

The People

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Nigerian Affairs

Cover Story

HUBERT OGUNDE — A MUSICAL CELEBRITY

THERE are many people in the world today—especially in this part of the world—who believe religiously in destiny. They believe that what a man is to become in later life has been pre-determined by the Supreme Being. Well, such claims as this one are, naturally, debatable. Just as there are those who religiously believe in, and vehemently defend, the concept of destiny, so also are those who do not believe in anything of the sort. Their belief, equally strongly argued and defended, is quite the contrary: a man becomes what he wants to become in the world by self-effort and not by anything called pre-destination.

Be that as it may. Of course, the question of whether there is anything called destiny is not the subject of this story. It only has an introductory relevance to it. Without prejudice to any opinion we may have on this seemingly controversial subject of belief in destiny, it can at least be said that people are destined for various goals in life either by their Maker or by themselves. Some are destined to become national or even world celebrities; (as the subject of this story) as a result of non-political activities; others are destined to make their mark in the field of public affairs—or to put it more clearly and understandably, political affairs; yet others are to make their impact in the field of social services, like education or welfare; still others become international celebrities via sports; and, finally, there are those—the hundreds of millions—destined to become no more than mere spectators in arenas where celebrities exhibit talents!

Nigeria is, by any yardstick, a

young country. But despite her relative youth as a modern nation, she is not lacking in celebrities of both national and international repute. She has plenty of them in many fields of human endeavour: in political affairs no less than in non-political fields where, in fact, Nigeria has made considerable impact in international circles in recent years. In the world of sports, Nigeria is not without a good number of celebrities who have received the highest acclaim in their fields in international sporting events. We have produced two world champions in boxing; we have had several international soccer stars as well as outstanding athletes distinguished in world sports gatherings. Then in the field of music, Nigeria, undoubtedly, ranks high in the developing parts of the world—usually referred to as the *Third World*. We have produced more musicians and entertainers than any other country in Africa and—apart from, possibly, India and some countries in the Middle East—in the *Third World*. It is one of these foremost Nigerian musicians — Hubert Ogunde — that this story is all about.

Our Consolation

Nigeria is a country superbly rich in culture. We have a number of potentials to develop in our cultural heritage, albeit we are just beginning to awake to this manifest reality. Of course, as a young country, it is not surprising that we are just beginning to discover, develop and popularise our rich cultural heritage. And we can, in any event, console ourselves with the saying: *it is better late than never!*

In the last few years, the percentage of Nigerians who believe in the

projection of our culture as an avenue of boosting our national image in the outside world has been on the increase. This dramatic phenomenon has been considerably accentuated by the efforts of a number of Nigerian musicians, playwrights and dramatists who have, at their own expense, risked so much to put Nigerian culture on the world map. The name of Hubert Ogunde, who, in 1968 and 1969, spent a total of one year on a cultural tour of Europe, accompanied by a plane-load retinue of actors and actresses, and who plans yet another extensive overseas tour in a few months from now, readily comes to mind. So also do such names as Duro Ladipo, the school-master-turned dramatist and playwright, Wole Soyinka, the university lecturer and playwright reputed at home and abroad, Oyin Adejobi, and Ogunmola, to mention just a few, readily come to mind. All these Nigerians have, individually and collectively, sought to put Nigerian culture on the world map. And they have immensely succeeded, in the face of odds which their financial limitation has put in their way. To these Nigerians—and others not mentioned here by name—the country must remain everlastingly grateful.

The name Hubert Ogunde is unquestionably the most famous in the Nigerian entertainment world. Very few—if any—would seriously contest this assertion. Even before his exploit over the seas lately, the name Hubert Ogunde was already a force to be reckoned with in the Nigerian musical world. This is so for many reasons. Hubert Ogunde has remained in the field of entertainment longer than any other Nigerian musician. In the



Cabaret and Ballad singing during Ogunde's tour of Europe.

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process, he has largely—and successfully—diversified, becoming a musician, playwright and dramatist all rolled into one. For a man who started out as an off-beat musician, this is by no means a mean achievement. And yet, there is no end in his diversification—and achievements.

Hubert Ogunde's theatre company is the country's most durable—and strongest. It was strong—and fearful—enough to pose a threat to a political party in power in one of Nigeria's former regions during the political days. This it did with a single record which was so devastating in its effect on the public standing of that political party in power that its possession and playing were forbidden in the area over which the party ruled. Further still, that political party was aggrieved sufficiently seriously as to consider it necessary to ban the entire Ogunde Theatre Company from performing any of its plays in the area of its jurisdiction. Yet, the Ogunde Theatre

Company succeeded in overcoming that seemingly insurmountable ordeal and refused to go under.

Over the years, the Ogunde Theatre Company has become a virtual national institution—reverred by millions of Nigerians at home and abroad. Despite the fact that the Ogunde Theatre Company is the country's—indeed Africa's—most successful, it is not resting on its achievements. New exploits continue to be made. Apparently, many people in Nigeria today are wondering about the secret or secrets behind the success of this famous theatre company which has been built over the years to a world class and yet continues to make more efforts aimed at new discoveries. Certainly, the millions of people who have, in one way or the other, especially by their patronage, contributed in the building up of the Ogunde Theatre Company to what it is today are entitled to some inner details about Nigeria's premier theatre company. This is where **The People**,

as an organ of information dedicated to true public service, comes in.

Paramount Question

The Ogunde Theatre Company is a unique entertainment group in this country: it specialises equally in two aspects of entertainment—music and drama. This is why the company qualifies as the most diversified theatre group in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

The most paramount question to be asked, no doubt, is: how did it all begin? The Ogunde Theatre Company—like any successful human creation—has come a long way from very humble beginnings to become the country's premier theatre company. This mighty theatre group started off as a one-man show a quarter of a century ago, the brain-child of its proprietor and star actor, Hubert Ogunde. At the time Hubert Ogunde conceived the idea of the theatre company and brought it into reality, he could hardly have

thought that what he was putting together was destined to attain the sort of prominence which is now the lot of the Ogunde Theatre Company. In those far off days, when Nigeria was in the very early stages of civilisation, not many people had much regard for entertainers of Hubert Ogunde's class. Save for a very negligible class of people—mainly the small educated elite—there were not many people who saw the need to patronise the theatre company which the pioneering Hubert Ogunde was struggling to establish. These were the first odds which, but for the determination behind the mind of Hubert Ogunde, were big enough to kill the initiative.

It was natural enough that the Ogunde Theatre Company should come face to face with the ups and downs of life early in its formation. It is said that any human creation which is expected to be a success ultimately must have its teething troubles to test the determination of those behind it. No one can expect to put up an organisation today and expect things to be smooth-sailing right away. No. This, should it happen, is a sign of bad omen. In the case of the Ogunde Theatre Company, there were plenty of ups and downs, which Hubert Ogunde faced resolutely. The ability of Hubert Ogunde to face difficult situations with resolute determination so early in his career equipped him for grappling with similarly complex circumstances later in his career. As already noted, the Ogunde Theatre Company was in conflict with an authority no less in importance as the government of one of Nigeria's former regions during the tail end of the *first republic*. Perhaps even more than the early stages of the founding of the theatre company, this was the most serious situation ever to confront the Ogunde Theatre Company. The company was faced with the stark possibility of extinction—but with God's help it overcame its all-powerful enemies.

Hubert Ogunde is a man the like of whom is not all that easy to come by. His appearance and personal

demeanour belie his stage craftsmanship and entertainment ingenuity. At home, Hubert Ogunde is as quiet as any man with such a large family and heavy responsibility should be. But on the stage, Hubert Ogunde puts on all the armours charm, toughness and warmth all rolled into one which make any Ogunde performance a thrilling show-piece.

As a show-man, Hubert Ogunde is hard to excel by any other contemporary in the continent. He is a man with insuperable talents in his field—and possesses the required energy to translate his creations into reality. The way he dishes out plays these days leads one to the conclusion that Hubert Ogunde is a man whose stock in show business is bound to soar even markedly in the foreseeable future. Only a man of extraordinary vigour can perform so admirably in a field noted for its complexities. It hardly needs be emphasized that show business is one of the most complex fields of human endeavour. But for Hubert Ogunde, the complexities of show business have long disappeared after a quarter of a century of hard-won experience.

BATALLION-SIZE

The life of any show-man especially a creative one as Hubert Ogunde is by no means an easy one. The life of a successful show-man as Hubert Ogunde is, on the contrary, a highly taxing one. Hubert Ogunde is virtually sought after all the year round throughout the country. Hence, he and his batallion-size troupe are always on the move—from one part of the country to the other. In effect, Hubert Ogunde—as the standard-bearer of this famous theatre company—is not easy to track down, especially by representatives of the press. For understandable reasons, it was not all too easy to get him down for an interview—but **The People** finally succeeded in pinning him down for a couple of hours of heart-to-heart conversation on his life-time career.

Despite his many years of active involvement in show business, Hubert Ogunde does not have enough

wrinkles on his face to tell you what a busily-crowded life he has had for half of his fifty-plus years. On the contrary, his moon-face, almost ever beaming with his characteristic smile, deceptively shows Hubert Ogunde as a crew-cut easy-going businessman not an enterprising playwright, dramatist and musician all rolled into one. His mode of speech, too, is quiet and slow—contrasting the flamboyant voice you hear on Ogunde records or at Ogunde shows. In spite of his gradually advancing age (he is 53), he is as youngish and active as a man half his age just starting life. This leaves many people with the irresistible impression that Hubert Ogunde is a born show-man who will, in all probability, remain a show-man for all his life.

Hubert Ogunde is, of course, a man of extraordinarily large family. No one actually knows the number of his children—and neither can anyone but himself say with any degree of finality how many wives Hubert Ogunde has. In ordinary circumstances—and in the context of the Nigerian society—Hubert Ogunde would be expected to be a troubled man as a result of his huge family. But the complete opposite is the case. His large family, as many people now readily agree, is an invaluable asset to him.

As a family man, Hubert Ogunde is as happy as a man with one wife and a child. Perhaps the Ogunde example is a negation of the common belief in Nigeria that large families are an invitation to chaos. Of course, not all polygamists in Nigeria are, like Hubert Ogunde, show-men. And this may well be the difference. As far as Hubert Ogunde is concerned, his large family is a blessing indeed. He hardly needs look outside to recruit members of his cast—although not everybody who works with the Ogunde Theatre Company is an Ogunde—as every Ogunde wife and child is a potential playwright, musician, and dramatist, like Hubert himself. In his compound at his modest residence in Yaba, you see even the youngest Ogunde children putting into practice their stage prowess.



Hubert Ogunde, dressed as a Yoruba Traditional Ruler, is paid Homage by His "Wives".



A Scene from another Ogunde Show at Apollo Theatre, New York.

There is no mistaking the fact that one of the most controversial characteristic features of the Ogunde Theatre Company is that a substantial percentage of the membership of the cast is made up of members of the Ogunde family—mainly wives. Only recently, Hubert Ogunde was the subject of press criticism by those who castigated him for exposing the *dignity* of his wives and Nigerian womanhood to overseas audiences during last year's successful tour of overseas countries. The common question many people ask is how come that many members of the Ogunde Theatre Company have blood relations with their leader? This question should be examined in the context of the general Nigerian attitude to show business.

Lucrative Occupation

Undoubtedly the most difficult problem with which Hubert Ogunde had to contend with when he was struggling to build up his theatre company was the recruitment of actors and actresses—particularly the latter. In the dark old days—and even now—not many people aimed at a career in show business. It was regarded with scorn—a sort of occupation for outcasts unfit for a decent career and rejected by society. It was a profession which many would venture into only in the last resort—after all else had obviously failed. This was in Nigeria of old, when little, if any, was known of the fact that show business is about the world's most lucrative occupation.

Hubert Ogunde—as indeed any other pioneer, especially in a field not yet popular with and readily acceptable to, society—had virtually insurmountable difficulties in convincing his fellow Nigerians to take up a career in show business. In fact, this initial set-back nearly crumbled his efforts. Parents who had laboured hard and spent so much to educate their children, refused to allow their offspring to take up a career with Hubert Ogunde. Even where some youngsters were obviously willing to venture into the unknown and untested career, friends dissuaded them from embarking on a career which promised them nothing but regrets in

the final analysis. In any case, at a time when there were not many educated Nigerians around, there were enough jobs for the few who possessed Western education in both the government service and the mercantile houses. And there was very little to choose between a career in the civil service or the mercantile houses and one in show business. Many a young Nigerian preferred the former and scorned the latter.

In point of fact, however, it cannot, in all fairness be said that every member of the Ogunde Theatre Company is an Ogunde. The true position, as of the moment, is that members of the Ogunde family form a small minority of the composition of the Ogunde Theatre Company. Of the 40-odd men and women who make up the Ogunde Theatre Company, only 12 are members of the family. In contrast to when he started off a quarter of a century ago, Hubert Ogunde does not now have to encounter stiff difficulty in recruiting suitable young Nigerians into his theatre company. He has shown that opportunities await the right people in show business as demonstrated by his recent successful tour of Europe with a 40-member cast.

What kind of a man is Hubert Ogunde? It has already been noted elsewhere that his personal demeanour is quiet—and unobtrusive. But what kind of background has he had? Hubert Ogunde was born in Ososa, near Ijebu-Ode, in 1916. He received his education *privately*—as he puts it—in his native home. His mother was a pagan but his father was a Baptist missionary away from home. Hubert himself, of course, is a Christian. What was to be his life-long career actually began very early in his life. Young Ogunde, his mother being pagan and his father being away from home, was quite fond of moving with traditional groups like the *Babalawos*, idol worshippers, and masqueraders, and took particular interest in the drumming which accompanied these groups. This was how Hubert Ogunde first developed interest in what was to be his life-long career.

To prepare himself for his future career, Hubert Ogunde first took a job as a teacher and church organist, which kept him busy for nine years. Then he switched to the Nigeria Police Force where he served for eight years. Needless to say that both jobs were fittingly appropriate as a *prep* for his cherished career. As an organist in several churches in Ijebu and Abeokuta provinces, Hubert Ogunde was very much at it composing musical tunes. Asked what prompted him into the field of entertainment, Hubert Ogunde's reply was succinct enough. He said: *From my youth, entertainment business has been in me: I was, so to speak, born into it. My mother was a pagan; grandfather, too, was a pagan—a Babalawo (native priest) and so I was born into drumming, dancing and singing and they all, formed part of me early in life. What originally attracted me to the conclave of the Babalawos was the drumming and singing. Soon in my youth, I found that entertainment was in my blood.*

First Performance

Indeed, entertainment is very much present in Hubert Ogunde's blood. And it is well-nigh impossible to divorce music from Hubert Ogunde—or Hubert Ogunde from music. Initial teething difficulties failed to drive a wedge between this musical genius and his first love—entertainment—and organised political machination, too, failed to have an adverse effect on him; in all probability, therefore, Hubert Ogunde seems to have entered into a life-long pact which Supreme Being Himself can terminate.

Hubert Ogunde's first public performance took place in June 1944 at the old Glover Memorial Hall. That first public performance was chaired by a man who was later to play a leading role in the political life of Nigeria—Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe—and the public response to it was, in Ogunde's words, *really great and that was why I decided to go into the entertainment business commercially.* Today, 26 years after his

first play was staged publicly. Hubert Ogunde has no reason to regret his adventure.

The first record to be waxed by Hubert Ogunde also made its debut in Lagos—four years after his first play—in 1948. The record, titled *Moranke*, was waxed on HO 123 by Hubert Ogunde himself and was also well received by music lovers throughout Nigeria. This encouraged him to follow-up with two other records in quick succession—*Herbert Macaulay*, in memory of the Great Father of Nigerian Nationalism, and *Kobo Ojomo* (literally meaning *Penny a Day*), in commemoration of the general strike by Nigerian workers for increased wages. All three records were bought by music lovers like hot cake and this provided the necessary boost which any adventurer requires to put in more effort. Hubert Ogunde seized the ball by the horn—and waxed more records.

To date, Hubert Ogunde has waxed a total of 30 records and written and presented a total of 40 plays altogether. By any standard, this is no mean achievement. Even more important than just the numerical aspect of his output so far is the unique factor that almost without exception, Hubert Ogunde's records and plays have been both best-sellers and crowd-pullers—and controversial. Yet, special mention must be made of one Ogunde creation—both waxed and staged as a play at a time of political controversy in Nigeria's *Wild West*—appropriately titled *Yoruba Romu*. Hubert Ogunde himself, while conceding that all his plays and records so far have hit the top, agrees that *Yoruba Romu* is both the most controversial and successful of his creations in the 26 years he has been in the field of entertainment. The story of *Yoruba Romu* which as already alluded to elsewhere, brought Hubert Ogunde into conflict with the then government of Western Nigeria, deserves more than mere passing reference.

Hubert Ogunde conceived the idea of *Yoruba Romu* (which translated, means *Yorubas Think*), in 1964 at a time when a political storm—strong as that on the world's high seas—was blowing across Western Nigeria

and dividing the children of immortal Oduduwa into various camps. He had carefully watched the events as a neutral observer and listened to public opinion through various channels. He was not interested in the politics of the crisis as he was neither a politician nor member of any of the then political parties. As a playwright and musician, he explains, he must not take side in politics—but must watch what society thinks and consequently reflect the views and posture of society. To make sure that whatever plays he writes or records he reflects the posture of society, Hubert Ogunde says that he often travels in public transport, eats in public places, takes evening strolls and otherwise collects data on what people are thinking about society generally. His plays and recordings are based on these findings—and so far they have gone well with public opinion.

First Patronage

That was exactly how *Yoruba Romu* came into being. But the play was too controversial and partial for the liking of the government then in power in Western Nigeria, even though, it was an incontestable fact that it was based on what the majority of Yorubas in particular and many other Nigerians were thinking at the material time. Ironically, however, the then rulers of Western Nigeria were the first to accord the play—*Yoruba Romu* patronage! Immediately the play was written, and staged in Lagos, Hubert Ogunde was invited by the then government of Western Nigeria—which was looking for a rallying slogan for all Yorubas to come together under the umbrella of the then ruling party in the West—

to stage the play to a gathering of leading Yoruba Obas, Chiefs, and other personalities at Obisesan Hall, Ibadan. The invitation was duly accepted and the play was staged—but had the opposite effect to what the organisers had expected! That was how the play *Yoruba Romu*—and its architect, Hubert Ogunde—ran into trouble.

Consequent on the show at Ibadan, further performance of the play anywhere in Western Nigeria was forbidden and the playing of the recording equivalent of the play, which had been waxed and several thousand copies within a short time, also banned throughout the region. As for the ban imposed on further performance of the play, *Yoruba Romu*, it was easy to ensure compliance as no local government council anywhere in the region would issue Hubert Ogunde the necessary permit to use the town hall or any other public place to stage the play. But it was not that easy with regard to the ban placed on the playing of recording version by those who bought the records—who numbered several thousand strong all over the country. In fact, the ban placed on the record made it more popular—and many more people went and bought it, especially those who had wanted to watch the play itself but could not do so due to the ban placed on it.

The ban remained in force until the military take-over of January 15, 1966 when it was lifted as one of the first corrective measures taken by the first military governor of the West, the late Lt.-Col. Adekunle Fajuyi. In effect, between 1964 and January 1966, Hubert Ogunde—himself a full-fledged citizen of Western

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Nigeria—was forbidden from performing his legitimate occupation in his region of birth. That he and his theatre company survived the ordeal was, by any yardstick, a great achievement which goes a long way to testify to the indomitable courage of Hubert Ogunde. Hubert Ogunde now recalls that he was not in the least worried about the repressive measures taken against him. In fact, he expected that his theatre company would be proscribed outright and was surprised that this did not happen. Asked whether he would have been worried if his theatre company had been proscribed throughout the Federation, his reply was *not a bit!* He was used to such repressive measures which, he said, he first suffered in colonial Nigeria. In 1946 and 1948, Hubert Ogunde and his theatre company were similarly punished for staging two plays, *Strike and Hunger* and *Bread and Bullet* respectively in parts of Northern Nigeria.

As a result of the ban imposed on him, Hubert Ogunde had to contend with a comparatively small area of operation—and audience. He confined himself mainly to the Lagos federal territory where the ban did not have effect and such neighbouring countries where there are Yoruba-speaking people as Dahomey, Togo and Ghana. In a way, the ban did Hubert Ogunde quite some good: the reception given to Ogunde plays and records in these countries convinced him that there was a potentially rich overseas audience for his plays and records—which he later explored on a large scale.

Unique Pioneer

As the star of the Ogunde Theatre Company, Hubert Ogunde, of course, carries on his shoulders the lion's share of the burden involved in the day-to-day operation of the group. In deciding topics for plays and records, Hubert Ogunde mainly relies on his own initiative, based on what the mood of society is at a given time. Having chosen the title and characteristic of a play, he settles down to write the story. After the story is written, it is time to discuss it with his top executives who are mainly

his senior wives and long-standing associates in the business. After this, a final script is agreed upon which then forms the basis of the play proper. Hubert Ogunde, in consultation with his executives, then allots the various parts to be played by each member of the cast and the yardstick for this is individual ability and talents. Almost invariably, all members of the cast are found within the Ogunde organisation and only on rare occasions does it become necessary to look beyond for talents. If there is anything which the theatre company lacks it is surely not talents. Once allotment of parts has been made the cast is divided into groups each headed by an executive and the executives are responsible for the training of members of the cast under them. The script is rehearsed meticulously until each member of the cast attains flawless perfection in his or her part. Then the play is ready for public performance.

Hubert Ogunde is a unique Nigerian pioneer. Almost simultaneously as he made his debut in the field of entertainment, Hubert Ogunde has been his own recording company. All his records have been waxed on his own since he started recording music in 1948. It was certainly some courage for a Nigerian to take to recording music in those far off days. But as they say, necessity is the mother of invention. At the time Hubert Ogunde began his career as an entertainer, there was not a single recording company permanently resident in Nigeria. Indeed, the only recording company interested in recording Nigerian musicians was the famous Decca Recording Company of Britain, which was, however, not permanently represented out here. The company sent representatives here once in a blue moon to make few recordings which were later waxed in the United Kingdom.

Because of the long processes involved, it took several months before such recordings were released to the public. Needless to say that Nigerian musicians suffered terribly as a result of the non-availability of a resident recording company and it was for this reason that Hubert Ogunde

decided to set up his own recording studio with the double aim of (i) waxing his own records, and (ii) those of other Nigerian musicians. Today, Hubert Ogunde still waxes his own records as well as those of a number of leading Nigerian musical groups including Suberu Oni and His Group from Ondo, Taibatu Amope and Her Waka Group from Ijebu-Igbo, to mention but two. As a recorder of music, Hubert Ogunde believes that Nigerian recording studios still have a long way to go to compare favourably with their counterparts in the advanced countries of Europe and America in the technical sense. But he is happy with the progress so far made in the field of recording and hopes that with the passage of time even more progress will be made. He himself is contributing in no small measure to that progress.

In recent years, Hubert Ogunde seems to have embarked on a new phase in his effort to project Nigerian culture. For three years in succession, he has rocked the world with his fantastic display of Nigerian culture—and plans to do more. This latest phase in the Ogunde programme strategy began in 1967 when he and his theatre company rocked the World Exposition which took place in Canada. This was the first major outing for Hubert Ogunde and his group outside Africa, and it was a great success. In 1968 and 1969, Hubert Ogunde and 40 members of his theatre company rocked Britain and Europe where they performed for one full year without interruption before returning home. This was undoubtedly the greatest artistic show ever staged by a Nigerian theatre group outside this country—and at a time when the name of Nigeria was not especially in the good books of many people in Europe, it was a big publicity boost for Nigeria abroad.

If anyone were asked to pin-point what he considers to be the greatest achievement of Hubert Ogunde to date, he would almost certainly mention the one-year performance-tour of Europe on which Hubert

Ogunde successfully led his theatre company in 1968 and 1969. To begin with, it is to the ever-lasting credit of Hubert Ogunde that he started off on such a mission in the first place. Realising that 40 or more able-bodied adults were involved in the tour, it is almost incredible that Hubert Ogunde decided to embark on the project on his own. Prior to his decision to embark on the tour all on his own, he had tried in vain to interest the Federal Government in it. Unfortunately, the Federal Government was not convinced of the cultural and publicity value of the tour and did not appear to be favourably disposed to support Hubert Ogunde financially in undertaking the tour. Having failed to impress the Federal Government on the tour, the alternatives left to Ogunde were (i) to forget about the project altogether; or (ii) to undertake it all on his own. He chose the latter. It was a million-dollar decision—perhaps the most significant and far-reaching ever taken by him. But it was a decision that he could never have any reason to regret.

* * *

COSTLY VENTURE

With a 40-member cast, Hubert Ogunde left for Britain in mid-1968. Even now, he cannot readily give an accurate figure of how much the tour cost. The only thing he would say is that although in terms of cash no profit has yet been made; but in psychological terms it was a hugely profitable venture. Pressed to give a rough estimate of what the tour cost him, all Hubert Ogunde could volunteer was that the cost of the tour should be anything between £60,000 and £100,000. He would not be far wrong—if at all. The cost of flying a 40-member cast around Europe, housing and maintaining them for one year alone, must run into several thousand pounds. Then the cost of preparing stages, buying costumes, paying for services, etc. must amount to yet another several thousand pounds. Therefore, all facts put together, the figures given by Hubert Ogunde should be fairly accurate.

Asked why he decided on such a costly venture, especially without any form of government assistance, his reply was meaningful enough: *I started this career 26 years ago: I have been to all parts of the country and most of West Africa. Then I started thinking that it was about time that I exported this culture to other parts of the world. My plays have been accepted here already, but had not even been seen outside Africa. Furthermore, cultural groups like ours have always been coming here from all corners of the world. So, putting all these thoughts together, I decided that it was time we perform outside Africa and see what people over there would think about Nigerian culture.* The decision to undertake the tour having been made and the members of the cast having been selected, the preparations for the trip began in earnest. The play that was to be performed throughout the tour—aptly titled **OH-OGUNDE** was meticulously rehearsed by the cast. For one year, Hubert Ogunde and his group thrilled audiences in Britain and several other European countries with this play and had they wanted to prolong their stay by another year there would have been no lack of audience support. Only a few months after returning home, Ogunde's overseas agents based in Britain began flooding him with letters and telegrams enquiring when the group could return to Europe for repeat performances.

As a result of the success of the first extensive overseas tour, Hubert Ogunde plans another trip this year to Europe and possibly the United States as well. The group has also been invited to take part in the next Edinburgh Festival. Hubert Ogunde also plans to make such overseas trips a regular feature not only for the purpose of making money but, what is even more, to advertise Nigeria in the outside world and in reciprocating the gesture of other countries which from time to time send cultural groups here to exhibit their cultural heritage. This is where and why he thinks the Federal Government should come in not only in aid of his own theatre company

but indeed any other Nigerian theatre company that seeks to project Nigerian culture in overseas countries. Hubert Ogunde is not happy at all about the attitude of the Federal Government in this matter. He made reference to the fact that before he embarked on his last overseas tour he tried without success to interest the Federal Government in it. On his return, he wrote a letter to the Federal Government asking for permission to show the play **OH-OGUNDE**, with which he had thrilled foreign audiences in Europe, to the Head of the Federal Military Government and members of the Executive Council. But not only was the permission not granted; he, in fact, received no acknowledgement to his letter of invitation! What annoys him even more is that on several occasions, the Head of State and members of the Executive Council have been entertained by theatre groups from such African countries as Guinea, Ghana, Togo and Dahomey while his own application to entertain his country's rulers **free of charge** remains unacknowledged. Obviously, Hubert Ogunde thinks that in all fairness, and that if we are proud of our own culture, charity should begin at home and he should be allowed to entertain the Head of State and his Executive Council if foreign theatre companies are given the same privilege. Many Nigerians apparently share this opinion.

* * *

NATIONAL THEATRE

If, as it is hoped, Hubert Ogunde's overseas exploits are successful in the economic context, he should be a substantial foreign exchange earner for this country. He has already made the necessary impact on millions of people in Europe and can conceivably be expected to improve on this when he takes his theatre group back to Europe this year and after that to other parts of the world—notably the Americas and Asia. The way things are going, this should not be far too long in coming.

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N T M STAND FOR QUALITY

As a leading playwright, dramatist and musician, Hubert Ogunde supports the idea of the formation of a national theatre company for Nigeria attached to the Cultural Division of the Federal Ministry of Information. The aim of such a national theatre company, he said, should be two-fold: (i) to entertain the Nigerian populace about the cultural attributes of Nigeria, and (ii) to go abroad to sell Nigerian culture to the outside world. He made reference to Guinea, one of our neighbours on this West Coast of Africa, which has had a national theatre company for about twelve years now. So also are Sierra Leone and Mali, and Ghana is soon to have one which is already in the process of evolution. He is surprised that Nigeria has not thought it desirable to have a national theatre company and hopes something will be done about it before long.

Hubert Ogunde, already a world

celebrity, is not the sort of man who rests on his achievements or is complacent. He is a man with a big heart—and plans ahead, no matter whether he has made a name for himself or not. Judging from what Hubert Ogunde has already achieved in his twenty-six years in show business, he could jolly well sit back and enjoy the fruits of his hard labour. But he is not doing anything of the sort. He is still as hard-working and energetic as a man just struggling to make it in life. And he plans ahead, too. He already has a plan to undertake overseas tours to exhibit Nigerian culture as a regular feature. He has other plans as well, one of which he disclosed to *The People* in confidence and said he would not mind if we divulge it to readers. He plans to build a modern, well-equipped theatre in Lagos where there would be adequate facilities for putting out the best plays. This projected theatre, which

could become a reality in about two years, would cost several thousand pounds.

Hubert Ogunde, a youngish 53, is a man of talents who is of invaluable service to Nigeria by ceaselessly striving to project the cultural image of this country abroad. At home an accepted national figure, Hubert Ogunde is a playwright, dramatist and musician who may some day—perhaps not too far from now—be counted amongst the world's top ten in his field. And it would be a glorious day more to Nigeria as a nation than Hubert Ogunde as an individual.

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