

# Arts and Africa

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ARTS AND AFRICA

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ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey welcoming you to another edition of Arts and Africa. And in today's programme we look at new music from West Africa. We hear from the rising star of Nigerian "Juju", Segun Adewale, and from an old friend of Arts and Africa, John Collins, an Englishman living in Ghana who for many years has been deeply immersed in the West African music scene. He's played with many of the Ghanaian Concert Party bands; he formed his own group 'Bokoor' and has also been active recording and producing from his small studio in Accra. Here's a track from his latest album 'The Guitar and the Gun', an anthology of new Ghanaian music.

Music: 'N'tutu, Genesis Gospel Singers

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well John, welcome to the Arts and Africa studio. I haven't heard anything from your band 'Bokoor' for a very long time, and now I see that you have produced this record. What is happening to your career?

JOHN COLLINS

Well, it took a change about two or three years after I brought part of my band to England to teach West Indians African music. When I returned to Ghana, I think that was 1980, the musicians who I'd left behind had scattered. Some had gone to America, some to Nigeria, and one of them unfortunately even died over there - my drummer, Papo. So, then came the revolution and the curfew and so on, and I decided that it wasn't a good time to go trekking around Ghana playing music any more and I brought over a small recording studio with me. I mean in fact it is a portable recording studio. It runs off high speed cassettes, and some of the bands got to hear about it, so they persuaded me to start recording them, particularly the first one was the "Jaguar Jokers" - it's a Concert Party I used to play with in the late 60s - and that was a sort of experiment. And finally, in one and a half years, I recorded sixty-five albums, or album length tapes, but none of them came out on record. Not in Ghana anyway. But from the sixty-five recordings I'd made which consisted of two or three hundred songs I picked about ten, brought them to England and then with the interest in African music down at this end I managed to get a Company called 'Cherry Red' interested, so they released this first album, which is a compilation album called 'The Guitar and the Gun' - the reason for 'The Gun' is simply that I have been recording army people as well, and I thought it was a good theme for the album.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now, what with the power failures I've been hearing about and the curfews you have mentioned, how do you manage to do these recordings?

JOHN COLLINS

Well, anyway the curfew doesn't interfere at all, because I'm staying in one place and I do the recordings in the day time. But the power failure has been affecting us greatly, so what I did last time I came to England was I brought back battery chargers and so on so I can charge my equipment up and any time there is a power failure I can switch to the batteries, but of course the situation now is becoming more and more serious in Ghana with the hydro-electric power problem - you know the water level is too low for the Volta dam - and it's possible that we might be entering a period of some years of semi-drought or something like that when there may be electricity off for maybe two weeks at a time - it could happen like that. At the moment it is every other day. So what I'm going to do is - because I won't have the electricity to charge up the batteries - I'm going to run everything off a windmill. So I'm in the middle of buying a windmill at the moment to take back and I'll fit it on top of the studio, and so if need be I can switch to the windmill.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

So are you going to call your studio 'The Windmill' studio?

JOHN COLLINS

Well, I'm still going to call it 'Bokoor' studios, but you will be able to see the windmill above the studio spinning around.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now, what is happening to the other bands who used to play at night clubs and so on?

JOHN COLLINS

Well, there is no night life now. It is "Afternoon Jump". The bands have to play in the afternoon and it's affecting the gate money as you can imagine. People don't have time to get back after work, or they can't go to "Afternoon Jumps", and it's having a particularly hard effect on the Concert Parties, because they used to trek from village to village town to town. There are so many problems facing them now - one of course is the curfew, they have to finish the show at ten o'clock. So they can't pack the place as they used to. Secondly there's transport problems: petrol rationing and so on, and now another great difficulty that has cropped up is the electricity problem because if everything is on A and B in other words, one day you'll have the electricity, one day you won't. It's very difficult to plan your itinerary now, because you don't know which town is on and which is off - you see what I mean. It's very confusing. So what has happened in the last two or three years, is that gradually many of the best musicians from the Concert Parties and the Guitar bands join the Churches, the African Spiritual Churches, Apostolic Churches and so on. The reason is that they don't depend on gate money. They depend on their congregations, their beliefs in religion, so that before these sort of churches were clapping their hands, singing and dancing, but now they've incorporated electric guitar bands. So what is happening is just like America in the 1920s and 1930s. You know when the Blues started it was from the blacks coming up from the rural South and there was a boom period, so they went up to places like Chicago and out of that came the Blues, the Electric Blues, and then there was a depression

and a lot of the musicians switched to Gospel music. And Gospel music developed into Soul, Aretha Franklin, and James Brown. So what's happening in Ghana is, in some ways is the same. It's going from the secular to the sacred and it's only the Churches that are now in a way, preserving the Hi-life music in a big way.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

In fact, we've got a tradition in Ghana of Choral singing. The popular musicians like E K Nyame were singing things that were really in the tradition of Gospel singing - hymns. And they were popular at the same time.

JOHN COLLINS

But there's one difference that's occurred to me since E K Nyame time and the Concert Party's time - in those days as you know the men played the parts of women - they sang in falsetto. Now that they've gone into the Churches, the Church has a mass of brilliant women singers so the difference on the record you heard is that those women were real women, they're not men pretending to be women.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well, I hope they're not going to try and sing like men. (Laughs)

JOHN COLLINS

No, in fact I think we're going to get a Ghanaian Aretha Franklin. I mean there's one there if only we can find her.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well, I hope you get all the encouragement possible from the Ghanaians and from the Ghana Government and we are looking forward to hearing whatever you produce. Thank you very much John.

MUSIC: from 'The Guitar and the Gun'

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

The Genesis Gospel singers, one of the new Ghanaian groups included in John Collins' new album 'The Guitar and the Gun'. And from the new Gospel sounds of Ghana we move to Nigerian 'Juju' and the music of Segun Adewale.

Music: Segun Adewale 'Adewale Play for Me'

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Adewale play for me the title track of Adewale's new album. Following in the wake of other Nigerian Musicians such as Fela Anikulapu Nkuti and King Sony Ade, Segun Adewale has been quick to capitalise on the growing craze in Europe and America for new African music. And judging by the response to his recent concert in London, he looks set to become the next king of 'Juju' music. But his road to success, as is to often the case, was not an easy one, and as he explained to Jerusha Castley, his parents, particularly his mother, were horrified when he told them he wanted to become a musician.



SEGUN ADEWALE

'What did I hear you say you wanted to become?' I said 'A musician', she said 'You've got a good brain, you could become a doctor, or an illegal practitioner, or a good business man.' But I said 'I'm taking music as a profession.' They said if I was taking music as a profession I was not to stay with them with the family. 'You will pack all your bags and baggages and move out'.

JERUSHA CASTLEY

Did you do that?

SEGUN ADEWALE

Oh, yes I did. For something I love most.

JERUSHA CASTLEY

And what is their attitude towards music now that you have established yourself as a creditable musician?

SEGUN ADEWALE

Oh god, I'm first in the family. I'm now first in the family. They love me so much.

JERUSHA CASTLEY

Did you ever get any formal training in music?

SEGUN ADEWALE

When I left home I was searching for one man who is very good at music and the superstar we have in Nigeria playing 'Juju' - Aki Daro - I managed to track him down and I told him my predicament. He told me 'You are still young and you are a learned person so 'Juju' music is not for that category'. then I said 'this is what I've got in mind: Education or no education I'm taking music as a career. You can give me the best help you think you can.' He has helped me a lot. He taught me how to sing and how to compose songs. He took me out to see things and he would say 'Segun compose on what you see and give it a tune and let me hear.' So it started that way.

JERUSHA CASTLEY

You've got a new album out, 'Adewale Play for Me'.

SEGUN ADEWALE

Yes, that is Yopop. Yopop music.

JERUSHA CASTLEY

Can you tell me what that kind of music is?

SEGUN ADEWALE

Yopop music is a fusion of four different kinds of music, Afrobeat, Hi-life, Jazz and Reggae. Coupled with Juju.

JERUSHA CASTLEY

In fact, African music has broken into the European Market in a very big way. Why do you think this is the case.

SEGUN ADEWALE

You see, ten years back I was thinking the Europeans play good music, but I don't think they've realised that music comes from Africa and now they know really that music comes from Africa. They are tired of their sound. There's no other way out than to succumb to the truth that music comes from Africa.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Segun Adewale talking to Jerusha Castley. And to the sound of Odaran Kan To Sa, another track from his new album, we must end the programme. So until next week this is Alex Tetteh-Lartey saying goodbye.

Music: 'Adewale Play for Me' - "Odaran Kan To Sa".