



Stage Veteran Hubert Ogunde

STAGE PERSONALITIES

MY STRUGGLES:

HUBERT OGUNDE

Hubert Adedeji Ogunde is a living legend. It is yet to be seen whether his followers intend making him a deity. Like people guarding the treasure of a nation, Ogunde's followers made it quite a task for one to come closer to the stage personality. When eventually he was cornered, Ogunde's demeanour was that of a modest, cheerful and well-informed man. His life struggles which he narrated to the New Era was a profile in determination fuelled by talent.

OGUNDE'S INHERITED TALENT

I inherited my stage talent from my mother's parents. My grandfather was Babalawo (a diviner). He was versed in occultism and organised masquerade performances. Thus, I was initiated into many cults at an early age. I played truant in my school days running away from classes to join the masquerades. That was in the year 1931 and I was then fourteen years old, having been born in 1917 at Ososa four miles to Ijebu Ode in the Western State of Nigeria.

My father, Mr Jeremaiah Dehinbo Ogunde was an evangelist of the Baptist Church. He was among the first students of Baptist Seminary Ogbomoso. My mother, Eunice Owotusam Ogunde was also very devoted.

FOUR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

My father's missionary duties which took him from one town to the other made it impossible for me to complete my elementary school career at a station.

I completed my elementary school, which was the only education I had, in 1932, after attending four different schools. Saint John's School, Ososa, was my first school and my last was Wasimi African School, Ijebu Ode after I had schooled at Baptist school, Ife and Saint Peters School, Faji, Lagos.

I became a wage earner in 1933 when I took to teaching. I was then earning the handsome sum

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Ogunde playing the role of Alhaji while one of his wives plays Hajia in the play 'Fatimah'

(OGUNDE Continued)

of ten shillings a month. In those days, a policeman was an attractive sight; his well-ironed uniform and the authority he wielded gave the clarion call to many youths. I left the teaching field and joined the police force in 1940. During my years with the force, I was staging dramas on part-time bases.

My first play was 'Garden of Eden' in June 1933. It was followed by 'Africa and God,' staged in September of the same year.

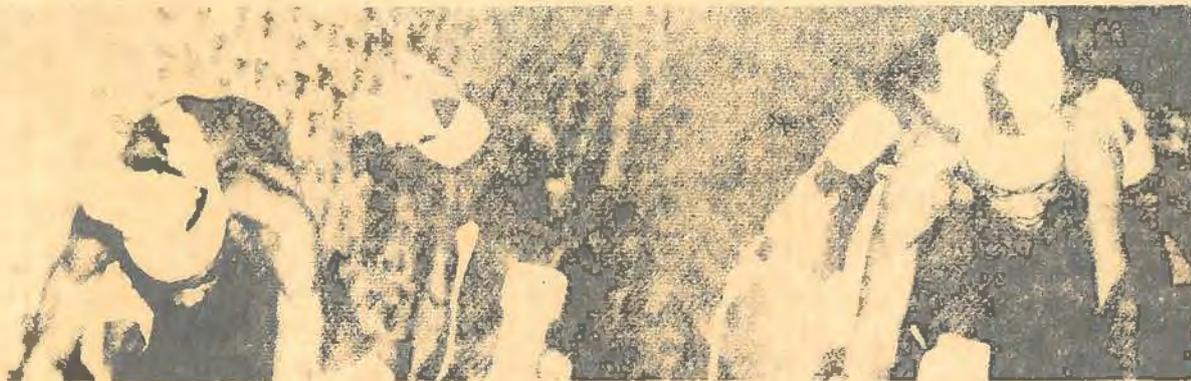
WITH A CAPITAL OF £9

I quit the police force in 1946 and turned professional in the stage business. With a capital of £9 (N18) which was all I could save, I bought some equipment. It was an uphill task gathering people to join my troupe. My parents thought it was sheer madness to allow their children take concert-acting as their profession. However, I managed to assemble the first troupe and presented the play 'King Solomon'. I toured many parts of the country to present this play and the reaction of the audience was favourable. My plays have been drawing sizable audiences since I began staging shows but the strength of the audience depends on the nature of the play being presented.

After the general strike of 1945, I staged a play 'Strike and Hunger' which became a hit with the indigenous population while the colonial masters thought the play was inciting the people to riot. When I took the play to the Northern Region in 1946, I was arrested and prosecuted in Jos. The £200 fine imposed on me was paid by the Yoruba community in Jos, but my troupe was banned from performing in the North. I also received this type of treatment



Ogunde's daughter (right) dancing during one of the stage performances



Time for traditional dances: male members of the troupe take the floor.

during the Western Nigeria crises when I staged the play 'Yoruba Ronu'. Most of my plays have been warmly received by the public but I regard as my hit plays 'King Solomon,' 'Strike and Hunger,' 'Yoruba Ronu,' and 'Ayomo.' I have also waxed many numbers in Yoruba language and these include Orilomsho, Onijonimi, Eiyere and Yeyemi. Many of my records are still in great demand.

THIRTY YEARS ON STAGE

In June 1974, I shall be celebrating my thirty years on the stage. It has been a long way since June 1944 when I came out with my curtain raiser—'Garden of Eden'. It has also been an interesting period. I have had the opportunity of making many friends and seeing many parts of the world. At the early stage of my profession, my wife and I toured Britain, France and Italy to get acquainted with the stage set-ups. My troupe was at the 1967 Canadian Expo. In 1968-69, the military government sponsored my troupe—forty in number—to Britain and the rest of Europe. We were well received and our performances were widely acclaimed by the British and world Press.

I am now 56 years old. I am married to many wives and have many children. My two sons and three daughters are among my troupe while others are pursuing their calls in life. I am looking forward to the World Black Arts festival and soon after that, I shall retire from the stage and retain only a supervisory role. Looking back to it now, I am very grateful to all Nigerians and foreigners who have made my struggles worthwhile.



These trio singers take the chorus as Ogunde renders his numbers.



Heavenly Angels: members of Ogunde troupe play the role of Angels in one of the plays.