

Arts and Africa

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SIGNATURE TUNE

LOUIS MAHONEY:

Louis Mahoney here, saying hello and welcome to another edition of 'Arts and Africa'.

Language and sculpture, those are today's main ingredients. The sculpture is from Rhodesia and the language from Sierra Leone, and it's in the form of Krio adages, or sayings. See what you make of this.

CHRIS DURING:

Wen you nor want monkey tail for touch you
Nor mix pan monkey dance.
Leck wa dar gladdy wa da pan ark norto im da pan fall-pekini.
Same wa so dar gladdy wa da pan sapoe nor-to im da pan craw-craw.
Dar shine-pan wa paddy wit palmii nor go frade rusty,
But dar palm-tree wa paddy wit palm-bod nar broom go lef nar
All kondoe lay belleh nar groun, im aid,
You nor know oos wan belleh da art.

MAHONEY:

"All kondoe lay belleh nar groun
You nor know ocs wan belleh da art."

The English words give a clue to the meaning;
"When all lizards are lying on the ground,
you don't know which one has bellyache."

Later on in the programme we'll be hearing plenty more about the value - and the humour - of these sayings. If I scratched my head I'm sure I'd remember one that talked about men being lazy and women doing all the work. That's what Josephine Ntsika's complaining about in this Xhosa song recorded in South Africa by the S.A.B.C.. But as she's persuaded Mr Shiyembe to join her maybe she isn't too serious.

MUSIC

A very gentle reproof from Josephine Ntsika with J. Shiyembe in the traditional Xhosa song, 'Jikel 'Emaweni'.

Among those magnificent ruins at Zimbabwe in Rhodesia were several large birds, carved in soapstone that once stood on the outer walls. So there's been a tradition of carving in Rhodesia that goes back many centuries. Cyprian Mandala is a Rhodesian sculptor, but he's in Britain at the moment, attending an advanced course in sculpture at a London art school. As part of his luggage he brought enough items of his own work to put on an exhibition and it was at the exhibition that Julian Marshall met and talked to him.

JULIAN MARSHALL:

Cyprian, what strikes one immediately, coming into the exhibition, is the tremendous difference of styles both orthodox and abstract. Which one do you prefer working in?

CYPRIAN MANDALA:

Actually I prefer working in the traditional, abstract form of art. I feel that I would like to work with traditional abstract, due to the reason that after I'd collected information from our elders about African mythology, I felt like turning these stories into what is known as modern art - which is the abstract form of art.

MARSHALL: One of the more orthodox pieces for instance is called "Old Mashona Chief".

MANDALA: In most cases the chiefs used to wear crowns as you see in the sculpture he has a crown on his head and a silver box of medicine under the chest. This is one of the things in which I wanted to show variety of art.

MARSHALL: And you have two sculptures called, respectively, 'Spiritual Unity' and 'Spiritual Twins'. Now what is the significance of these two?

MANDALA: Actually, when collecting this information from the elders they told me that spiritual unity is when a father or mother dies their spirit joins up - these spiritual persons - and will come back and guide the children and the rest of the family.

MARSHALL: But you seem not only to be preserving traditional culture but also attempting to build on it. For instance, you have two pieces, one called 'Eastern Buddha' and the other called 'African Buddha'. Now is the Buddha a part of African traditional culture?

MANDALA: Actually, the thing is that when I went in to ask the elders they used to tell me similar stories to that of the eastern Buddha. This is why I decided to carve the African Buddha because we also have similar religions to the Buddha.

MARSHALL: Now turning to the medium in which you work, I see that the two main stones are serpentine and soapstone. Is either one more easy to work in?

MANDALA: Serpentine is a harder stone than soapstone. I prefer mostly to carve serpentine. Since I was thinking of coming abroad and I didn't know the right stone to carve, so I chose to work on hard stone. Actually I would also like to carve marble into African expressions as well.

MARSHALL: Now when you have an idea for a particular sculpture how do you actually go about carving a piece?

MANDALA: First of all you have got to look into the stone. If the stone is good for the kind of style you want to carve it is very easy for you to start with the stone. Then there are very complicated stones in which case you have got to sketch. In most cases I should say I start sketching on paper.

MARSHALL: So the colour or texture of the stone makes a difference to what you actually intend to do with it?

MANDALA: First of all I've got to choose the type of stone I would like to carve - the colour of the stone. In most cases I prefer to carve black serpentine or soapstone or green serpentine. Really I like to carve black because it is a sort of representation of an African or something like that - something beautiful - it is something that people would appreciate. I really think so.

MAHONEY: Cyprian Mandala from Rhodesia.

His feeling for stone sounds very much like the feeling Chris During has for words and especially the way they are used in Krio.

DURING: I love the Krio language and, of course, I am very much interested in it as a language. It's just to tell people - the Krio people - that what you speak is a language and it needs developing. This is my aim.

MAHONEY: By-the-way, Krio isn't, of course, a purely African language. It's a form of English that freed slaves brought back to Freetown and it's become a sort of 'community language' within Sierra Leone and also the Gambia. It's full of proverbs and adages but there can't be many that have escaped Chris During who's an avid collector. Chris is firstly a professional broadcaster but he's an actor and a bandleader and a host of other things and all his activities have helped him to increase his collection of sayings. Here he is reading some of them to Roland Buck.

DURING: ADAGES (quotes)

ROLAND BUCK:

Chris, for the benefit of our listeners who might not understand Krio can you translare that into English?

DURING: Well I opened with the adage which means to say "If you lie to a husband and wife who have separated to allow them to meet again, don't be afraid to tell that lie. You'll be doing them a world of good. But it there's truth that you should speak that will separate a family - please for God's sake don't tell it". That is what that means.

- BUCK: What would you call this? Is it a collection of poems or a collection of proverbs?
- DURING: Well, I would say it's a poem. What has happened is that it has taken me a long time to collect them - these adages. I go around and hear people using these adages in their colloquial speech and whichever interests me, I make a note of it. So I find that even right now I have pieces of paper in all my pockets - people talk things and immediately the things they say that interest me, I write them down. They are things that can stand individually but I feel that I can collect them. If one flows into another one - I let it follow - if not I put a preposition here, a conjunction there and make them join up.
- BUCK: What kind of story would one particular one that is standing by itself tell?
- DURING: For instance, let's say: "Monkey talk, Monkey yerry" which means to say that if you are not a member of the monkey family you will not understand what the monkeys say. But "monkey talk, monkey yerry," that is to say, for instance, that in a given situation where there are some differences and you want to reconcile that difference between two members of the family - if you send A who is related to B to talk in favour of C - then everything will be allright. You see, that's monkey talk, monkey yerry.
- BUCK: What is the relationship to the culture of Sierra Leone? To what degree does it reflect the folklore of Sierra Leone?
- DURING: Well, the Krio language, more or less, is built on what they call 'parables' but which you and I can call 'adages'. And you have these expressions running throughout the Krio language - they say things in their common speech all over the place and unless you understand these adages you will not understand Krio.
- BUCK: Are these purely Krio proverbs or are they influenced by other sources?
- DURING: There are some which are authentic Krio proverbs; there are some that are translated. I've collected some from Nigeria when I was there and some Ghanaian ones again that I translated. But my main interest is the Krio language.
- BUCK: Do you see this as a means of preserving Krio folklore and proverbs and adages?
- DURING: Yes. It's a means of preserving these things in the language and telling people what they mean because most people use these things, they stop and ask you: what do they mean?
- BUCK: Can we now have another series of sayings from Krio?
- DURING: Well, I will start with a common one which everybody knows. It says:
Connie man die, nar connie man go berye a,
Man butoo, man wach.
Befoe teefman wef go sleep angry, nar habbar fall go loss,
Arata nar get nartin for do iyen pot pass ee clam go look insie en cam dung back.

MAHONEY:

And I shouldn't be surprised if everyone listening hasn't something very, very similar in their language. But I'm sure Chris During will say that Krio puts it best! And he was talking to Roland Buck in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Well nar done done for todayo. But until I have the pleasure of your company for 'Arts and Africa' next week, let Josephine Ntskie, like any woman, have the last word.

MUSIC

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