

Arts and Africa

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SIGNATURE TUNE

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Welcome from Alex Tetteh-Lartey, and today we talk to a prizewinning writer from Ghana, and listen to one of her stories in ARTS AND AFRICA.

SIGNATURE TUNE

TETTEH-LARTEY:

VICKY YERBOAH-AFARI is a young Ghanaian writer who's earned her living and her reputation as a journalist. At 25, she's a staff writer for the MIRROR, and was declared JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR in 1973. She has also won several prizes for her short stories, and hopes to have a first collection published soon. Now, Vicky was one of the founders of the creative writing course at the University of Ghana, Lagon, and she's a very active member of the Ghana Association of Writers. Well, Ian Collington met Vicky Yerboah-Afari when he was in Accra recently, and he talked to her in the busy GRAPHIC office about her views on journalism, her own writing, and the state of publishing in Ghana. But first, let's listen to one of Vicky's stories - THE SOUND OF PESTLES, read by TAIWO AJAI.

TAIWO AJAI:

THE SOUND OF PESTLES

TETTEH-LARTEY:

THE SOUND OF PESTLES, read by TAIWO AJAI. Well, Ian Collington was curious to know from Vicky Yerboah-Afari whether the story was based on her own experience.

VICKY YERBOAH-AFARI:

Part of it is from personal experience, but I wanted to focus on appearances being deceptive, that is one of the things I try to bring out in my writing. Actually, that story is the title piece of a collection of short stories that I have just sent out to publishers, and most of the stories in that book are on that theme, that things are just not what they seem to be.

IAN COLLINGTON:

It has a very strong personal feel, as though you have some experience or some feeling for the central character. Is that true?

YERBOAH-AFARI:

Yes, it is. You see, my father was a minister in the Nkrumah regime. So most of it is from experience.

COLLINGTON:

Did you, like our heroine in fact, see poverty when he lost his office?

YERBOAH-AFARI:

I am still seeing poverty. Yes, most people in Ghana believe that all Nkrumah ministers hoarded away vast sums of money that they are now making use of. But I think the truth is that most of them are facing very acute poverty.

COLLINGTON:

As a writer, you have received many awards in Ghana, and you are 25, you started writing about five years ago. Have you found it difficult as a woman in perhaps a bit of a man's world, here in Ghana?

YERBOAH-AFARI:

Not really, not difficult. Sometimes irritating, though. For instance, when I go out on an assignment with a male cameraman, people invariably turn to the cameraman, before they realise that I am the one who is leading the delegation.

COLLINGTON:

So you are out reporting for the DAILY GRAPHIC, and they don't think you are the journalist, they think you are just some girlfriend. But when you come to write the stories you do for television, and for the press, your short stories, is this something you had training for, or you spent years developing, how did it come about?

YERBOAH-AFARI:

I think it developed through a lot of reading. I read a lot as a child, I would read anything, even Quaker Oats packets, anything at all that had writing, I would read. And I used to go to the library, I think, five times a week, I could read that fast.

COLLINGTON:

What about the actual way in which you write, I mean, a lot is talked about "African writing" and this sort of thing, I mean, do you see yourself as an African writer, or just a writer?

YERBOAH-AFARI:

I think, just a writer, but I suppose sometimes my background has to come in. I think what I aim at is something that can be understood anywhere in the world.

COLLINGTON:

What do you think about some of the people who are on the African writing scene at the moment? To me, personally, I mean, I am not an expert, they seem a bit pretentious, thinking of prestige and reputation, rather than what they are trying to do.

YERBOAH-AFARI:

I think that, except for a few very good writers, people in the past have managed to get published just because there weren't enough African writers around. Maybe that is why you found this pretentiousness. I think, with more people writing now, that problem should be solved.

COLLINGTON:

I know another big problem is publishing, here in Ghana, because of the cost, and the actual getting hold of the paper, and everything else, so is enough being published in Ghana of Ghanaian writers?

YERBOAH-AFARI:

Oh, I don't think so. I don't know, maybe now, the state publishing company has improved, but people have a very bad image of them.

COLLINGTON:

Why do they have this bad image?

YERBOAH-AFARI:

Well, for instance, I know of a person who had a manuscript with them for about two years, and they couldn't decide if they were going to use it or not, I mean, that's a big hustle for any writer.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

I don't think that experience is confined to Ghana alone. Vicky Yerboah-Afari was talking to Ian Collington in Accra. And since that story was about appearances being deceptive, let's end Arts and Africa with a highlife by the Black Beat Band, which expresses the same theme in a different way. You have a familiar name for a fruit or vegetable, but that name may be deceptive because there are so many varieties that come under it. That doesn't apply to just fruit, there are women as well.

SRC TOI YE NLI - Black Beat Band

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