interesting. Unfortunately, until now their music was scarcely known here. We will present them together with musicians from French-speaking Africa, from countries like Gabon, Mali and Guinea and through that we will try to find the differences and the different identities of those peoples.

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So what are you hoping that the audiences will get out of the performances from various parts of Africa?

CHERIF KHAZNADAR

Firstly, we hope that they will appreciate the immense variety of music, instruments and dancers that are in Africa. You know that it is the same in every country of the world - from far away you think that all the music of a country, for instance India, is the same because you know some of the music, or Africa because one has some very rough ideas of what the music is like. People don't realise that these countries are very, very rich in the variety of their music, of their singing and the instruments and all that. Our first aim is to show this variety and to show how rich the culture of Africa is today. The second aim is that we hope that each member of the public after listening to these musicians will try to get to know more about these countries and by knowing more become more interested in this part of the world.

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But this isn't the first time that you have had African musicians and dancers performing at the Maison des Cultures du Monde in Paris, is it?

CHERIF KHAZNADAR

No, but this is the first time that we have had a whole month devoted completely to Africa and in which we have such an intensive programme running every night with so many groups. There are actually about 200 artists who will come from Africa for the programme.

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Now they are bringing African music and traditions to Paris. What do you think they will be taking back with them to their various African countries when they return home?

CHERIF KHAZNADAR

One thing they will take back with them is I think, how much we appreciate their music. The second thing is that they will also meet here people from other countries and exchange ideas and have this human contact with others which is essential for better understanding between peoples of the world.

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Now can you explain to me a little bit, what is this African Extravaganza?

CHERIF KHAZNADAR

Well they are mostly, all the groups except one, traditional musicians, who are taken from different ethnic groups and it's mostly village music. We have only one group, the group from Guinea, which plays contemporary urban music. All the others we were very keen to keep traditional and we tried also not to make a patchwork of say all the different types of Tanzanian music, but just to focus on one or two and try to give them as much time as possible so that people can really appreciate them.

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In some depth?

CHERIF KHAZNADAR

In some depth yes. Also, we are not inviting any organised folklore or ballet groups. We are not having any music or dance which is re-choreographed or re-arranged and we make sure that all the artists are people who really live that music and still perform it in their daily and social lives. It is not stage music, but music that still has its social meaning in the life of the people.

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Do you think it is a success?

CHERIF KHAZNADAR

Well I'm happy to say that it is a success! It is raising a big interest in the press, and amongst the public. We have just had 5000 people coming to listen to the Mozambican music and the same for the Rwandan music. We had a big open air stage and when we presented them there were really big crowds around them. At night we presented them in a closed theatre where people can appreciate more closely this music and fortunately it is a big success.

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And take it from me, Chérif Khaznadar couldn't be more right. *Afriques à Paris* was really spectacular. I didn't get to see all the performances, I mean 200 artists from eight African countries, but I did watch the Mozambican ensemble. The sounds, the dances, the voices ... quite wonderful.

MUSIC - Mupundu antelope horn.

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The sound of Mpundu antelope horn ... it's rather eerie. Françoise Gründ is the artistic director at the *Maison des Cultures du Monde* in Paris. It's her job to go to the different countries and find the musicians, artists etc. I asked her to tell us more about the Mozambique Traditional Music Ensemble.

FRANCOISE GRUND

Here we have a very special group of Chope people who live in the centre of the country. The centre of the country was not completely colonised by the Portuguese, it was preserved in a certain way by the lack of communications. Also the means of resistance against colonisation was culture, pure culture. So they were fighting but in a very natural way to preserve their African culture.

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Now can you describe the different musical instruments to me and the dances.

FRANCOISE GRUND

Yes the Chope have very original instruments. For example, they have Mpundu, Mpundu are very big antelope horns and they play it on the side. They have one hole and they produce one or two notes and they form big ensembles and they play it in the "hocketting" way. "Hocketting" means that one player is playing one or two notes continually and to complement it the other players are playing different notes to make a strange sort of harmony.

MUSIC - Mpundu antelope horn.

FRANCOISE GRUND

They also have very special dances done to the accompaniment of a chivenka. Chivenkas are a sort of whistle, so they dance to those whistles and the dances are miming movements of the animals in the forest. And as you can see, it is very frenetic, very convulsive and very energetic at the same time.

MUSIC - Chivenka

FRANCOISE GRUND

They have another instrument which is quite interesting, the musical bow - chitende. The resonance is formed by a calabash and there is a vegetable fibre string and the player plays with a little stick with which he produces two or three notes but at the same time he is singing and that instrument is an accompaniment instrument. To modify the volume of the instrument he presses the calabash against his chest, so it is quite interesting for its technique also.

MUSIC - Example of chitende.

FRANCOISE GRUND

Afterwards they have the big timbila ensemble. Timbila means xylophone. They build different sorts of xylophones in volume and also in pitch, so in the Chope villages they can play with eight or maybe twelve ensembles of timbela. Each ensemble is accompanied by dancers who act like servants of the musical instruments. And here also the dancers are very energetic and they are miming the life of the forests with animals and birds. The dancers wear rattles on their legs to make rhythmical punctuation with the feet. Remember that Mozambique is on the coast, on the Indian Ocean, and not so far from the Indian continent where they have those big dances of Kathak, Bharatnatyam etc, also with little bells and rattles on the legs to punctuate the steps. Maybe, I don't know as it is a strange theory, but maybe there is an influence from the Indian Ocean and also the Indian continent on that coast of Africa.

MUSIC - Timbila xylophone music.

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Timbila xylophone music from the Chope people of Mozambique.
That was Francoise Gründ, the artistic director from the Maison
des Cultures du Monde in Paris talking about the Mozambique Traditional
Music Ensemble ... performing at the Afriques à Paris event in Paris.
And it's with their music that we end this edition of Arts and Africa ...
From me, Ofeibea Quist-Arcton au revoir.