

# Arts and Africa

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## "ARTS AND AFRICA"

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### SIGNATURE TUNE

#### ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Welcome from Alex Tetteh-Lartey; and today Tanzania considers its culture in "Arts and Africa".

### TANZANIAN FIDDLE TUNE

#### TETTEH-LARTEY:

We all have our traditional musical instruments and our traditional musicians like Ibrahim Ismail of Bukoba in Tanzania who was playing the fiddle just now. Graham Mytton has been spending some time in Dar-es-Salaam recently and he's with me in the studio now. Welcome to "Arts and Africa", Graham. Now, you've been talking to people at the Tanzanian Ministry of National Culture and Youth and knowing the independent line that Tanzania takes in so many matters - how about the Arts?

#### GRAHAM MYTTON:

Well, this Ministry is responsible for promoting Fine Arts, Theatre, Dance, Music, everything in fact from basket-making to composing music for brass bands. They seem to be involved in a number of different strands of activity in terms of whether to promote traditional music or whether to look ahead and there is a concern above all to overcome a colonial legacy. John Nsibu is assistant music promoter at the Ministry of National Culture and Youth.

#### JOHN NSIBU:

There was a period when our music was not regarded as something of any importance now the people have to sing songs which are relevant to the revolution of the lives of the people.

#### MYTTON:

Do you mean by that, that you are telling people what kind of songs to sing or are you asking your cultural officers to look out for different kinds of music, or what?

NSIBU:

What we do is to ask the people to select what is the best from what they have in the villages. You see even now cultural officers are not musicians who can do the best selection in the music but at least they have to spearhead the best songs which are a good example for other tribes of this country.

MYTTON :

So the role of the cultural officers is to look out for good musicians, look out for good music, encourage that music and encourage musicians to perform new music especially music which expresses the policies of TANU and the policies of the Government.

NSIBU:

And the life of the people.

MUSIC 'HISTORY OF TANU'

MYTTON:

That's the Tanzania Dance Troupe performing a short opera-like sequence on the history of TANU, the ruling political party.

MUSIC 'HISTORY OF TANU'

MYTTON:

What you heard then was part of quite a long work describing the history of TANU. It was created for the twentieth anniversary of TANU in 1964; as I say, a traditional theatre with a modern message. Theatre is of course something about which there is a lot of discussion in Africa. What kind of theatre ought Africa to be promoting? And this was a subject I discussed with the theatre man in the Ministry, Mr. Rashid Masimbi. I asked him about their policy on theatre.

MASIMBI:

At least in Tanzania we do not have any big theatre building, although some few years back there has been some suggestion to have one in Dar-es-Salaam, but now I should think the idea is not as strong as it was before because we do not think the theatre should be put in halls. If we did that then we would be excluding a lot of other people who could not, for many other reasons, be able to get into those halls. So what we do encourage is to adopt the kind of theatre where any place in the open, under a tree, beside a house, would be fit for a performance, so that is what we are doing right now; that is what we are encouraging.

MYTTON:

Of course the argument about preservation versus the future is very much in the field of music as I found when I was talking again to Mr. Nsibu, the Assistant Music Director.

NSIBU:

If the Ministry of National Culture is very successful, something we hope for, there should be a lot of, lets say, 'preserved music' which can be of reference but we can't omit the fact that it should be something new in the lives of the people, because the people are now changing. We can take an example of people living in an Ujamaa village. In the past you find that different musicians, our traditional musicians were living in different places, but now if they are brought together you should expect a change, the music will be more developed. For the young generation they will automatically learn from the different peoples, and their music will be something different. But the main emphasis is to make this traditional music, not fade-away, it should not die-away.

MYTTON:

Take yourself back to your own childhood. What kind of music were you taught at school?

NSIEI:

Well, I was taught foreign music I would say. Let's say at school I was taught songs.

MYTTON:

What kind of songs?

NSIBI:

English songs, like 'Row, Row Your Boat', and American songs: 'Old Folks at Home', German tunes learnt at the mission.

MYTTON:

Were you actually taught that local was inferior, or was it just something you assumed because the European taught you their music, that therefore your own music was not worth talking about?

NSIBU:

No, our argument is that our traditional music was not given room in the school curriculum to be taught to us as it is now.

MYTTON:

So, what do you do now in the schools?

NSIBU:

Now we have time devoted for traditional dances, traditional singing: School choirs now are singing traditional melodies other than western melodies.

MYTTON:

John Nsibu. And it was at this point that Mr. Mselewa, who works with John Nsibu in the Ministry, came and gave an actual demonstration of this. Mr. Mselewa, as well as being a civil servant is a composer and arranger of brass band music.

MR. MSELEWA SINGS AND TAPS ILLUSTRATION OF MARCHING TO TRADITIONAL MELODY

MYTTON:

I couldn't get a recording of a brass band actually playing that, but there is another song available, this one now played by a brass band, which is arranged from a traditional song.

MUSIC BRASS BAND

MYTTON:

Tanzania's Police Band playing a traditional Nyamwezi song as a marching song.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

That's a pleasant blend of traditional music and western orchestration, but what does the song mean? What is it about?

MYTTON:

"I am annoyed". That's the title of the song. I think we are all familiar with the national dance troupes of Africa which wear coloured 'pyjamas' and things, all in rows, something which is phoney, something which is forced, which is not natural. This is a question I talked to Masimbi about again.

MASIMBI:

A link must always be maintained between what is modern and what is traditional, so our development is deliberately slow. Where we think this is too fast then we say so: it's too fast. I'll give an example. We had a few of our dance experts here who had gone into other parts of Africa - Guinea, some other places where they saw this kind of development happening. One thing was dance drama, dance drama, that you do not concentrate on one dance type but you put together so many dance types in expressing a certain method. O.K. they came here and they tried to encourage that kind of thing. Our elders, especially TANU, they said, No, this is too fast because we really want to see our own dances, now you take this bokabokobwe (phon) type of dance you dance it for one minute while our people could have danced it for a whole day. You take another dance for one minute. No, we do not want to see that kind of thing.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Graham, you appear to have talked to civil servants only, cultural officers, who look out for good music and encourage artists to develop new music. Who really is in control of culture in Tanzania, is it the politicians or the artists?

MYTTON:

That is a bit of a leading question in a way and it suggests there is a dichotomy and I don't think there is. In a way, in Tanzania today, everything is political because the political movement which is a mass movement throughout the country in every village and so on, it is a movement generally of very large numbers of people and therefore I don't think there is a very easy distinction to be drawn between what is political and what isn't. The arts are

MYTTON:

inevitably involved in politics and politics are inevitably involved in the arts. Nevertheless, there is a point, and the point is not so much a political one as a question of centralization. Should the arts be promoted from the centre in this way? Well, the Ministry itself is concerned about that problem and wants to develop things to the regions, to the districts, to the villages, so that people have very much the control over what they do themselves. One thing that ought to be said though about those civil servants; most of them, most of these music promoters and art promoters in the Ministry are themselves artists. They're musicians, they're teachers, so I don't think that the dichotomy is as strong as it might be elsewhere.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Mr. Masimbi did say that most of the cultural officers actively discourage anyone from building theatres. Now, there surely must be rebel artists in Tanzania. How are they received?

MYTTON:

Well Alex here is Mr. Masimbi's answer to that.

MASIMBI:

We do think that the artist is himself part of the community, so he cannot do anything without taking the society into consideration, otherwise he would be a nuisance in that society.

MYTTON:

Doesn't he sometimes need to be a nuisance? I mean artists in history have often been a great nuisance, but it is to our benefit and to the benefit of all of us that they were a nuisance. You shouldn't always necessarily take notice of what the TANU elders say.

MASIMBI:

Hmm, I really don't think that is possible. I think I did say that all development in our country, in all aspects, our people's lives must be guided. You don't just let people do anything they like. No, there has got to be proper guidance.

MYTTON:

Guided by whom?

MASIMBI:

Guided by the nation as a whole.

MYTTON:

What kind of things would the TANU Cultural Committee take exception to, though? What kind of things might they be angry about? And for what grounds.

MASIMBI:

If it does not agree with the aspirations of the people.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Thank you very much Graham Mytton. Our thanks also to Radio Tanzania, Dar-es-Salaam, for making available all the music played in this programme. And with more music from The Tanzania Dance Troupe this is Alex Tetteh-Lartey saying goodbye and hoping to meet you next week for more 'Arts and Africa'.

MUSIC TANZANIAN TUNES