

Arts and Africa

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ANNOUNCEMENT AND SIGNATURE TUNE

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Welcome from Alex Tetteh-Lartey. There's music-making from Zambia and dancing on the printed page in today's "Arts and Africa".

READER:

'A Dancer of Fortune' Page 6/7

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Ayasko's skill gives the title to John Munonye's latest novel, 'A Dancer of Fortune'. It's the dancer who draws the crowds towards the cellar of patent medicines. The setting is present day Nigeria, a lively, bustling place with commerce dear to the heart of everybody. Now, if you've read his earlier books, 'The Only Son' or, perhaps 'Obi', you'll know that up to now, John Munonye has written sombre stories in traditional settings so, when he came along to the "Arts and Africa" studio recently, I suggested that 'A Dancer of Fortune' was a new departure. Once again he has chosen a serious subject, but unless I'm mistaken, this time he treats it as a social satire.

JOHN MUNONYE:

I think I know what you mean, as you said the stories have been rather serious ones, but I want to think about the early books being serious in mood, I mean the presentation. One or two of them were rather stark, to the point, I mean in a serious mood, but here we tried to make the mood light. After all this man is a dancer. If you had made the story so serious he wouldn't be all that dancer, jumping from one employer to another. So, as you said, there is a commentary about it. First of all these people who are employing the dancer to enrich themselves, they must beware. He is not all that fool. And secondly this man who is jumping from one employer to another, we must beware of him. There must be something he's aiming at. And having said that we should add, whoever has ears to hear let him hear. It could be applied to politics, it could be applied to politics, it could be applied to any other aspect of life. This man somewhere said he was a 'Permanent Secretary'. I know what Permanent Secretaries are. They stay in office, they realise there are many Commissioners come and go. He has no allegiance to anybody except medicine. So I think he is a man to be feared.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

It's only at the end that they realise they've been fooled. One is working for each employer in turn. He doesn't make it quite clear to the employer what his eventual aim is.

MUNONYE:

No, no because these employers were after each others throats. They were blinded by their jealousy and competition and so this man was exploiting them all the time and at one time one employer wanted to get rid of him and he ruined his business, in fact he staged a coup in the real sense, destroyed his business and jumped over into another camp. And this man was very happy, Ayasco treated him very well. A sort of business major and in the end he came out on top and they discussed where he is and they came out of the court premises (there was a court case between Ayasco and his last employer) a lot of them were assembled, looking like fools. Ayasco came out of his car and said "How are we" and began to shake hands. We don't take these things seriously.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Yes, I'm not sure if you really like any of the characters at all and the employers for whom he worked: Sabanco, Marabu, Avarido and Eddy Chindi. They don't seem to be very pleasant characters, except of course Eddy Chindi, whom I found I liked better than the others.

MUNONYE:

I don't think they liked me either! I personally don't like some of the things happening in the name of business, and one had to bring that out. Sort of underhand dealing, and so on and so forth. I wanted to paint the image of an unsprupulous patent medicine man who was out to cure diseases of the body in others and "diseases of the pocket" about himself. He wanted to make his money at all costs, and he uses this man to enrich himself. There was no intention to make them look angels.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

How do you want Ayasco really to be looked at? As a likeable character? He is, after all, the central person in the whole story.

MUNONYE:

It depends what you want. If you want a man who dances well, yes he's likeable, or who has a repertoire of jokes and so on you like him. But if you consider what he was after, He was a very clever man. A very clever man.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Hiding his feelings....

MUNONYE:

Hiding them from his wife, When he was saving money to start his business he wouldn't let his wife know. When his wife was urging him to get a bigger apartment he was always evading it because he was making the money all the time. He'd come back and hide his money somewhere and get out one or two shillings and say "take this". If the wife asked for more money he would start one of his jokes and escape. He was a clever man. I don't know whether you should like such a man or not. But he knew what he was after, all the time.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

It seemed to me that John Munonye was asking his readers to make up their own minds about the use and misuse of the drugs as well as of the characters and he's a match for any real quack in creating the excitement in which to sell those specious remedies, The names he gives them...

MUNONYE:

I make them up! That's what is fiction. Take what you want. With some funny epithets about them: "don't let diseases celebrate Christmas inside your body". These are things they shout. "Drink this and you'll do that and that tomorrow".

TETTEH-LARTEY:

And you don't think there's any danger in using actual drugs which are known, mixing them up with these fake ones? Don't you think you'll be giving the impression that they might also be fake drugs, that they don't really work.

MUNONYE:

Well these unscrupulous people could do that. This is the danger. They could take an antibiotic capsule, open it, put in some aspirin powder and seal it back. These things do happen and the police are after the offenders. But it's my job as a novelist to perceive it and expose it. It's my job, I don't belong to the Ministry of Information! I wasn't promoting anybody's image but I felt a loyalty to facts.

READER: I

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TETTEH-LARTEY:

Jumoke Debayo was reading from John Munonye's novel, 'A Dancer of Fortune'. It's published by Heinemann and they are bringing out a paperback version very shortly.

Time for music now, and for anyone who's had an opportunity to listen to Radio Zambia lately this could be a familiar song.

MUSIC:

'Diana Moyo'

TETTEH-LARTEY:

The tune's called 'Diana Moyo', a composition by the Zambian musician George Kazoka. George began composing way back in 1959 and, forming a band at the school where he taught, he was able to create just the sort of sound he wanted. He's written a great number of songs and recorded ninety or so, some with the Malala Jazz Band as here. Stephen Chifunyise wondered how George came to think up the words and the tunes for such an enormous output.

GEORGE KAZOKA:

I don't find it difficult, sometimes I hear a story about, say, something happening in a village and then what I do is simply sit down, I do my compositions usually during the night time when it is quiet and I am left alone and then I try to put the words into a certain tune. What happens is that sometimes I can be sleeping and then during the night a new tune comes into my head and then I start playing it and usually after playing a new tune then I wake up during the night and write down the tune and the words. Once I do that, then the following morning I can simply play that tune. Now this is a bit strange but that's what I sometimes do.

STEPHEN CHIFUNYISE:

A number of your songs are dealing with social problems, some of them about African beauty and some of them are patriotic songs, but there's one special one which I remember very well which talks about the relationship between Zambia and Tanzania. Do you think that, apart from these issues, that you have got within your songs there is any other thing that you would like to bring into your music which will help people to understand more about themselves?

KAZOKA:

If you examine the songs that I have so far composed I have composed the songs which are partly political, like the one where we sing about the dying of the Zambians on the land mines on our borders between Zambia and Rhodesia. Most of my compositions anyway are on either social problems or political issues and I don't think I can do anything more than that.

CHIFUNYISE:

Do you think that you have another opportunity at all to devise something else different from this type of rhythm you have established with the Malala Jazz Band?

KAZOKA:

I think that, I hope that after the training which I am doing now at Evelyn Hone College probably I shall come up with some new ideas and I may improve on the work which I am doing right now.

CHIFUNYISE:

The country has suddenly decided that most of the music to be played on our radio stations should be local music and this is also one of the reasons why your songs are featuring prominently, now do you think that by getting in contact with other countries, other African countries and other countries abroad you will be able to broaden your view of what music ought to be?

KAZOKA:

This is a question of our own Zambian music being played on Radio Zambia is a very crucial one. But I have the feeling that from my own point of view we, as musicians, have a lot to learn from other people, even if I have the feeling that it is also very good and necessary for us to preserve our own music because it is part of our culture but it is also necessary for us, I think, to appreciate what other people in other parts of the world are doing.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Stephen Chifunwise talking to George Kazoka, who, by the way, is furthering his musical education at Evelyn Hone College, Lusaka.

And that's all for now. There'll be more 'Arts and Africa' this time next week, so it's goodbye from Alex Tetteh-Lartey (and from 'Diana Moyo').

MUSIC:

'Diana Moyo'

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